

# The Friend of Disciples

by W.F. Anderson

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*The sermon explores the profound nature of Jesus as a friend to His disciples, emphasizing His unconditional love, sacrifice, and openness.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 17:17, Matthew 16:6, Matthew 16:11-12, John 15:12, John 15:14-15, Romans 12:16

**Topics:** "Christian Friendship", "Spiritual Community"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the second charity of a friend, which is an openness of heart and mind. He uses the analogy of a slave who only receives orders from his master without knowing the master's plans or intentions. The speaker emphasizes the importance of finding someone with whom we can open up our hearts and minds, using C.S. Lewis' statement that friends have naked souls. He also mentions the psychological background of the turning community, highlighting the joy of sharing with friends and the support they provide in times of grief. The sermon concludes with a reference to the story of the man who went to his friend's house at midnight, emphasizing the cultural importance of hospitality and the need for friends in times of trouble.

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## Transcript

In this time of chapter 15, for those of you who have just tuned in tonight, we've been looking at our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. And we've been trying to see the kind of person our Lord is and what his attitudes are toward us today, as we see them reflected in his attitude and actions toward people when he was here on earth. And this morning we look at our Lord Jesus as a friend of sinners, and tonight I want to look at him as a friend of his disciples.

And that's in John chapter 15. And for a change, we'll read a short passage tonight, beginning with verse 12 of John chapter 15. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friend, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants or slaves.

For the servant does not know what his master is doing. Or, as Philip paraphrased, he hasn't been taken into his master's confidence. But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another. A friend has been defined as somebody who knows everything about you and loves you anyhow.

And that comes close to something Wise Man says in the book of Proverbs, a friend loves at all times. And that's a pretty good definition of a friend. He knows everything about you, and he loves you anyhow.

And one of the glorious things about our Lord Jesus is you're never going to take him by surprise. You will never do anything, you will never be anything, you will never say anything that's going to surprise or shock you. He knew all that when he saved you.

He knew all that when he committed himself to you. There isn't a single thing in your life that he didn't know. When he came to you in saving grace and said, I love you, he knew absolutely everything about you.

And I remember working with one of our Mayan students who was having an awful struggle with the feeling that our Lord thoroughly disapproved of her. She had a very legalistic view of God, that Christians are accepted and approved by God only when they achieve certain standards and do certain things and don't do a lot of other things. And as much as I tried to help her, I couldn't.

We went over various passages of Scripture, we talked together, and one day she burst into my office saying, I found it! And we happened to sing a hymn in chapel that morning that finally got through to her. And the line of that song went, He loved me ere I knew him. And that did it for her.

He loved me ere I knew him. When I was still in my sins without any thought of him, he loved me. If he loved me then, there isn't anything in my life now that's going to make him stop.

There isn't anything you can do to get Jesus Christ to quit loving you. You can't do it. He's that kind of friend who knows everything about us, and loves us anyhow.

Because one thing we have to learn, and it's hard for us to learn sometimes, is that his love does not originate in us, but in himself. There isn't anything we have done or can do to stimulate his love. His love is self-originated, because God is love.

And John, in his first epistle, when you get over to chapter 4, is very clear about that. The kind of love he's talking about all through that epistle has its source in God. Even when it manifests in our love toward each other, the source of that love is God.

That kind of love is foreign to our society and our world. It has its roots in another world. It has its roots in the heart of God.

And you didn't do anything, you never will do anything to stimulate God's love toward you. And you will never do anything to shut it off. You cannot stop Jesus Christ from loving you.

A friend knows everything about you and loves you anyhow. And that's our Lord Jesus. He was at us in the English essayist, way back in the, what, 18th century? I forgot my English literature.

17th or 18th century. Who said that a friend multiplies our joys and divides our griefs. And that's biblical, too.

You remember the stories our Lord gave in Luke chapter 15, of the things that were lost and then found? When that shepherd found the sheep and brought it home rejoicing, what did he do? He called his friend, Rejoice with me! When that woman found the coin, what did she do? She got her lady friends in and said, Rejoice with me! And when the prodigal son came home, what did the father do? He had a great feast and invited in all his friends with music and dancing. Oh, sorry, he wasn't Christian. But he invited in all his friends.

They had an orchestra and dancing there. And the joy just went on, but he wanted his friends to share it. Friends multiply our joys and they divide our griefs.

And you remember the story our Lord gave us to encourage us to pray? We talked about the man who went to a friend's house knocking at midnight, saying, Friend, lend me three loaves. Now, by the way, to me, the force of the story is not to encourage us to keep on unknowingly battered down a reluctant God to do what we wanted in the first place. He could have saved himself and us a great deal of trouble if he'd answered the first time we knocked.

That's not the point of the story. What our Lord is saying, and I think you can make that one long question, would you ever find a friend who would stay inside that house while his friend is knocking outside and tell him, go away, don't bother me, we're all in bed and I don't want to answer the door? No, you wouldn't find a real friend like that. That's the encouragement to go to our Heavenly Father in prayer.

Even a real earthly friend wouldn't be reluctant to come to the door when you knock, no matter how much trouble it was to him. And it would be a great deal of trouble. One-room Palestinian peasant's home.

Mother and father slept on the floor. Kids all slept on the floor. Everything was locked up for the night.

The barge dropped across the inside of the door. And if he's going to answer that door, he's got to get up and step on it. I mean, over his wife and over the kids.

Probably kick them in the process and wake everybody up getting to the door. And he says, don't disturb me. Our Lord puts it in a question, really.

You don't think a real friend would do something like that, do you? No, of course he wouldn't. But here is a man in trouble. His whole reputation depends upon his offering hospitality to someone who has come in at midnight.

Unexpectedly. And in the culture of the Near East in the first century, the housewife only made as much bread as she thought she was going to need for that day. And this family had some teenagers in it because it was all gone.

And when these friends came in at midnight, there was nothing to give them. And here is a man who is bound by Eastern hospitality to set something in front of the traveler. And he doesn't have anything.

And he goes down the street and he knocks on the door at midnight. When everybody's sound asleep, the whole town's asleep. And I'd be mighty careful at whose door I knocked at midnight.

But he went to his friend because he knew his friend would share his burden and give him what he needed. And friends multiply our joys and divide our griefs. And isn't it great? I don't know a great deal about prayer.

And I have trouble with all the books I read on prayer. But one thing I have gotten some help from. I think all the exhortations to spend a long time praying at night before you go to bed are crazy.

That's absolutely the worst time of day to pray. Absolutely the worst time. Any time I kneel down at the bed late at night to pray, my wife has to wake me up.

Hey, you know, if you've done anything during the day, you're dog-tired. That's the worst time to pray is when you've gone to bed. But anyhow, toward the end of the day, one of the delightful things you can do is just sit down and talk the day over with the Lord.

Just go over the whole day. What happened? Talk to him about it. You find all sorts of things worth giving thanks you hadn't noticed at the time.

And all sorts of people for whom to pray because you bumped into them that day. You had a little conversation with them. You discovered a need.

Whatever it is, you can sit down and all the needs and all the joys of the day, you can talk them over with him. Why? Because he's your friend. And you share your joys with him.

He multiplies those joys because you can share them with him. And he divides your grief. You can put those burdens on him.

He's a friend. And he's a friend to his disciples. But anyhow, in this particular incident in the Upper Room Discourse, the things that our Lord said, I think all of us see that there are three characteristics of a friend.

And our Lord talks about those three in his relationship to his disciples. And the first characteristic of a friend is he'll give anything for you, including his life. One of the characteristics of friendship is the willingness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of a friend.

And the second characteristic of a friend in this passage is a complete openness of heart and mind. And the third characteristic of a friend in this particular passage is a great trust. And I see those three characteristics in our Lord's relationship to his disciples and in his relationship to us.

And the first characteristic, of course, is very obvious. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend. That's obvious, isn't it? You can't go any more than that.

That's the ultimate. That's as far as you can go. You lay down your life for your friend.

And this is what our Lord is saying to his disciples. And I'd like to look at two expressions in that statement. First, that expression, to lay down his life, and then his use of the term friend.

This lay down his life is a common expression in the New Testament. Our Lord uses it in the tenth chapter of this gospel when he talks about the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. And that's a good translation.

It's the proper translation of the expression, to lay down one's life. But the interesting thing is that the verb that is used basically means to place or to put. Not to lay down, not to give, but to place or to put.

Combined with this word life. To place or put his life is really what it means if you were to take it literally. What it means is to lay down his life, and therefore that's the proper translation.

But to take it literally would be to put or place his life. And there are scholars who know a whole lot more about the New Testament than I'll ever know who would like to translate it this way. He put his life at our disposal.

That's a friend. And that's what our Lord Jesus did during those three and a half years. He was always putting his life at the disposal of other people.

Not to meet their whims and fancies, to meet their needs. And it was impossible for him to run across a real need and not put his life at the disposal of the person who needed that. That was simply his characteristic.

And John writes in the first epistle, that's how we know love. Because he laid down his life for us. Same expression.

He put his life at our disposal. That's how we know love. You don't know love by a feeling.

Not the biblical idea of love. You know it by the willingness to put oneself at the disposal of the other person to meet his needs. That's love.

The feeling will swallow that. The feeling does not produce that. That's a moral decision.

And that's the decision our Lord Jesus Christ made. In the incarnation described in Philippians chapter 2, that our Lord came into this world, took on the form of a servant. When he came into this world, he had all sorts of choices to make.

Because he's the only one that's ever been born into this world that could decide who his parents would be, and could decide where he was going to be born, and under what circumstances, and at what time. He's the only one that's ever been born into the world that could make that decision. And when he made that decision, he chose not to be born in a palace, not to be born to a noble family.

He chose to be born of a peasant girl. He chose to be born in a stable, because he controlled all the time and circumstances. And he chose to be born as a servant, not as a ruler.

As a servant, because he had made the decision to lay down his life. And that tells me that when he was hanging on the cross, that death was simply the climax to what had always been characteristic of his life. Some men can give themselves sacrificially, as every army in war has known, but that self-sacrifice has not been characteristic of the way that individual has lived.

In a moment of crisis, he had thrown himself on a hand grenade to spare his buddy, but he never lived self-sacrificially. Right in that moment, somewhere, he made that decision to sacrifice his own life for his buddy, but he didn't live that way. And you find those moments of heroism.

You remember it in Dickens' story, *The Tale of Two Cities*. You find those moments of heroism at the end of an individual's life that were not characteristic of the way he lived. When our Lord was laying down his life for our sins on the cross, that was characteristic of the way he had lived.

That when he was faced with our greatest need that demanded the sacrifice of his life, he gave it, because he had always been giving himself. And so he says to his disciples, greater love has no man than this, that a man put his life at the disposal of his friends. That's beautiful.

And I know in our own experience, in times of deep stress, which many Christians whom we knew sympathized with and prayed for us, we ran across some Christians we had never met before who went farther than that, and they put themselves at our disposal, and at great personal cost and commitment on their part, they stepped into our needs. We had never met them before, didn't know them, but they found Christians in difficulty, and they stepped right in. They put themselves at our disposal.

That's a friend. He laid down his life for his friends. But now notice, for his friends.

Now, please don't read Romans chapter 5 into that. You can't do that. Certainly our Lord Jesus Christ died for us when we were ungodly, when we were enemies, when we were sinners.

That's all true. I don't want to minimize Romans 5, but I can't read Romans 5 in John 15, because it isn't there. Our Lord is not saying in John 15 that he's going to lay down his life for the world.

That's true. He's not saying he's going to lay down his life for his enemies. That's true.

But that is what he's saying. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Now, don't lose the force of that by saying, Our Lord had greater love than that he laid down his life for his enemies.

That's not the point. You've missed what he's saying to these men. He's saying, You, my friend, you mean so much to me, I'd rather die than lose you.

And in three and a half years, a relationship had grown between our Lord and these men that meant so much to him that he could honestly say to them, For you, my friend, I'll give my life. And my impression, as I read through the gospel, is that our Lord thoroughly enjoyed the three and a half years he spent with these men. And if he were to go back to heaven without the cross, that's the end of that friendship.

And what he's saying to me, at least, as I see it in John 15, is you men mean too much to me for me to lose you now. I'll lay down my life for you. You, my friend, because I want you to be my friends forever.

Now, that's what he's saying to us. Never mind when we were enemies, when we were sinners. He's saying that to us now, as those who know him.

I'd rather die than lose you. That's how much you mean to him. Now, that's a friend.

That's a friend who would rather die than lose us. That's how much we mean to him. The second characteristic of a friend that our Lord talks about here is an openness of heart and mind.

He mentions that a slave doesn't know what his master is doing. The slave just gets orders. He's told to do this, he's told to do that.

What's going on in the mind of his master? He has no idea. What's the purpose, goal? Nothing. He doesn't know anything about that.

Does the master sit down and tell him all his own plans and his hopes and his aspirations and his fears and all the rest of it? No. He doesn't share anything with his slave. He simply gives him orders.

And our Lord is saying, everything the Father has given me, I told you. He had opened his heart and mind to these men. I like C.S. Lewis' statement in his book, Before Love.

He said, lovers will have naked bodies, friends will have naked souls. And that's our Lord with his disciples. His own heart has been opened to these men without reservation.

They could know him through and through, and I cannot know another person except as that person tells me what's in his mind and heart. I can guess from his actions, but I usually guess wrongly when I'm guessing at what lies behind a person's actions. But when that person opens his heart to me and tells me that I know that person, and that sometimes, of course, fouls up communication between husband and wife.

Why don't you understand that? How could I understand unless you tell me? I'm not a mind reader. I only know what you tell me. And when you tell me, now I understand.

And that's what our Lord is doing with these men during all those three and a half years. Opening his own heart and mind. They didn't always see what he was saying, but think of some of the things he told them.

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I pressed in until it be accomplished? And right there he opened his own heart to those men, and how he felt as he thought about that coming cross. Right now, the pressure of it, squeezing him in, when he told them how he felt. How often he opened his mind and heart to them, not just with instruction, but with the revelation of himself.

That's a friend. One glorious thing about having our Lord Jesus as your friend, you never need wonder what he means. He's a very honest, forthright friend.

He says just what he means, and he means what he says. Now, we're not used to that kind of thing. We're used to all kinds of decumulation and pretense and facades and all the rest of it, so we're never quite sure when we're really getting the real stuff, and when this is just what we're supposed to say.

But they never had to wonder about that with our Lord. They're so used to the other kind of thing that they sometimes thought he was talking that way, too. Do you remember when they were crossing the Sea of Galilee, going over to the northeast side of that Sea of Galilee? And over in that northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee, there were no villages, no place where they could go to buy bread.

And they had switched off from the shore and started across the sea, going northeast across the Sea of Galilee. And our Lord said to them, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. He just had a controversy.

Show us a sign from heaven. And our Lord turns to his disciples out on that sea, and he says, Beware of the leaven of the Herodians and the Pharisees. The disciples are saying, Hmm, 13 of us men in this boat, we're headed across there where there isn't any A.M.P., and we got one loaf of bread.

He's mad at us because we didn't buy bread. What a stupid conclusion to reach. And our Lord tells them it's rather stupid.

He throws nine questions at them. Hey, have you fellows already forgotten? How much did you have left over when we fed the 5,000 and the 4,000? They had seen those two miracles. They participated, and they distributed the food.

And these giants of the faith are now concerned that they've only got one loaf of bread for 13 grown men. And he took how many loaves of bread and fed 5,000? And they're worried about one loaf of bread for 13

men? And once he's through with all his questions, they finally understand he's talking about the teaching of the Pharisees and the Herodians. They should never have wondered to start with, because if he wanted to ball them out for not buying bread, he'd have balled them out for not buying bread.

You were never in any doubt where you stood with this man. There wasn't a possibility of dissimulation in his heart. There was no way he could tell you that he liked you like this.

There was no way he could praise you when he needed to rebuke you. And there was no way he could fail to praise you when you deserved it. It simply is not possible for him to be a hypocrite.

And when he told them his heart and mind, he told them his heart and mind. And I think that's one of the most beautiful things about our Lord. Taking these 12 men and exposing his thinking and his feelings, his own fears, his ambitions, his desires, his hopes, his aspirations, opening himself up totally to these men.

Because I remember when he was 12 years old in the temple in Jerusalem, he was able to interact with the theologians of his day on their level, and leave them astonished at his understanding and his answers. And in his adult life, his fellowship, his interaction, his conversations were confined to fishermen and peasants. A man who, at 12, could interact with the doctors of the law has opened his heart and mind to common fishermen and peasants.

And I remember J.B. Fuller's paraphrase of a verse in Romans chapter 12. Don't become snobbish. You learn to have your friendship with ordinary folks.

That was our Lord Jesus, opening his heart and mind to ordinary folks. Because it does not depend upon intellectual response. Not that he despises intellect, of course, but it does not depend on intellectual response, but on heart response for him.

And you're hunting for that person that you can open up your heart and mind to. Now, let me go a step further with that. In a book on the tongues movement written a few years ago, three professors at the Southern Baptist Seminary each took one aspect of this whole idea.

One of them did an exegesis of the passages in the New Testament, another took up the history of the movement in the first. It was a professor of the psychology of religion, took up the psychology of what he saw in this rise of the tongues movement. And he started talking about the psychological background, and in his thinking one of the reasons lay in the frozenness, he did not use the term but that's his idea, in the frozenness of the average church.

Where we come and we sit and we listen to a message, but in our interaction with each other we don't dare. For many people that thing is built up and built up until they get the explosion of the tongues movement, and that's where they go. For all the tendons, they can express it, and I don't mean that in a bad sense.

And he felt that for some people that tongue was that inarticulate cry of a child asking to be heard and understood. And so long as we have the viewpoint that we must always say the right thing and do the right thing, and we cannot really be honest with friends and tell what's in our hearts and minds, we have no idea what our Lord meant when he said, I have told you everything the Father gave me. We have no idea what friendship really is.

Oh, to be safe with a friend! And I wish I had that poem with me now. But the gist of it is to know that whatever I say, that friend is going to take, and with a breath of love, blow away the chaff and let the grain remain. To be safe with a friend like that, where I don't have to be the spiritual Bible teacher which I'm not anyhow, where I can be the struggling Christian that I really am.

And this is why the writings of Keith Miller are such an appeal to me. He is not afraid to show himself as a struggling Christian trying to be like the Lord Jesus Christ, but not there yet, and willing to share with us how God has come into his life and helped him in those struggles. But I can tell all that to him because I can trust him with it, because he has told all his heart to me.

He has told me what grieves him about me. He has told me what pleases him. He has told me what his ambitions are, and what his ambitions are for me.

He has told me how he feels about my struggles and my sorrows. He's told me all that in this New Testament, as well as in the Old. He's told me all that.

He's opened up his whole heart and mind to me. This is not the unknown God! This is the thoroughly self-revealed God. He has opened up his mind and heart to us.

And I don't know a greater honor that he could pay us than to do that. I felt it, Emmaus, and I feel it in the pastoral ministry now in South Carolina, that for me there is no more holier moment than when a fellow Christian trusts me enough to unburden his heart and mind to me. I feel I'm in the holiest of all right since that moment.

And our Lord could pay us no greater honor than to tell us what's in his mind and heart. And that's what he has done as our friend. The third and last thing in this section is that he has trusted us as he has trusted these disciples.

And he said to them, you didn't choose me, I chose you. Oh, that's beautiful. That's so delightful.

I don't want to talk about God's choice, because I have some pretty strong feelings about it. Especially since he writes to the Corinthians that God chose the nobody. He had reasons for making his choice.

It's not just a sovereign choice, mysteries in the minds of God. He's told us why he chose certain people, and there are moral reasons in God's choice. But, anyhow, he says to these men, you didn't choose me, I chose you.

Well, of course, that's historically true. Some of those were busy along the Sea of Galilee mending nets, or fishing, whatever it was. And he turns and says, follow me.

He chose them. And I've wondered as I've looked at those men, particularly where we have the account of the choice, what was it he saw in those men that he chose them? Why did he choose these fishermen and not some other fishermen who were just down the lake? One reason, some of these had been disciples of John the Baptist and had repented. That was one reason.

But what did he see in these men? But whatever it was, he's reinforcing it now, I chose you men. This is no lottery. He's not going blind.

He doesn't have his eyes shut and just reaching into a basket and pulling out names. He said, I chose you. And he's done that with each one of us.

He didn't one day say, now let me see, I want a thousand Christians out of that city, so we'll start pulling names out of the hat. No, he chose you. He did it deliberately.

He chose you. And then he says, I've ordained you to go and bring forth fruit. And truthfully, it's already past time.

But what he is saying is, look, the whole future of this thing is in your hands. I've ordained you to go and bring forth fruit, and let your fruit be made. I'm going back to heaven.

Of course he's going to send the company. He's not going to leave them orphans. He's not going to leave them alone without the help that they need.

Put the whole thing in your hands, the whole thing in your hands. He's saying to these men, I trust you. Now, that's a friend.

Happy the man who has friends like those, eh? Oh, man, I thank God for friends. People that I can trust with the darkest secrets of my life, if the need arises. People who know me thoroughly.

My wife, for one, nobody knows me better than she does. Not because she lives with me, but because I trust her and I can tell her anything. What security.

What security. And that's our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. I can tell him anything.

He trusts me, and I trust him. But now watch, there's a condition to that friendship. When you have a friendship on earth, it means you take the other person as that person is.

You can't, you know, you can't say, hey, I'll be your friend when you become so-and-so, or do this, do that, the other. Friendship means we take each other as we are. Isn't that the way he took us? That's the way you have to take him.

You have to take him as he is. You can't make him different from what he is, and want to be his friend. And he's the son of God, and that's the only one you can take.

He is the Lord Jesus Christ. And you have to take him as he is. And if he is the Lord Jesus Christ, then in this friendship he has the right to issue commands, because he is the Lord.

If we had a personal friendship with a king on earth, because we were his friends would not remove his right to rule, would it? And if he said to us one day, go, go to a certain country and do a job for me, would we say, because we are your friends, we say no? Because we are his friends we'd be all the quicker to go, isn't that true? So our Lord says to us, you are my friends if you do what I command. So on our part it's obedience to him. And that's how we become his friends.

Not perfect obedience, any more than these fellows gave him perfect obedience. They didn't, but that was the bent of their life, and that's what he's looking at. Say, isn't it wonderful to have Jesus Christ our Lord as a friend? Jesus, what a friend of sinners.

Jesus, lover of my soul. Then we ought to be able to sing, what a friend we have in Jesus. I call you friends.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, in spite of having seen this passage, it almost seems impertinent of us to look up into your face and say that you are our friend and we are yours. Release us into the liberty of that friendship and into its obedience we pray in your name.

Amen.

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