

Main Idea: According to the Master's words in John 15:14-17, being a friend of Jesus involves three traits.

- I. Being a friend of Jesus involves obedience (14).
    - A. We do not obey Jesus in order to *become* His friends.
    - B. We obey Him *because* we are His friends.
  - II. Being a friend of Jesus involves knowledge (15-16).
    - A. We are privileged to know about a special position (15a).
      1. When we enter the world, we are God's enemy.
      2. When we receive Christ, we become God's friend.
    - B. We are privileged to know about a special purpose (15b).
    - C. We are privileged to know about a special plan (16).
      1. We have been chosen.
      2. We have been chosen to bear fruit.
      3. We have been chosen to bear fruit through prayer.
  - III. Being a friend of Jesus involves love (17).
    - A. Any friend of Jesus is a friend of mine.
    - B. When I see a friend in need, I have an opportunity to be like Jesus.
- Time for Reflection: Two questions to ponder...
1. Am I a friend of Jesus?
  2. What can I do to be a better friend?

As I left my mother's hospice room this past Monday, I gave her a kiss and told her I loved her. My mom opened her eyes. She looked at me and said, "You're so special."

As I walked out of the room, I thought of all the times she had said those words to me in my life, and how God used those words to motivate me.

It's a powerful thing to know what significant people in your life think of you.

I'm thankful that the person who gave me life regularly told me what she thought of me. Her words affect me to this day in profound ways. And yet, as influential as her words have been, there's something far more significant to my identity. It's knowing what the Person who gave me eternal life thinks of me.

Though I am an unworthy sinner, He calls me His *friend*.

God's Word uses many words to depict our identity. We are followers of Jesus, believers, children of God, saints, heirs, just for starters. But this morning we'll be looking at this mind-boggling term Jesus used. The Son of God said to His disciples, "I have called you *friends*."

Back in 1936 Jesse Owens traveled to Berlin. He was the sure favorite to win the long jump at the Olympic games. The year before he had jumped 26 feet, 8 1/4 inches -- a record that would stand for 25 years. As he walked to the long-jump pit, however, Owens saw a tall, blue eyed, blond German taking practice jumps in the 26-foot range. Owens felt nervous. He was acutely aware of the Nazis' desire to prove "Aryan superiority," especially over blacks.

At this point, the tall German introduced himself as Luz Long. "You should be able to qualify with your eyes closed!" he said to Owens, referring to his two jumps. For the next few moments the black son of a sharecropper and the white model of Nazi manhood chatted. Then Long made a suggestion. Since the qualifying distance was only 23 feet, 5 1/2 inches, why not make a mark several inches before the takeoff board and jump from there, just to play it safe? Owens did and qualified easily. In the finals Owens set an

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\*\*\* Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Olympic record and earned the second of four golds. The first person to congratulate him was Luz Long -- in full view of Adolf Hitler.

Owens never again saw Long, who was killed in World War II. "You could melt down all the medals and cups I have," Owens later wrote, "and they wouldn't be a plating on the 24-carat friendship I felt for Luz Long."<sup>1</sup>

There's something special about friendship. No matter how young or old we may be, we long to be friends, and to have friends. A friend is someone you can be *you* with. A friend is someone who knows you as you really are, warts and all, and still loves you.

I have called you *friends*.

This morning, we're going to ponder those amazing words of our Savior.

Last week in our study of John 15, we talked about the topic of intimacy. We learned that fruitfulness is linked to intimacy, not activity. A fruitful Christian experiences intimacy in two areas of his or her life. There will be *intimacy with Christ* (9-11), and *intimacy with other Christians* (12-13).

Intimacy is not an option. It's at the heart of a vibrant Christian life. Successful, vivacious Christians are those who have learned to make it their #1 priority in life to be close to Christ, to depend upon Christ, to *abide* in Christ.

Is there a word which enables us to visualize this intimacy? There is. It's the word that Jesus used as He spoke to His disciples in His conversation about the vine. It's the word that appears in John 15:12-17. It's the word "friend."

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his *friends*. <sup>14</sup> You are my *friends* if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you *friends*, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other."

What's involved in being a friend of Jesus? We'll find out this morning. According to the Master's words in John 15:14-17, being a friend of Jesus involves three traits.

#### I. Being a friend of Jesus involves obedience (14).

"You are my friends if you do what I command."

You are my friends. What an overwhelming statement! To be called a friend of Jesus. But there's more.

You are my friends *if*. That word "if" sounds strange to us, doesn't it? "You are my friends *if* you do." It sounds like a conditional friendship. Is it?

Check the context. Jesus spoke these words to the eleven disciples. Judas had already left. In but a few hours, he would be back, this time with an angry, hateful mob of soldiers.

When Jesus spoke the words recorded in John 14-16, His aim was to prepare His followers for life after His departure. He was leaving them via the cross, and He would one day come back for them. But in the meantime, they needed instructions as to how to live.

He gave them a picture from agriculture. He told them, "I am the vine, you are the branches (5)." As branches, they needed to abide, to make a conscious, daily decision to be close to Him, to be in contact with Him, to *remain* in Him. And if they would do that,

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<sup>1</sup> David Wallechinsky in *The Complete Book of the Olympics*.

He guaranteed they would bear fruit. The person who remains in Him bears fruit. The person who doesn't remain doesn't bear fruit. Both are guarantees.

What's the key then to this responsibility of "abiding" or "remaining"? In verse 10, Jesus spelled out an essential, "If you obey my commands, you will remain [abide] in My love."

Last time we illustrated with the picture of a greenhouse. I asked you to think of a plant living inside a greenhouse located in the middle of a desert. When a plant stays within the confines of a greenhouse, there will be fruit. If it were to go outside, there would be barrenness.

The commands of Jesus are like the walls of a greenhouse. When we keep Jesus' commands, we experience growth and fruitfulness. Fruitfulness is linked to abiding, and abiding is linked to obedience.

That's why Jesus could say, "You are my friends *if* you do what I command." Friendship with Jesus is linked to obedience. A true friend of Jesus obeys Jesus.

Notice carefully. In John 15, disciples are said to be Jesus' friends, but Jesus is not said to be their friend.<sup>2</sup> In fact, can you think of anywhere in Scripture where either God the Father or the Lord Jesus is said to be a friend of anyone? Granted, Abraham was called the friend of God (Isa 41:8), but the Scriptures do not call God the friend of Abraham.

That seems strange, doesn't it? Especially when you think of the many hymns that use this image...

James Grindley Small: "I've found a Friend; O such a Friend! He loved me ere I knew Him; He drew me with the cords of love, and thus He bound me to Him..."

Joseph Scriven: "What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer."

J. Wilbur Chapman: "Jesus! What a Friend for sinners! Jesus! Lover of my soul; Friends may fail me, foes assail me, He, my Savior, makes me whole."

Listen to this observation by D. A. Carson (105): "All of these hymns express true ideas, and I do not hesitate to sing them. After all, the Scriptures never present Jesus as an UNfriend. If friendship is measured purely by love poured out, then Jesus is the greatest friend. Yet the fact remains that the Scriptures never refer to Him by the noun 'friend.'"

Why don't they? Think about it. Jesus says to us, "You are my friends." He doesn't say, "*We* are friends." Just what is He offering us here? Intimacy with Him? Yes. Equality with Him? No. The friendship Jesus offers is not reciprocal.

Don't miss this. Friendship with Jesus doesn't mean He stoops to equal terms with us. He doesn't become our "buddy." We're not "chums." There's a fundamental difference between Jesus and us. He is the Creator; we are the created. He's the Redeemer; we are the redeemed. He's the King; we are the subjects.

It's that distinction which explains why Jesus qualifies His offer: "You are My friends *if* you do what I command you." Being a friend of Jesus involves obedience.

Keep in mind...

**A. We do not obey Jesus in order to *become* His friends.** We'll see how that occurs in a moment. Rather...

**B. We obey Him *because* we are His friends.** It's our privilege.

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<sup>2</sup> Observation by D. A. Carson, p. 105.

Answer this. Do you delight in obeying Jesus? If you are His friend, you will. I'm not talking about perfection. I'm talking about your passion. Will we always obey Jesus perfectly? No. But when we break His commands it will break our heart—if we are His friends. Because when we are someone's friend, the last thing we want to do is to disappoint them.

I'll be frank. If the Christian life is a grind to you, if it cramps your style to obey the commands of Christ, then you'd better recheck whether you're Jesus' friend.

The telephone rings. You pick up the phone, and on the other you hear an unfamiliar voice say, "Hello, Mr. Brandit [that's how they usually butcher my name]. May I have just a minute of your time?" And I cringe. Why? It's a telemarketer.

Now suppose ten minutes later the phone rings again, and I hear the same basic question, "Hello, got a minute to talk?" But this time, there's no hesitation. "Sure do!" I say as I plop down into the easy chair. "For you, I've got all the time in the world."

What made the difference? The second caller is my *friend*. There's a world of difference between a stranger and a friend, isn't there?

Now make it personal. "I'd like to spend some time with you in the morning," Jesus says to us. "I have some things I want to show you from My Word. Let's get together, just the two of us, before your day gets too hectic."

Then Sunday comes. "You know, I'd appreciate it if you would come to My House today," the Lord says. "My other friends will be there. I'm looking forward to our time together."

Have you ever thought about the fact that missing church and missing a daily quiet time with the Lord is kind of like *standing up a friend*? These are privileges He has graciously offered us—not to mention responsibilities. He invites us to be with Him. He deserves it, for sure, but what an invitation!

Remember what He told the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2? This was a *good* church. It was filled with people who had their doctrine straight and their schedules full of good things. But Jesus had this to say, "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first [remember how when you first came to know Me, you wanted to be with Me more than anything else?]. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (4-5)."

That's the first trait of a friend of Jesus—obedience. Here's the second.

## II. Being a friend of Jesus involves knowledge (15-16).

Consider verse 15, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you *friends*, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

This was quite an announcement. Jesus told the eleven, "From now on I no longer refer to you as servants." Jesus let His followers know that they had graduated to a new level of intimacy with Him.

Why doesn't Jesus call us servants? Here's the reason. A servant doesn't *know* what his Lord is doing. A friend does.

Let me ask you a question. Why were the disciple no longer considered merely servants? Jesus' answer—because He made something known to them. He let them know the Master's business. As friends, they were entitled to knowledge.

What kind of knowledge? As friends of Jesus, we are privileged to know about three special things...

**A. We are privileged to know about a special position (15a).** “I have called you friends.” What a special position! When we were born into the world, we certainly weren't friends of God. What were we? Just the opposite. We were enemies. Let that sink in...

1. *When we enter the world, we are God's enemy.* It's so easy to forget what we were, and still would be apart from God's grace. Listen to what the Bible says:

**Romans 8:7** “The sinful mind is hostile to God [the KJV says “is ENMITY against God”]. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.” The Greek term is *ekthra* and means “a state of enmity with someone - ‘enmity, being an enemy of.’”<sup>3</sup>

**James 4:4** “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”

We do not enter the world in a neutral state. We enter the world with a sin nature which we've inherited from Adam. We enter the world as a trespasser. This is God's world—He made it—but we live like it's ours. We want to do things our own way.

How then does an enemy of God become a friend of God? We find the answer in...

**Romans 5:10** “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

It's true. When we enter the world we are God's enemy. But...

2. *When we receive Christ, we become God's friend.* If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, if you are His follower, you have a special position! Listen to His words, “I have called you friends.”

A lot of people struggle with so-called poor self-esteem. But right here in verse 15 is a nugget of truth that will solve the problem. We need to take seriously what Jesus says about us. It's what Jesus says about us that matters. Not what we think. Certainly not what we feel. What He says. And what does He say about us? “I have called you *friends*.” Oh beloved, ponder that! We have a special position.

But wait. If I'm a friend of Jesus, does it mean I am no longer His servant? In one sense, yes, Christians are slaves of Jesus. He is the Master. We obey Him. So we read statements like Romans 1:1, “Paul, a *servant* of Christ Jesus.” And Philippians 1:1, “Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ.”

But in another sense, we are no longer merely slaves, but friends. Jesus has given us a special position. As Paul said in Galatians 4, we are no longer slaves, but sons (7).

Being a friend of Jesus involves knowledge of a second sort.

**B. We are privileged to know about a special purpose (15b).** What purpose? Notice the end of verse 15, “For everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Suppose a king came here to church this morning. If right in the middle of the service, he ordered his chauffeur, “Go out and bring my limo to the front door,” what would the chauffeur do? Would he ask for an explanation? Would he say, “Well, King, let's talk about this. Why do you want your car now, and why by the front door?” No way. The chauffeur would obey his master, no questions asked.

Now suppose the king asked a close friend to get the car. No doubt the friend would get the car. He would never think of disobeying his king. But being a friend of the king,

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<sup>3</sup> Louw, Johannes P. and Nida, Eugene A., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, (New York: United Bible Societies) 1988, 1989.

he would feel comfortable to ask a few questions. “Are you feeling poorly? Is that why we need to leave early?” And the king would probably share with him the reasons behind his command. Why? Because the man is his *friend*.

See the connection? A servant does not have an intimate relationship with his master. A friend does. A servant does what he's told without understanding his master's plan.

But Jesus calls us *friends*. He lets us in on the Father's will.

What in the world is God doing? We know the answer to that question, don't we? We know what God is doing. And why? Because He told us. He has given us His Word.

As the friends of Jesus, first of all, we're privileged to know about and hold a special position. Secondly, we have the privilege of knowing about His special purpose.

**C. We are privileged to know about a special plan (16).** I tabled a question a few moments ago I want to address now. How do we become Jesus' disciple and friend?

Do we choose Him? Is that how it happens? Jesus explains how it happens in verse 16. He shares about a very special plan that involves three details...

1. *We have been chosen.* “You did not choose me, but I chose you.”

In Israel in the first century, the common practice was for a disciple to pick the rabbi or teacher he wanted to follow. But do you remember how the Twelve got connected to Jesus? Jesus went to them. He went to Peter the fisherman, and said, "Follow Me." He went to Matthew the tax-collector, and said, "Follow Me."

On earth, friends generally choose each other, but friendship with Jesus is different. It's one-sided in its origin. It's not that we met half-way. Again, listen to what Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." The "I" is emphatic in the original text.

I chose you. Those words point out that the love of Christ for us is spontaneous, free, independent, and uninfluenced. The Bible is full of statements like this that highlight the sovereign nature of divine love:

**Deuteronomy 7:7-8** (To Israel) “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup> But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

**Hosea 14:4** “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely.”

**Romans 5:8** “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

**Ephesians 1:4-5** “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight [not because He foresaw that we were going to be holy]. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.”

**1 John 4:10** “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

**1 John 4:19** “We love because He first loved us.”

The objection is raised, “I don't like the doctrine of election. It makes people proud.” Well, first of all, we're in danger when we start picking and choosing doctrines based on our likes and dislikes. But secondly, the doctrine of election is one of the most humbling doctrines in Scripture when properly understood.

Here's a case in point. Jesus just informed His disciples that they were His friends. Wow! That's enough to turn anyone's head.<sup>4</sup> So to keep it in perspective, Jesus reminds them, "You didn't choose Me. I chose you."

D.A. Carson says it well, "This truth is of overwhelming importance if we hope to escape the puffy spiritual arrogance that talks almost as if Jesus has been blessed by our presence, as if we have done him a favor by choosing to trust him. I do not doubt for a moment that men are responsible to repent and believe; but it is salutary to recognize that no believer will have legitimate grounds for claiming, throughout all eternity, that he made it and his neighbor did not because he made the right choice. One of the songs that will surely be sung forever around the throne is this one:

*I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;  
It was not I that found, O Savior true;  
No, I was found of Thee."*

As friends, we're privileged to know about this special plan. We have been chosen.

But why?

2. *We have been chosen to bear fruit.* Jesus continues, "I chose you and appointed [KJV "ordained"] you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." There's the word "fruit" again. We've seen a form of it seven times already in the chapter.

The word "appointed" refers to the act of setting someone apart for special service. Jesus has not only chosen, but He has appointed us. He's given us a mission, to bring forth fruit. He is in heaven now, yet He lives through us. He is the vine, we are the branches.

There's a third element to this special plan.

3. *We have been chosen to bear fruit through prayer.* Verse 16, "Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." To pray in Jesus' name is to pray in a manner consistent with who He is. When we pray in Jesus' name, we ask for things for which we know He would ask.

But notice the relationship here between *asking* and *bearing fruit*. Prayer is the key to fruit. When we pray, we advance the name of Christ. Prayer is the key to God's special plan.

I agree with an observation by Bill Hull, "Prayer attacks the status quo, striking at the root of issues, moving God's hand, and catapulting angels into action...I've heard it said that the first church prayed ten days (prior to Pentecost), preached ten minutes, and saw 3,000 come to Christ. The modern church prays ten minutes, preaches ten days, and sees a handful come to Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Being a friend of Jesus means we're privileged to know about the divine plan. And when we pray, we get in touch with that plan.

We are a privileged people, beloved. As Jesus' friends, we're privileged to know about a special position, purpose, and plan. Let's not take that for granted. Thank Him for it right now.

Being a friend of Jesus involves three traits. We've seen two thus far: obedience and knowledge. Here's the third.

### III. Being a friend of Jesus involves love (17).

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<sup>4</sup> As Carson points out, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, p. 68.

“This [lit. “these things”—it’s plural] is my commandment: Love each other.”

As Jesus' friends, we love Him. We love Him because He first loved us. But as His friends, we must also love His other friends. We must love one another.

This is not the first time Jesus told us to love one another. We heard it in 13:34. And He repeated the charge again in 15:12, “Love one another as I have loved you.”

As friends of Jesus, we're called to love each other. Think of the implications. In practical terms it means that...

**A. Any friend of Jesus is a friend of mine.** Brothers and sisters, we're commanded to love each other. Does this command have any bearing when I learn that a fellow Christian is in the hospital, or struggling in life? Or how about when I observe that a brother hasn't been to church in a couple of weeks? Who should visit them? Who should call them to let them know they were missed?

When that happens, the entire church family has the opportunity to move into action with an outpouring of love for that fellow-friend of Jesus.

I'm so encouraged by the many ways I see that happen in our midst. It's a joy to see those whom Jesus has called friends loving His other friends.

But this is not natural. As sinners, we're prone to go our own way, to retreat and hide and hoard.

A great disservice happened to the American church about a generation ago. “Let the clergy do that,” someone said. “They're better trained than we are. We'll pay them to do the ministering, to show that we care.”

Is that what Jesus said to do? No. What responsibility did the Lord give the “clergy”? According to Ephesians 4:11-12, it's to *equip*—through the ministry of the Word and prayer. And what responsibility did He give the congregation? Again, from Ephesians 4:12, it's to *minister*. In the Body, every friend of Jesus is a minister.

In John 15 Jesus calls us to be a *caring community*. Simply put...

**B. When I see a friend in need, I have an opportunity to be like Jesus.**

And when I do that, I show that I truly am His friend.

As you know, Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. Breaking baseball's color barrier, he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. The fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then, shortstop Pee Wee Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.<sup>6</sup>

Oh the liberating power of knowing you are a *friend*.

Time for Reflection: Two questions to ponder...

1. *Am I a friend of Jesus?* Be honest with yourself. Do you know Him?

2. *What can I do to be a better friend?* “You are my friends, *if* you do what I command,” He said. To be a good friend, we must obey Him with all we've got. And the result will be fruit, fruit that will last.

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<sup>6</sup> From *Leadership Journal*