

Cornerstone

A Voice To The End-time Church

The Friend of God

by Jim Rector

The operative word when it comes to God and man is *relationship*.. And indeed the Scriptures describe a number of very significant links and associations between human beings and their Creator. None, however, is more important, more intimate, more special and more needed than that of friendship. We easily relate to being a child of God or a servant of God, but Yahweh desires more--He wants us to be HIS FRIEND!

When it comes to God and man, perhaps *the* operative word is RELATIONSHIP. Above all other goals and considerations, the Father desires to establish a connection, an association, an affiliation, a very special link and bond between Himself as Creator of all things and mankind.

When you think about it, it is really quite remarkable that Yahweh, the one true God of heaven and earth, would deign to even glance in the direction of human beings--much less actually crave a close and fruitful relationship with us. After all, He is the epitome of absolute perfection and sinlessness. His life is eternal; ours is so very temporal. He lives in utter splendor; we, by comparison, eke out less than a mere shadow of such an existence. He is rich; we are poor. He is unable to be tempted; we succumb easily to every form of enticement. He cannot abide sin, yet He sacrificed His only Son on our behalf that we might be reconciled to Him and enter into His presence. Every conceivable barrier possible stands between the likes of lowly man and the omnipotent El Shaddai, but amazingly He has broken them all down--forgiven all sin--and openly invited us to come unto Him.

MANY KINDS OF RELATIONSHIPS

This subject of *relationships* is a broad one, and this article cannot do justice to it all. I do, however, wish to carefully focus our attention upon one particular type of association that is profoundly important to God. Before we delve into this issue, let's get a quick overview of the other major kinds of relationships that are revealed in the Scriptures.

1. FATHER-SON: This is probably the most easily recognizable and primary spiritual relationship that exists between a believer and God. When the Saviour walked this earth, he constantly talked about God as his Father. In many instances, this startled and even angered the Jews of his day. On one particular occasion, we see their negative reaction displayed most forcefully. Notice the account in John 5:

"Jesus (Yahshua) answered them, My Father works hitherto and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath (so they thought), but said also, that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:17-18).

Jesus not only revealed that Yahweh was his true heavenly Father, but he also taught the disciples that they too should look upon God as their own spiritual Father. In Matthew 5:48, he said:

"Become you therefore perfect, even as YOUR FATHER in heaven is perfect."

The passages of Scripture dealing with this very important relationship are far too numerous to even list, much less quote. We shall let the apostle Paul have the last word on this particular affiliation between man and God. In his classic letter to the Romans, he makes one of the most straightforward statements concerning this matter:

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are THE SONS OF GOD. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry, ABBA, FATHER" (Rom. 8:14-15).

2. MASTER-SERVANT: This special relationship between God and man is evident from the very earliest times. In fact, any human being who is called and chosen by God automatically becomes His servant. This role has been played by the likes of everyone from righteous Abel and Enoch and Noah, before the great Flood; to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; to Moses, Joshua and David; to the prophets, the apostles, even to Christ Himself. In John 13, the Messiah told the disciples:

"You call me MASTER, and Lord: and you say well, for so I am" (John 13:13).

Every single one of God's people, whether in ancient times or in our up-to-date 20th century, have all been called to serve. This is indeed the bottom line of true Christianity.

3. HUSBAND-WIFE: We often think only of Christ and the New Testament Church when we consider the relationship of Husband to wife; but, in fact, it existed long ago as well. Let's not forget that Yahweh was once married to ancient Israel. But that's not all. He has promised to marry her again in the future. Hosea prophesied of that time by saying:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her (to her heart). And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came from the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that you shall call me ISHI (My Husband!)" (Hosea 2:14-16).

Of course, it virtually goes without saying that Christians are also pictured in a certain type of marital relationship with Christ. Paul makes this quite clear in his second letter to the Corinthians:

"For I am jealous over you with Godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (II Cor. 11:2).

Paul expounds on this theme much more extensively in Ephesians 5, showing how the love and care and responsibilities that exist between a physical husband and wife also have spiritual fulfillment in the relationship between Christ and the Church.

4. **BODY OF CHRIST**: Here is another very unique bond, both between the Saviour and the Church, as well as among the believers themselves. Once again, it is the apostle Paul who treats this subject in several of his letters, most notably that of I Corinthians. Writing in the 12th chapter of this book, he states:

"For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For the body is not one member, but many...And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you...the members should have the same care one for another...Now you are the **BODY OF CHRIST**, and members in particular" (I Cor. 12:12-27).

This association demonstrates the kind of care and service the various members of the Church are to have toward each other, while at the same time being subject to the Head of the Body--Jesus Christ.

5. **BROTHERS AND SISTERS**: This relationship is easy to understand, if we believe that we are begotten children of the Father. In other words, if the Father-son relationship is present, it naturally follows that the offspring of God would then be brothers and sisters of the same divine Family. This, of course, is why we often read in many parts of the New Testament of how the members addressed each other as "brother" or "sister." As we know, the apostles usually saluted the members collectively as "brethren." Anyone who has been in the Church for very long has surely come to understand and appreciate this very marvelous connection one with another.

Scripture reveals, however, yet another relationship--one that is woven through all these other associations--one, in fact, that ties everything together. It is the most intimate relationship that God desires between Himself and His people; and, because of this, it is perhaps the most difficult of all relationships for us to truly believe and experience.

In spite of the fact that all of these foregoing links and bonds are certainly in force and effect, we still have a desperate need for this other unique relationship. Even though the relationship of Master to servant, Husband to wife, brother to sister, even Father to son, are all of immense significance, without this special relationship, something is still missing.

THE FRIEND OF GOD

~~We are all, by nature, essentially alone--existentially alone.~~ The door to our personal home is closed shut and latched. God the Father and Christ want to change this situation. Notice how Jesus put it in Revelation 3:20:

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man shall **HEAR** my voice, and **OPEN** the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Please consider what Christ is conveying in this passage of Scripture. He is describing a certain, special relationship that he desires with each of God's children. That relationship is not the Father-son association nor that of Master-servant nor of Husband-wife. This particular bond is different. Your Saviour says that what he would really like is to have you recognize his voice, open the door and invite him to come in--sit down, relax, and enjoy a meal--indeed, a feast--together--just you and him. This relationship, brethren, is much more profound than any other possible affiliation.

This type of relationship is also expressed by Christ in an earlier instance. After the last supper, one of the apostles asked him a question. His response is very telling:

"Judas, not Iscariot, said to him, Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world? Jesus answered and said to him, If a man loves me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will COME TO HIM, and MAKE OUR ABODE WITH HIM" (John 14:22-23).

In these two passages, Christ makes very plain the fact that both he and the Father desire a very special type of relationship with true believers. When one is alone, as we all really are, that person needs something--indeed, someone. In fact, he desperately needs precisely what God wants to provide for him. He needs, above all else, A FRIEND!!

Brethren, the truth is that our very effectiveness as the children of Yahweh is directly proportional to our INTIMACY with our heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus Christ (Yahshua). When God inspired the prophet Isaiah to write those famous, oft-quoted words: "**Come now, let us reason together**" (Isa. 1:18), He was essentially extending an open invitation to each of us to get to know Him, not just as our Father or Creator or Master, but as our friend.

Those individuals who throughout history have been the most effective in interceding with God have been HIS FRIENDS--not those who have been merely casually acquainted with Him. Perhaps the most prominent example of this type of person is to be seen in the great patriarch Abraham. In at least three different places in Scripture, we read something very special about the relationship between Yahweh and Abraham. First, Isaiah writes:

"But you, Israel, are my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham MY FRIEND" (Isa. 41:8).

The apostle James also comments on this unique association by saying:

"And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness: and he was called the FRIEND OF GOD" (James 2:23).

I know that we all have read these verses before, perhaps many times in the past; but I have to wonder just how real they truly are to us. The Bible states categorically that Abraham was not just a son of God or a servant of God, but a friend of God. Now the relationship of Father to son is admittedly very special. That of Master to servant certainly expresses an appropriate aspect of our affiliation with God. But a friend, indeed the closest and best of friends--well, that is an entirely different matter--one that I am afraid we tend to either overlook or simply view in the abstract.

The idea that God and man (read: God and **YOU**) could be considered friends will strike many as just a little difficult to accept, just a little hard to truly visualize, maybe even bizarre! Such a relationship seems impossible--too human--too casual. Oh, we can easily relate to it on our own level. After all, we all hopefully have friends, and a few of those friends have perhaps become our best friends. In fact, when it comes down to the human frame, most of us could hardly imagine life without friends; or, at least, a friend.

The fact, however, that we desire, cultivate and enjoy friendships is clear evidence that the God who created us in His own image also wants the very same thing. This may sound astounding to some, but it should not. All of the good qualities, proclivities, even desires, of mankind find their ultimate fulfillment in God Himself. Man has emotions (joy, sadness, anger, etc.), because Yahweh has those same feelings. Man can manipulate mathematical formulae and calculate huge numbers and invent or design incredible creations, because God's mind is, first and foremost, able and intelligent enough to do these things and far more, of course. Well, the very same principle applies in the case of friendship between God and man.

Our Saviour emphasized to his disciples that his relationship with them (and certainly with us as well, if indeed we are his disciples!) was based primarily on friendship, not merely on a Master-servant association. Notice John 15:14-16:

"You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants (slaves); for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you FRIENDS; for all things that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."

These are surely some of the most inspiring, encouraging, uplifting and revealing words in all the Scriptures. Jesus Christ (Yahshua ha Meshiach) actually wants to be friends with the likes of you and me--indeed, best friends. This is utterly remarkable. We can relate to the other relationships discussed in the Bible, but best friends is almost beyond our ability and even willingness to fathom and accept. Please, however, I urge you not to feel this way nor to relegate this to the realm of mere abstract concept. And don't try to spiritualize it away. This is **REAL!** This is the way it is--the way God Himself truly is!

ATTRIBUTES OF A FRIEND

If we are to understand and identify with the fact that God wants us to be best friends with Him, we would do well to simply consider some of the characteristics of a true friend. Obviously there are many more than I can list or expound here, but let's take a brief look at seven outstanding traits of best friends. As we cover these points, think about how they apply in the spiritual realm between you and God.

1. FRIENDS ALWAYS STAY IN TOUCH: This is really a given, isn't it? It seems that no matter what arises between best friends, they always manage, indeed make a concerted effort, to stay in close contact. Why? There is one overriding reason--they **LIKE EACH OTHER!!** Life just wouldn't be the same, just wouldn't be as rich and rewarding, without that link between best

friends being continually nourished and enhanced. I don't care if companions like these are separated by hundreds, even thousands, of miles; it doesn't matter if such separation lasts over years of time--they are going to make a point of staying in touch--whether by letter, by phone, or by arranged visit. It is almost like one's best friend is really an extension of oneself, and to lose contact with that individual is akin to losing part of you. It is heartbreaking when a best friend drifts away and fails to stay in close communication. It's like something very vital inside you just shriveled up and died.

Brethren, it is the same way with God as well. Remember, God desires, craves, even needs close friendship. When He created man, He stated that it was not good that the man should be alone. He feels the very same way about Himself. He neither prefers nor chooses to be alone. Just like us, God wants close friends--and the close friends he wants are, believe it or not, you and me! Therefore, as best friends, it is incumbent upon us, indeed it should be our driving purpose, to stay in close contact with each other. The truth of the matter is that God the Father always fulfills His part in this special relationship. He continually seeks to draw closer, to contact and stay in touch with us. His Spirit is constantly working, seeking ways of stimulating our minds, triggering right thoughts, moving us and directing us to discern His will for us, motivating and urging us to make the right decisions and take the right turns in this life and calling.

If you wish to really get a strong hold on genuine friendship with God, you must begin with the DESIRE for that relationship and the willingness to consistently stay in touch with your BEST FRIEND! That means that you must begin to seriously reconsider your status with God--your relationship--and especially the quality and quantity of your contact with Him.

Our real lack of this kind of friendship with God is so often indicated in the way we pray. In so many instances, we feel uncomfortable in prayer--stiff, stilted, overly formal, uncertain of what to say or how to say it, worthless, guilt-ridden, small, insignificant. I know these feelings from my own first-hand experience. I have, however, decided to talk to God as my Friend; and therefore, although I always want to be respectful, I strive to speak face to face, man to man, remembering and continually meditating upon this special relationship that exists between me and the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. I urge you to ponder how you really relate to God. On what basis is it? Is He truly your Friend, or is that merely a spiritual-sounding notion to you, and not a living reality? From now on, as you pray, think of the concept of friendship--indeed, best friends. I am absolutely certain that it will begin to make a very meaningful difference in your spiritual life.

Remember that there was another very famous *friend of God*--a man to whom Yahweh revealed Himself in the most personal and powerful way. We read of their relationship in a passage from Exodus 33:11. This is what each of us should desire in our individual situations:

"And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the door of the tabernacle: and all the people rose and worshipped, every man in his tent-door. And the Lord spoke to Moses, FACE TO FACE, AS A MAN SPEAKS TO HIS FRIEND" (Ex. 33:9-11).

2. **FRIENDS ALWAYS FORGIVE:** Ideally, best friends should have little need to forgive each other of wrongs committed; but, of course, this is certainly not always the case. Whenever such a situation exists, invariably true friends find it in their hearts to be understanding and forgiving toward one another.

God constantly proves to us that He is our very best friend in this very area. Don't the Scriptures plainly show us His mind, when they state:

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified (forgiven and cleared of all wrongdoing) by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:6-10).

This is such strong evidence of just how much God desires to have a close, intimate relationship with man--so strong, in fact, that He was willing to pay the highest price possible--the life of Yahshua, His only Son. That sacrifice squared the past, exonerated us in spite of who and what we are, and reconciled us to a perfect, sinless Creator God. Christ's death paved the way, broke down the wall of partition, rent the veil, opened the door to allow free access to our Father and Friend in heaven.

Brethren, the forgiveness that God has granted us is inexpressible. Even though we often carry on our shoulders a load of guilt and shame, we must come to terms with the pure fact that God already knew all about who we were and what we would do long before He decided to reconcile us to Himself and make it possible for us to become His friends. And He did it anyway, in spite of the sin and sinful nature of man. When we come under the shed blood of our Saviour, that which we have done and that which we are is covered and forgiven and washed away. We must accept this marvelous act of love and compassion on God's part toward us. The apostle Paul put it so well when he told the Romans:

"There is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:1).

When God forgives, He forgives completely. There are no strings attached to His love and mercy. They are freely given, because of who He is, because of His perfect nature and character. There is no earning of His compassion, no deserving on our part. He does not say that we must become perfect before we can share in His justification, redemption and reconciliation. He offers it without charge--without charge to us, that is--but certainly not to Him. The price He willingly paid is incalculable!

This sort of freely granted forgiveness is what true friends are able and willing to do for one another. This attitude and approach establishes the basis for real friendship. It opens the door and keeps it open continually.

3. FRIENDS ARE ALWAYS THERE WHEN YOU NEED THEM: There is an old proverb written by King Solomon that says:

"Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father...better is a friend that is near than a brother that is far away" (Prov. 27:9-10).

Can you think of a Biblical case where, as the saying goes, *a friend in need is a friend indeed*? How about the time when Paul, upon his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, was confronted with a rather stern group of apostles and disciples. Undoubtedly they recalled his former fanaticism in having Christians arrested, beaten, imprisoned and even killed; and consequently they would not welcome him into their midst. Paul would surely feel the sting of rejection many times in his life and service to God, but this time must have been a particularly bitter pill to swallow. Here he was being repudiated by the chosen apostles, the very eyewitnesses of Christ Himself. It was a difficult time for this young man.

Paul, however, was not without a friend. In this case, it was perhaps a future friend, but one who showed from the outset what the nature of a true friend really is. Barnabus, the *son of encouragement*, came running to his rescue. He was intimate with all the Jerusalem crowd and immediately stepped in and paved the way for Paul. He took him, introduced him to the apostles, and then personally vouched for him. And it made all the difference in the world to a man in Paul's position--especially to Paul, who had very few, if any, friends at this trying time in his life and ministry, and who was unquestionably plagued with many troubling reminders of his past. But Barnabus put everything aside. Nothing, absolutely nothing, got in the way of his determination to befriend Paul. And even though they later parted company under very adverse circumstances, we know that they remained close friends throughout their lives. Paul speaks affectionately and admirably of Barnabus in some of his later epistles. It is also interesting that Barnabus also befriended John Mark when he too was down. Friends are like that--they are there when you need them.

Once again, the Proverbs speak to this issue by saying:

"A man who has friends must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24).

Who could possibly overlook one of the most well-known friendships in all the Bible--that of David and Jonathan. Their relationship was so beautiful--like the proverb above literally springing to life. Indeed, here were friends who stuck closer than brothers. In fact, that statement is so true. Brothers can often get into quarrels and may be divided forever. Of course, they remain blood kin, but the relationship of best friends is even stronger and more precious than that of siblings. It is said of David and Jonathan **THAT THEIR SOULS WERE KNIT TOGETHER** (I Sam. 18:1)!

Upon learning of Jonathan's tragic death in the battle of Gilboa, David was inspired to write a eulogy in language that is perhaps unsurpassed in all the Scriptures for its poignancy and emotion:

"David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, and ordered the men of Judah be taught this lament...Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mightily have

fallen! Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice. O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul--no longer rubbed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. Saul and Jonathan--in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, MORE WONDERFUL THAN THAT OF WOMEN. How the mighty have fallen!" (II Sam. 1:17-27).

Brethren, you and I have a friend whose love surpasses not only that of women, but even that of Jonathan for David. He fills to the full each and every qualification and aspect of a true best friend. In time of need, He is always, always, always there--close at hand, not far away. He senses when things are wrong. He knows when trouble is near. In one place He says: "I am a God that is close at hand...and not a God far off...Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:23-24).

4. BEST FRIENDS ALWAYS CONFIDE IN ONE ANOTHER: I think that most of us can easily identify with this attribute of a best friend. In fact, this is one of the great blessings of even having such a person in one's life. All of us need a true confidant--someone to whom we can come with our innermost problems and feelings and freely discuss them. In other words, there is never a need for hiding things, speaking in mere pleasantries or generalities with a best friend. You can, as we often say, spill your guts! Nothing need be held back.

Believe it or not, this is just the way God is with us. Remember the verse that we quoted earlier from John 15, where the Saviour says that he now calls us friends? A lot of people tend to pass over what is really revealed in this passage. Notice verses 15-16 once again:

"You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants, for the servant knows not what his master does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you."

Do you see what I am getting at here? Christ says that he no longer calls us mere servants and for a very good reason--because a servant is not privy to what his master is thinking and doing--but a friend is! Therefore, ALL THINGS that he has heard from the Father, He CONFIDES IN US! I think that this is such a remarkable statement. It speaks volumes concerning the kind of deep, profound, real relationship that the Father and Son desire to have with the likes of you and me.

Brethren, you know and I know that best friends are close; they are intimate; they share their feelings, their needs, their problems. They seek an ear that is bent their way, a mind that is

open and receptive, a shoulder that is broad and strong, a heart that is sincere and outgoing and truly concerned. Best friends seek wise counsel and advice from each other. They keep one another up to date with what is transpiring in their respective lives.

Think of how this can and should apply to your own personal relationship with God. Begin to seriously determine whether or not these attributes of a best friend are truly applicable to your standing with the Father in heaven. It is so true that most, if not all of us, just simply take our relationship with God for granted. In so many cases, it is actually based far more on Biblical facts and figures, or on certain church associations or particular human relationships with brethren. While all of these things may be good, they cannot and must never form the foundation of a genuine relationship with God. That kind of connection is built squarely on the absolute reality of the indwelling Christ--perhaps I could even say, on the degree of that reality that is present in your life or mine.

How many times do the Scriptures literally invite us to come close to God. "Enter you into His presence," David often says; or as in Psalms 73:28: "For lo, they that are far from You shall perish...it is good for me to draw near to God." In the New Testament, the apostle James simply puts it this way: "Draw near unto God, and He will draw near unto you" James. 4:8).

I'm afraid that it is a fact that the vast majority of God's own people never fully enter into the Father's house. We may hear the invitation; we may open the door and stand there looking in, but we are so often either unable or unwilling to come all the way in and close the door behind us. In other words, we say that we desire a relationship with God, but what we really mean is that we want an association that is established on our terms. We prefer it be kept at arm's length. True closeness and oneness and intimacy are things we tend to shy away from. That makes us feel uncomfortable, perhaps even trapped; so we leave the door open in case we have to make a quick getaway!

After all, consider the reasons why we always close the door behind us when we enter into a friend's home. First of all, it is courteous. It shows respect for the person and his property. Next, it shuts out unwanted sights and sounds, distractions that would disrupt the personal rapport of being with a true friend. It also keeps out the elements (heat, cold, rain, etc.). In other words, it adds to and guarantees comfort--an atmosphere conducive to good conversation and enjoyable times. It is a sign too of intimacy, of privacy, of a desire to be with and communicate with the other person.

When we only stand in the doorway of God's house, we really are indicating that our relationship with Him is not yet full and mature. It has not progressed to that of a Friend. Friends always come on in and shut the door behind them. Brethren, hear what I am saying to you. The world in which we live today is quite simply too dangerous and deceptive for us not to take the next step and truly enter into our Father's house. It is high time that we fully admitted and put aside forever the fact that we generally tend toward a more shallow relationship with God, rather than the deep, profound, personal link of true best friend to true best Friend. It is only when we become willing to put aside our individual considerations, indeed our attachment to and fondness for the things of the world, of this life, that we can begin to really be brought into the kind of close, intimate relationship that God desires for us.

We absolutely must ALLOW the Father and Son to come into the home that is our inner life--to eat with us, commune with us, relax with us, confide in us, walk with us. And it works both ways--the door to the very Holy of Holies is open. God has made that a certainty through the very death of Jesus Christ. We can truly enter in--not as a trembling, groveling slave, but as

a beloved child and true best friend to the God who made us and sacrificed everything for us. Our Father deeply desires that we know Him even as we are known by Him--but the key word in this entire discussion is **DESIRE!** We must want this kind of relationship, and we must seek it. In so many cases, God remains abstract, conceptual, vague, ethereal, removed, distant. Oh, people believe in Him; but they have not yet truly entered into His very home, sat down, ate a meal with Him and openly, honestly and easily communed with Him as friend to Friend.

God doesn't want a bunch of fearful, guilt-ridden mice who scurry away at the first sign of His coming near to them. Nor does He care for some unconcerned, self-assuming, take-it-all-for-granted, ho-hum crowd who remain generally oblivious to His presence. He desires **REAL FRIENDS**--like His friend Abraham. When the Lord came calling on this great patriarch, what happened? Why, Abraham immediately got up, killed a fatted calf, and they all sat down and ate a meal--like friends are supposed to do! Well, God still wants to sit down and eat a meal with you and me! He wants to enjoy our company, take us into His confidence, open His heart to us, reveal His innermost thoughts, ideas and plans; and conversely, to intently listen to us in the very same manner. After all, this is what true friendship is really all about.

5. **BEST FRIENDS LIKE TO BE WITH ONE ANOTHER:** This is another quite obvious trait of true friendship with which we are all familiar. Best friends just naturally enjoy, indeed prefer, being with each other. This is no doubt precisely why the apostle Paul described the relationship that we, as Christians, ought to have for one another in the following terms:

"Let love be without dissimulation (unfeigned, sincere--the real thing)...Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor, **PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER**" (Rom. 12:9-10).

This is really a wonderful passage of Scripture. When Paul says that we should *honor* each other, he means "to value or esteem in the highest degree." And when he states the we should *prefer* one another, he is saying that we should "highly respect and desire one another." If you insert the expanded definitions of these two key words into the text, then you truly get the flavor of the apostle's teaching. He is saying essentially that Christians ought to be the best of friends--close, caring, desiring each other's well being, success and company. Unfortunately, in some instances, I have witnessed just the opposite of this beautiful sentiment--cases where Church members actually preferred the company of worldly people more than their Christian brothers and sisters. This is most regrettable. If we ever hope to be the friend of God, we had better first take a close look at our friendships right here on this earth.

Notice once again how Paul put it to the Philippians on this same issue:

"If there is therefore any consolation in Christ (*and there most assuredly is*), if any comfort of love (*absolutely*), if any fellowship of the Spirit (*undeniably*), if any bowels and mercies (*I should hope so!*), fulfil you my joy, that you be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each **ESTEEM** the other better than themselves" (Phil. 2:1-3).

Ask yourself: Who do you truly prefer and desire and esteem the highest in your relationships with others? Brethren, what I am saying here is that we Christians ought to be good, close friends--intimate, confiding, forgiving, always there when needed, always in close contact,

always desiring one another--FROM THE HEART! Unfortunately, some continue to judge by the outward appearance, and thus find themselves being critical of certain brethren--brethren they just prefer not to be around or truly close to. In some cases, it is a matter of intellectual vanity or feeling of superiority. In other instances, it is a perception that this man or that woman is just not quite as *cool*, not quite as *with it* as one's carnal acquaintances. I have keenly observed that a relationship between some brethren is forced and stiff, as though they just *had* to do it; but not springing from an innate desire and preferring of one another.

God is not like that with us. He tells us expressly that He wants to be with us; that He enjoys our company; that He desires our friendship. This then should become the basis for our full relationship with the Father, and with each other. Examine yourself on this 5th attribute of true friends.

6. BEST FRIENDS CAN ALWAYS BE THEMSELVES WITH EACH OTHER: What this simply means is that with best friends there is never any need for pretense--no cover-ups, no shame, no guilt, no trying to be something you aren't--just open, above-board, straightforward, real. God wants us to be ourselves--our real selves--with Him. He wants us to come clean, to level with Him, to say it like it is. So often our conversation with God is not that of friend to Friend, but of slave to tyrant, of the most unworthy piece of dirt on the face of the earth to the Sovereign Potentate of the Universe! Have you ever approached God in this manner? I'll bet you have--many times, in fact. Have you noticed that the language you use in speaking to God is often somewhat formal, stilted, uncomfortable, unnatural, strained, forced, difficult, abnormal, sounding more like a quote from 1611 King James English than the natural, spontaneous dialogue of one who is communing with his best friend? If so, then you need to consider this particular attribute of a close friend as it impinges upon your relationship with God.

If, indeed, you were to speak to your best friend in the same distant, affected manner as you might sometimes do with God, how would that be taken by your friend? He would immediately begin to wonder what in the world was wrong with you! Well, maybe God feels somewhat the same when we approach Him in such a calculated way, almost as though we were reciting a memorized prayer.

Best friends are able to break down the barriers that tend to generally separate human beings. They don't have to hide it; they don't have to fake it; they don't have to whitewash it. They don't have to be so overly careful in how they choose their words, for fear of accidentally offending the other. They can relax and allow the free flow of their spirits to motivate their conversation and conduct in each other's presence. With best friends, it all comes naturally, easily, smoothly, without stress, fear, worry, uncertainty, or inferiority. This is precisely the kind of relationship that God wants for each of us--one with another--and, most especially, with Himself.

Now, by all of this I do not mean to state or imply that we should be disrespectful in how we approach God. That should be obvious, though, because best friends always have the utmost respect for each other and are always careful to be thoughtful, considerate and kind in their dealings one with another. So must it then be in this aspect of our relationship with God.

7. BEST FRIENDS GO THE EXTRA MILE FOR EACH OTHER: This is the seventh and last of these special attributes of a best friend that I intend to cover in this particular article, but it is a most significant one--especially in relation to what God and His Son have done for us.

Going the extra mile is part and parcel with being best friends with someone. For true best friends, no request is too demanding, no problem is too frivolous, no matter is too personal, not to merit the immediate and utmost attention and action. That's just the way it is with best friends. They are always there for each other--and more than just being there, they are always ready, willing and able to do whatever is necessary to help, to serve, to lighten the burden, to ease the pain, to solve the problems of one another.

As always, God is the same with us. He goes all the way with His friends. Indeed, He pulls out all the stops, goes overboard, works overtime. When we hurt, He feels the pain intensely. In one place, the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write:

"I will recount the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praiseworthy deed of Yahweh, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel, which He has granted them according to His mercies...For He said, Surely they are My people, sons who will not lie--who will not deal falsely with Me; and so He was to them a Saviour in all their distresses. In all their affliction, HE TOO WAS AFFLICTED, and the Angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity, He redeemed them; and He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. 63:7-9).

Isn't that a remarkable statement? When ancient Israel--that carnal, sinful, backsliding nation--got themselves in trouble, were in deep despair and distress, were afflicted time and time again, it was Yahweh, the Father in heaven, who not only cared and was moved with compassion toward them; but suffered right along with them. "In all their affliction, He too was afflicted!!" When they hurt, He hurt too.

In later New Testament times, Paul, in describing Christ, said:

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest that has passed into the heavens, Jesus (Yahshua) the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but who was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16).

Indeed, whether we speak of the God of the Old Covenant or the New, in ages past or right now in the present, our Father and His Holy Son have always related to and identified with and suffered with and for every single one of us. Our Saviour did not just go the mere extra mile that is indicative of a good friend--oh no--he ultimately gave up everything--his divinity, his power, his eternal life in heaven, his comfort, his possessions, his dignity. Yes, he went ALL THE WAY for you and me! We read the moving words of the Messiah in John 15 once again, when he said:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has greater love--no one has shown stronger affection--than to LAY DOWN HIS OWN LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS" (John 15:12-13).

And going all the way, even to laying down his own life, was precisely what Jesus Christ did for you and me. He was and is the ULTIMATE BEST FRIEND!--the very best friend a human being could ever possibly have.

Brethren, do the concepts of *going all the way* and *laying down your life* truly characterize your deep, personal, day-in and day-out relationship with Almighty God? Once again I urge us all to carefully and seriously reflect upon our REAL spiritual lives--not our imagined ones or the ideal ones or the ones we wish we had or the ones we know that we should have--but what is really and truly there. There is no shame, no sin, no guilt, in coming up short in such an honest and forthright examination. The key is, first of all, to do it; and then, secondly, to do something about it.

Our conclusive victory in this life and calling is gained through knowing God and Christ on intimate, not superficial or abstract, terms. If we truly desire to have impact and influence on our Father; if we wish to pray effectively; if indeed we really want to be all that we can be in spiritual service and growth, then it all must necessarily flow from a genuine, close, personal relationship with God the Father and His Son. Who expresses that kind of special link better than David in the famous 23rd Psalm:

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff,
they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence
of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my
life; and I shall DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD
FOREVER."

Brethren, it truly surpasses all expression and words of description to know that after all is said and done--in spite of who or what we are--with all our problems, shortcomings and failures--our pains, afflictions and sufferings--we can come to the resting place of God's own home, open the door and enter into the very presence of Yahweh Himself--to know that we can finally come home again, into the welcoming smile and warm embrace of our loving Creator, our merciful Father, and OUR BEST FRIEND!