



February 14, 2025

## Friends

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

During the Civil War of 1863, (January in fact), Abraham Lincoln was meeting with his cabinet during a very stressful time in U.S. history. He was telling a joke from a comedian of the time, (Artimus Ward). Upon completion of the President's joke, Secretary of War Stanton, scolded Mr. Lincoln for "telling a joke as if with friends". Mr. Lincoln replied, "If I do not laugh as if with friends, I will lose my mind". He then pulled a piece of paper out of a hat, and said, "Gentleman, I present to you the Emancipation Proclamation".

I often reflected back on this story and asked myself, "Are these really my friends I am with here?" and then "What is a friend?"

Perhaps weird questions right? Hum, maybe not. Who are really our friends?

In my weekly letters I address "friends" both in the greeting and closing of every letter. There's a reason for that.

Throughout scripture, there are many examples where the term "friend" is used.

In Exodus 33: 1-11 we find some interesting dialogue. In verse 11 we read "The LORD spoke to Moses face-to-face as a man speaks to his friend."

II Chronicles 20:7 we see Abraham was God's friend! Also in Isaiah 41:8 Abraham was called, "my friend". Yes, Abraham was called a "friend of God".

What I also found interesting was that it is recorded that Abraham (and his wife Sarah) laughed before God – He was a friend and friends can laugh together!

Turn with me to John 15. And, let's begin in verse 1 and read through verse 14.

The next verse I'd like to read from the (Holman Christian Standard Bible): Verse 15 *"I do not call you slaves anymore, because a slave doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father"*.

Might we notice...Christ says "I now call you friends"...this is a very profound statement!

Did our Savior ever laugh and relax with his disciples? I believe He did.

I look back at my childhood. I still remember the friends I had, and it has been over 50 years ago. I sometimes cannot remember what I just did 5 minutes ago, but I CAN remember events with some of those friends. I did not have many. But the ones I did have were a blessing. They were friends in good times and in not so good times.

You see, we live in a world today where some count their "friends" as the number they might have on Facebook. Maybe it's the few brethren they meet with every week at church. Maybe it's the folks they meet with once a week at Bingo, or at Rotary Club.

What I see through scripture are "friends" who were genuine. Not simply acquaintances. Not simply people they got together from time to time. If we glean from scripture what a "friend" is it might be surprising.

Friends go way deeper than just occasionally getting together. Friends go deeper than simply claiming to all believe the same thing or have the same focus.

One day in the 1950s, Jacques Soustelle, governor-general of Algeria between 1955 and 1956, returned from Algiers, where he had taken an informal poll. He told the president that all of his friends were bitterly opposed to de Gaulle's Algerian policies. What was De Gaulle's reply? - "Cha nsej vos amee" (Change your friends).

Not only is it vitally important WHO our friends are, but at times of duress we must make sure that we focus on the greatest friends we have, Jesus Christ, and God the Father, and not be led a direction that does not bear good fruit, simply because someone is “our friend”.

When we face difficult times in our lives, or as they say “when the going gets tough” we often find out who are truly our friends.

What’s a danger of the wrong friends? – your friends will influence you. You might have had a friend for many years, maybe even from growing up...and they can influence you...for the good or bad. We must remember to stay connected with God, our Father and His Son and never put “friends” ahead of either.

Many have stated over the years when I would visit them (as a minister) the first time: “I stay part of the church I belong to because it is where my friends are”.

I’ve heard some say “I am part of this or that political party because it is where all my friends are”.

Some have said “I’d love to move, or live somewhere else, but I’d have no friends there”.

Good friends likewise will also influence you. Phil 4:8 *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think (meditate, ponder, muse, dwell) on these things.*

Someone once told me “my friend, has betrayed me”. We most likely have all experienced that in some point in our life.

Where can we find a friend who won’t betray us? The words of the song that many sing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” come to mind: “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!”

In Proverbs 18:24 it says “There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother...”

Now, mind you, friends are important. The individual relationship we have with our friends depends on each person. I get that.

But, first and foremost, our greatest friends should be our Father in heaven and His Son Jesus Christ. Can we be open with them? Can we laugh with them? Can we receive correction from them? During good times is that friendship different than during bad times in our life?

Are we a friend of the world (i.e. its ways)? We're cautioned about that.

*James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

So, might we each ask ourselves, what truly is a friend, and who are my friends? Enjoy the journey.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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