

Seven Elements of Friendship with God 6-22-03

(from chapters 10-12 of Purpose Driven Life)

We've been looking at God's purpose for our lives. The first week we discovered that it's not about me. Then we saw that it's not about now. Last week we saw that it's all about God; everything is for His glory. I hope you've been taking these lessons home and living them out on a daily basis. If we are applying these truths to our lives, we are finding our focus shift from what will please us to what pleases God. Our prayers will be a desire to find out what pleases Him, instead of giving Him our list of preferences.

During this last week I've been watching my attitude to see if it is self-oriented or for the glory of God. When I'm focused on getting my way, the Lord faithfully steps in and frustrates my plans. Then, as I turn my heart back to wanting to please God, surrendering to His plan and the peace and joy return. It is a conflict of wills. If I hadn't asked God to cause my life to glorify Him, then I might complain, but since I asked, I have to follow through by capturing my will and submitting it to God's.

This week we are going to look at the wonderful fact that God wants your friendship. *"He is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you."* Exodus 34:14b (NLT) God sent His only Son into the world to make it possible to have a relationship with you. We have this highest of all privileges, but we often walk away from it, or ignore it, because of the first hurdle toward friendship with God. The first hurdle is surrender. That's not a word that puts a smile on our face. We associate it with failure and defeat, but surrender to God is victory over our old destructive nature. We tend to think of God like we think of man, wanting to use others for our own advantage. God is utterly unselfish in His love for us. He desires our surrender to His will so that He can lead us into what we were created to do and through that bring the most meaning, purpose and fulfillment to our lives. God is a lover and liberator, not a tyrant or dictator.

Surrender isn't part of human friendships, for that results in one imperfect person dominating another. Surrender to God is the yielding of an imperfect knowledge and desire to One whose perfect knowledge and desires have our best interest at heart. Once we understand that surrender is a good thing, the best thing for us, we can begin to enter more deeply into a relationship of friendship. That is a clarification of the meaning of surrender that distinguishes it from the way we would use it with other humans.

Other barriers to surrender include pride and fear. Pride is dealt with by seeing who we are. Fear is conquered by seeing who God is. Pride is the desire to have my way! We like to be in control and have our way. It is Satan's original temptation to mankind, and what he currently uses in the New Age, "You will be a god!" That is the surest way to end up in a destructive life style like his. That desire to be in complete control is the source of most of our stress. Much of our life's struggle is a struggle with God. It is the struggle I mentioned I was having this week. Who is going to have their way, God or me? There is no way you can win that struggle. God

loves you too much to let that happen. A.W. Tozer said, "The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they haven't yet come to the end of themselves. We're still trying to give orders, and interfering with God's work within us."

When we face our own limitations we become frustrated, irritated, and resentful. We want it all in our way and our time, and when we can't have it, look out. What do you know, you aren't God! Surrender avoids this self-destructive cycle. I'm not talking about passive resignation, fatalism, and a "que sera sera" attitude. Surrendering to God is a call to active participation in His will. It is not a squelching your personality or even all your desires; it is a cooperation with the Spirit of God through who He made you to be. Surrendering enhances your personality. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become- because He made us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be... It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have real personality of my own."

Surrender to God is one of the most difficult things we can do because it is warfare against our self-centered nature. It is a life of blessing though. *"Stop quarreling with God! If you agree with him, you will have peace at last, and things will go well for you."* Job 22:21 NLT Then you can know the freedom from your demanding old-self nature. *"Offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits...(his) commands set you free to live openly in his freedom!"* Romans 6:17 (Msg) Then God gives the power to overcome those stubborn temptations and weaknesses that plague you. In the spiritual realm, victory comes through surrender to God. William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, said, "The greatness of a man's power is in the measure of his surrender."

Man surrenders to something in life. It may be personal desire, or that of another, or to pride and ego. E. Stanley Jones said, "If you don't surrender to Christ, you surrender to chaos." *"Surrender is not the best way to live; it is the only way to live."* We often blame others for our shortcomings, but maturity sees that the greatest hindrance to God's blessing is not others; it is our self, our will, a demanding ego, and personal ambition. If you want to find God's purpose in your existence, you will have to stop focusing on your own plans. As our sign out front reads this week, "If God is your co-pilot, swap seats!"

There is a moment of surrender, and there is a life of surrender. Many of you recall when you told Jesus that you would live for Him. Then, daily, you have had to learn to let Him be Lord of your life. Some of you are still in the valley of decision, wondering if you should begin down this road of surrender. If you want the high calling of friendship with God, it begins at the crossroad of surrender. Jesus said, *"If people want to follow me, they must give up the things they want. They must be willing to give up their lives daily to follow me."* Luke 9:23 (NCV) I can give you no better advice than that of the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:13b (TEV) *"Surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes."*

The second element of becoming a close friend of God is constant conversation. Once a week on Sunday and even a daily quiet time is less than God is after. He wants to walk and talk with you throughout your day. He doesn't want to fit into your schedule, but to be your schedule. You can include Him in everything you do. How else do we "pray without ceasing"? God wants your undivided attention at times, but He also wants to be in on your daily activities, share your heart, and speak to your heart about the details of your day.

You've heard me share about Brother Lawrence and his teaching on practicing the presence of God. He taught that friendship with God was not about changing what you do, but changing your attitude about what you do. He learned to scrub pots and cook to the glory of God, in communion with God. Ephesians 4:6b (NCV) tells us "*He rules everything and is everywhere and is in everything.*" We don't have to escape our surroundings or go to a retreat to spend time with God. He wants to share our daily lives.

You can change your attitude by being more conscious that God is with you and has you where you are for a purpose. Benedictine monks used the chimes of the bell tower to remind them throughout the day that God was with them. I always turn off the hour chime on my watch until I heard that. Now I want it on to remind me that God is with me. Shoot little prayers off every time you are reminded of His presence, prayers like, "Lord, I am dependent on You"; "Show me your purpose in this task"; "Help me to do this to your glory"; "Is there something in this task that You are teaching me?" This is a developed skill that comes from intensity of desire to be a friend of God and being open to what the Holy Spirit desires to teach you each day.

The third way you can grow in your friendship with God is through meditation. I'm not speaking of some Eastern spiritual exercise. The Bible tells us to meditate on God's word. "*I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread,*" Job said in Job 23:12 (NIV). David said, "*Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.*" Psalm 119:97 In Psalm 77:12 he said, "*They are constantly in my thoughts. I cannot stop thinking about them.*"

If you want to be God's friend you need to know what He says. Friendship requires two-way communication. Meditation is merely focused thinking on what God says in His word. This week this wonderful Scripture spoke to my heart throughout the day, "*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love.*" John 15:9 As I meditated on that passage throughout the day, it spoke volumes to my heart. It was part of God's voice to me that day. Prayer lets you speak to God, but meditating on God's word allows Him to speak to you. "*Friendship with God is reserved for those who reverence him. With them alone he shares the secrets of his promises.*" Psalm 25:14 (LB)

Fourthly, friendship with God requires honesty with God. The foundation for friendship with God is the cross of Christ. That calls us to a place of surrender. We build upon that with the communication of constant prayer and meditation, but we need to do so in complete honesty. God wants to hear your heart, not your memorized expressions. Throughout the psalms, honest, open communication is

expressed. Feelings like frustration, disappointment, fear and worry are all openly and honestly voiced. God never rebukes the psalmist for his honesty. In fact, God commended Job for his forthrightness and condemned his counselors for their lack of authenticity. *"You haven't been honest either with me or about me-not the way my friend Job has...My friend Job will now pray for you and I will accept his prayer."* Job 42:7b (Msg) God wants to hear your true feelings. If you aren't honest with Him about them you'll have a harder time accepting His solution to your situation or attitude.

Until we mature to the point that we really understand that God uses everything for our good, we will harbor bitterness in our hearts for God allowing things to come into our lives. God allows people to make free will choices that sometimes hurt other people. We often blame God for what people have done with the freedom He gave them. Bitterness can be a real barrier to friendship with God. Blaming God for what others have done, or what we do to ourselves can put your friendship with God on hold. Honesty can reopen the doors of communication that can bring a renewal of your relationship. One of the wonderful things about our friendship is that we can honestly express our pain to the One who completely understands and has compassion on us. *"I pour out my complaints before him and tell him all my troubles. For I am overwhelmed."* Psalm 142:2-3a

Fifth, your friendship with God is strengthened when you choose to obey God in faith. We don't think of obedience in relationship to friendship, but Jesus applied it to friendship with Him. *"You are my friends if you do what I command."* John 15:14 (TEV) The world thinks Christians obey out of fear of reprisal or judgment, but a real Christian obeys out of love. Jesus said, *"I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey me, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father and remain in his love. I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow."* John 15:9-11 (NLT)

Jesus is our perfect model in this. His life was a demonstration of His love for the Father. He obeyed Him in everything – out of love. When Jesus began His ministry in the baptismal waters, the Father said, *"This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him."* What had Jesus done those first thirty years of His life that so pleased the Father? We only have one verse that describes those years. *"He went back to Nazareth with them, and lived obediently with them"* Luke 2:51 (Msg) A life of obedience pleased God.

Sixth, we must choose to value what God values. If you care about someone, you care about what they care about. The more your friendship with God grows, the more you will share His heart toward things. You will love the things He loves, and hate the things He hates. You will rejoice over what brings pleasure to His heart and grieve with Him over what grieves Him. David said it like this, *"Passion for your house burns within me, so those who insult you are also insulting me."* Psalm 69:9 (NLT)

Are you willing to share God's heart for the lost around you? Praying to share His burden for the lost will break your heart. Are you willing to be that close of a friend

to God? It will call you to action as God shares with you how He feels about people you come in contact with, even your enemies. It will certainly change your attitude and motivate you to pray.

The seventh and last major ingredient to friendship with God is to desire it more than anything else. The psalms use words like *longing, yearning, thirsting, hungering*. David wrote, *"The thing I seek most of all is the privilege of meditating in his Temple, living in his presence every day of my life, delighting in his incomparable perfections and glory."* Psalm 27:4 (LB) He also wrote, *"Your love means more than life to me."* Psalm 63:3 (CEV)

You can see this passion in the life of every man in Scripture that God called a friend. Abraham demonstrated his passion by taking Isaac to Mt. Moriah. Moses declared his passion when he refused to go forward if God was not going. God spoke of David's passion when He called him a man after His heart. Stephen declared his passion when he boldly proclaimed the Gospel before those who were ready to and did stone him. Peter declared his passion when he refused to be crucified right side up. Paul expressed his passion in Philippians 3:10. In the Amplified Bible it reads, *"My determined purpose is that I may know Him- that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly."* Jesus demonstrated the ultimate passion for His Father by laying down His life in obedient love. These all had a desire for friendship with God that outweighed any attraction of the world.

You are as close to God as you choose to be. At times, I've tried to share godly disciplines with men and had some tell me it was impossible. If it's impossible, why do some do it? It's because they have a passion for a relationship with God. They know if God desires it, He will help them make the changes in their life. If you are God's child He will deal with you to draw you into a relationship. You can take the hard road of pain – God's megaphone, or you can take the easier road of praying for a transformation of your desires. Ask God for a passion that will motivate you to action. Every time it comes to mind pray, "Lord, I want to know you and the power of your love more than anything else."

God spoke to the captives in Babylon through Jeremiah, *"When you get serious about finding me and want it more than anything else, I'll make sure you won't be disappointed."* Jeremiah 29:13 (Msg) Do you want that relationship more than anything else? There is no time like right now to acknowledge that you've missed your purpose. You can begin to live for what you were created for, the glory and friendship of God, if you will choose to do so today. You are as close to God as you choose to be. *"Draw close to God and God will draw close to you."* James 4:8a (NLT)