

CHOICES EVERY SPIRIT-FILLED BELIEVER SHOULD MAKE

Choice #4: Spirit-Filled Believers Are Learning How to Friend God for Life

Genesis, John & James

Sometimes a person gets tagged, and that tag sticks with them through life. The same is true in the Bible, when God tags a person in His Word, that tag sticks. For example:

- John the Apostle was called the disciple that Jesus (loved).
- David was called the man after (God's) own heart.
- The Apostle Thomas is more commonly known as (doubting) Thomas.
- Rahab from Jericho is most often called Rahab the (harlot).
- Moses was known as the man who knew God (face-to-face).

There are many others, but one is vital for us as we look at Abraham. There is a tag that God placed on Abraham that should stick with us. Abraham is called the (friend) of God.

Have you ever thought about what it means to "Friend God"? Being God's friend is an incredible relationship to have. Up until Jesus opened the door for all believers, there was only one person ever called God's Friend; and that is who we are learning about today.

Abraham: the Friend of God

Last week, we opened to a statement God Himself made about Abraham in Genesis 18:19. In that verse, God expressed a wonderful confidence in Abraham, the man that God Almighty had called to Himself, and chosen to be the Father of the Jewish nation.

Abraham was one of the most intriguing people from the ancient past. From the most distant days, just a couple of hundred years after the Global Flood of Noah's time, we find Abraham in the pages of Scripture.

Abraham was living in a tent, earning his living as a shepherd over 4,000 years ago.

But unlike the countless thousands, and the multiplied millions, and eventually billions of others who have lived over the centuries: God **immortalized Abraham** by choosing to tell us that Abraham became **the very Friend of God**.

God's Word Only Calls Abraham the Friend of God

There is only one man in history that the Bible calls the Friend of God, and does so three times (II Chr. 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). In the Old Testament world friendship had a deeper meaning than it has become in modern times (as in acquaintance), rather friendship spoke of 'unity in thought and purpose'.

In II Chronicles 20:7 (NKJV) King Jehoshaphat wrote:

*Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of **Abraham Your friend** (lit., "one who loves") **forever**?*

In Isaiah 41:8 (NKJV) God as He was speaking, says:

*"But you, Israel, are My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
The descendants of **Abraham My friend**.*

Abraham was all of those and more. Please stand with me as we read these words, and hear the voice of God speaking to us, recorded in His Word:

James 2:17-26 (NKJV) Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!²⁰ But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead?**²¹ Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?²³ And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." **And he was called the friend of God.**²⁴ You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.²⁵ Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also **justified by works** when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?²⁶ For as the body without the spirit is dead, **so faith without works is dead also.**

Pray

Abraham was Amazing

Abraham, the Friend of God, towers over the history of the Bible, casting a long shadow from Genesis, through the Historic Books, the Major Prophets, into Romans; and all the

way through the Hall of Faith in Hebrews, and finally is placed by God into this passage in James.

Abraham the pagan Gentile, who left the idolatry of Ur, walked to a land he never had seen, and by faith followed the God of the Universe, and became the Father of the Jewish people.

Abraham is amazing, but he is also so normal.

Abraham was So Normal

Abraham struggled with fears, with doubts, and with impatience. Yet Abraham obeyed, waited, and followed. Abraham was not perfect, but once he met the Lord, he made a choice to follow Him.

Abraham is a great example of who can follow God: the normal, the ordinary, and the struggler, because Abraham was all three, and more. He was as human as they come, and showed to all of us who exactly God looks for: the ordinary.

Abraham also shows us what God can do with the ordinary: God can use them in a way like no other, until they are extraordinary.

Paul later summarizes God's plan at the end of the first chapter of I Corinthians. Listen to these penetrating words:

I Cor. 1:26-31 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.²⁷ But God has chosen the **foolish things** of the world to **put to shame the wise**, and God has chosen the **weak things** of the world to **put to shame the things which are mighty**; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence.

It is time to reset our minds to the truth that God is not looking for superheroes. Rather, God can make superheroes out of the ordinary, the weak, the poor, the undesirables, and the nobodies. That is the God we serve, and that is who the God of Abraham really is.

Jesus Invites Us to Become Friends of God

Jesus elevates friendship with God to a whole new level when He told the disciples that now by God's grace, believers can choose, by faithful obedience, to become friends of God, and can enjoy the intimacy, closeness, and access that friendship with God brings.

The truth of God's Word is that each of us can get as close to God as we want to get.

God has not limited our access. We limit our closeness to God by our choices to not obey Him. How close to God would you like to be? That is the real question each of us needs to ask ourselves.

Friendship in the New Testament context takes on an entirely new and powerful meaning when we realize what those of the first century understood when Jesus spoke these words.

The phrase 'friends of God' can be illumined by the time when the enemies of Christ threatened Pilate, saying that he was endangering his "friend of Caesar" status (Jn. 19:12), they were revealing what was well known at the time.

Friendship Meant Special Access

In the courts of the Kings and Caesars during the times of the Bible, there were a very select group of men who had access to the King or Caesar. Like Hamaan in Esther, there were those who could walk right in and have an audience with the highest authority in the land.

They would have access to him while he was still in his chambers in the morning. Before all the military and civil administrators got to him, these friends could talk to him. They were known and feared, for they had intimate access to the one at the very top.

Friendship granted to someone in Biblical terms equates with allowing them personal access into the most private areas of our lives; and the most exclusive access to our scheduled time; and allowing that friend to be an influence upon us.

Now Jesus in his final hours offers to all His disciples a simple pathway of special access to Him: Jesus says I am available to you. You can come to me at any time, and always know that you will be heard.

Jesus said you can be as close to me as you want to be. He said there is a way that you will never again be a distant stranger, and that way is by becoming my friend. Friends were unlike those who only saw the King or Caesar from far away, or had to come through a delegate or representative.

The pathway of life-long friendship with God is explained in John 14-15, as Jesus opens to us the way of friendship. As we turn thereto John 14:15 next, note just how Jesus describes those who want to be His friends:

Friendship & Love are

Inseparable from Obedience

The first mention of "friendship" with God by Jesus Christ is in the context of these words in John 14. He is speaking to His disciples who are believers, Judas is gone, only true born-again followers remain. Here are His instructions.

First, Friendship with God is always based upon a Relationship of Love.

John 14:15, 21, 23 (NKJV) **"If you love (agape) Me, keep My commandments.**²¹ He who **has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves (agape) Me.** And he who loves (agape) Me will be loved (agape) by My Father, and I will love (agape) him and **manifest Myself** to him."²³ Jesus answered and said to him, **"If anyone loves (agape) Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love (agape) him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.**

Jesus Himself tells us that love for Him as our Christ, is always presented as inseparable from obedience. When Jesus says: "My commandments" He is not only referring to His exhortations to the disciples here on His last night with them (vv. 23, 24), but also to God's Word revealing the desires of the God who is our Father (see also John 3:31, 32; 12:47-49; 17:6).¹

So, Friendship with God, and the closeness that such a relationship brings, is always based upon a Relationship of Love. Jesus uses both the word for the highest volitional love of choice (agape), and the word for the highest emotional affection, of close personal friendship (philos).

Second, that Relationship of Love is always Maintained by Staying Faithful to the One we Love.

John 15:10-13 (NKJV) "If you **keep** My commandments, you will abide in My love (agape), just as I have **kept** My Father's commandments and abide in His love (agape)"¹¹ "These things I have spoken to you, that **My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.**"¹² This is **My commandment**, that you love one another as I have loved you.¹³ Greater love (agape) has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends (philos).

Note here that Jesus stresses the "keeping" of His commandments as the proof of the loving relationship that we are to have with Him. It is a choice, it takes effort, and not everyone of His children choose to keep His commandments.

Finally, Friendship with Christ is Always Built upon Love-prompted Obedience.

John 15:14-15 You are **My friends**(philos) if you **do whatever I command you.**
¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is

¹The MacArthur Study Bible. 1997 (J. MacArthur, Jr., Ed.) (electronic ed.) (Jn 14:15). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.

doing; but I have **called you friends (philos)**, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

What Harms our Friendship with God

James, the first letter to the church explains that believers go through life with two choices, choose to become a: Friend God or a Friend the World.

Each of these choices excludes the other. Jesus had already said in the Gospels that we can't have two masters.

James enlarges that truth by explaining that which ever friend is allowed intimate, close access into our lives, our desires, our time, and our direction is the one that is our friend.

It isn't who we say is our friend, it is the one that we allow in to shape our lives that is really our friend.

Either we are like Abraham, and are a friend of God by the choices we make, or we are a friend to the world and act like God's enemies. The simple test is whether we love the Lord enough to keep His commands.

James 2:23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called **the friend of God**.

One of the clearest explanations of the tension every believer faces is right here in James. Friendship is explained, and the contrast between those who are God's friends, and those who are not is clearer here in James, than anywhere else!

Look onward at James 4.

James 4:1-6 Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members? ² You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. 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**. ⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? ⁶ But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Note: Kosmos (world) does not refer to the physical earth or universe but rather to the spiritual reality of the man-centered, Satan-directed system of this present age, which is hostile to God and God's people. It refers to the self-centered, godless value system and

mores of fallen mankind. The goal of **the world** is self-glory, self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, self-satisfaction, and every other form of self-serving, all of which amounts to **hostility toward God**.²

God Has Defined the Pathway of Friendship

Genuine saving faith provides the power of grace for every believer to make this choice of obedience is the clear teaching of Scripture. So the problem is not whether or not we can obey and love God's commands, it is whether or not we as born-again believers want to choose to do so by His grace.

In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

In John 8:31 Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine."

In John 14:21 Jesus defined those who truly love Him as those who obey Him: "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

In John 15:14 He added, "You are My friends if you do what I command you."

Tips From Abraham the Friend of God

Just before we go, can I show you from the ancient times how Abraham showed God how much He loved Him and wanted to be His friend? In Genesis 18 where we started we see the example of how Abraham showed His friendship to God.

Back to Genesis 18, and the scene where God and two angels visited Abraham. What jumps out from these verses is the behavior of 100-year-old Abraham. Note what he does: he interrupts his plans, warmly greets strangers, does everything he can to show them kindness, and invited them to a special meal.

The first half of the chapter is full of movement. Abraham hastens, runs, and charges those around him to do the same. He calls himself a servant (v. 3,5), and acts like a servant. Even during the meal he stands, on the ready to serve their every need.

Then the scene changes in the second half of chapter 18. Abraham is invited into a special conference with God. He is allowed to know God's plans. God asks: "Should I hide from Abraham my plans?" The answer is no, and they discuss them as the Friend of God.

What a picture of what Christ says in John 15. We love Him and He loves us; and we are

² MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). *James*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press.

both servants (first half of Gen. 18) and friends (second half). But Christ treats us as friends if we do what He commands us. So we see that Abraham was God's friend because He obeyed God (Gen. 18:19).

"If we have friendship with the world, we then experience opposition from God (James 4:1-4). Lot in Sodom was not called God's friend, even though Lot was a saved man (2 Peter 2:7). God told Abraham what He planned to do to the cities of the plain, and Abraham was able to intercede for Lot and his family.

In John 14:16, Jesus reminded the men that they had this privileged position only because of His grace. They did not choose Him; He chose them! He chose them out of the world (John 14:19) and ordained them to do His will. Again, we find this important word *fruit*.

As branches, we share His life and bear fruit; and as friends, we share His love and bear fruit. As branches, we are pruned by the Father; as friends, we are instructed by the Son, and His Word controls our lives".³

The Greatest Thing of All

The greatest privilege in life is being God's friends, and learning to know God better and better. Remember: "Each of us is as close to God as we choose to be."

Since you and I can be God's friends, we should ask for His grace to keep us near the throne, allow His Spirit to help us listen to His Word, express often our desire to enjoy His intimacy, and by His grace obey His commandments. One way I cultivate my friendship with God is a little chorus: "The Greatest Thing".

The greatest thing in all my life is knowing You;
The greatest thing in all my life is knowing You.
I want to know you more, I want to know You more.
The greatest thing in all my life is know - ing You.

VERSE 2: Loving You
VERSE 3: Serving You

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Jn 15:12). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.