

Letters to the Church



DECEMBER '23

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

In his last hours, Jesus taught us what it means to be a friend.

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

JOHN 15:15

Disciples are expected to leave all behind to follow him as the master. They had proven the sincerity of their devotion to him and they would continue to for the rest of their lives.



However, at this moment, the Lord made a change with them, and in doing so, he teaches us all the meaning of friendship. Jesus now shared with them what he was doing, and because of this, he no longer called them servants, but he called them friends. He is always teaching, and in this simple statement, he teaches all of us what it really means to be a friend.

Jesus would now trust with them his heart and his purpose in his life. John records how, in those hours, Jesus entrusts them with understanding him and what he was all about. He shares that what was coming next, was why he came - to press on to the cross and conquer. Yet, a “servant does not know what his master is doing.” So now, Jesus invites them to know what he is doing and why he is doing it, meaning from now on, they are his friends. In fact, he is so open with them here, that the disciples even remark, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!” (John 16:29)

I doubt any of us have any servants, but we all have many acquaintances. In the same way, we can have many frequent interactions with each other at church, but never actually develop any friendships. A friend is someone who you invite into your life to understand you. Just like Jesus taught, a friend is someone you open up plainly to in order to entrust them with understanding what you do and why you do it.

As a pastor, I am both astounded and saddened that churches are so often filled with lonely people. Every one of us, at times, struggles with loneliness, and we rarely talk about it. I am writing this because I am certain that includes you, and so I want to encourage all of us to pursue gospel friendships (not acquaintances).

For most of us, it's easy to make acquaintances in our church, but developing meaningful gospel friendships is another thing entirely. This is something that we have to deliberately pursue and develop with trusted brothers and sisters. Remember, these are those with whom you can be vulnerable enough to plainly share you. The human heart is a fragile thing, so these should be individuals you know will handle it with care. How often, when we are bruised and broken we need the balm of a gospel friend to truly know ourselves and heal. Yes, they take time and effort to grow, but like anything else worth achieving, the investments into gospel friendships are worth it!

Especially in seasons of trial and distress - we need friends to help us make it through. The book of Proverbs teaches us how a person may have many acquaintances, but will come to ruin because they had no friend to stick to them closer than a brother. **(Proverbs 18:24)** Times of adversity will come to all of us, and in those seasons, we especially need friends who "love us at all times." **(Proverbs 17:17)** We see Jesus was about to go through his life's greatest challenge, so he pulled in some friends for reinforcements!

Unless, like Jesus, we are deliberate in entrusting and inviting others into our lives - to plainly understand what we are doing in life and why we are doing it - then they won't be there for us when the times of trial arise, and we won't be there for them. Sure, acquaintances in the church will pray for you and generally encourage you, but if you never entrusted them to know you, then they won't be able to call you back to who you truly are when you are challenged by trials to veer from your true self. (See Jonathan as a friend do this for David time and again)

So, I challenge you: don't read this whole letter without making some changes - Who are your gospel friends that you would pull in as we see Jesus did in the hours before your greatest challenge in life? Who are the people you have entrusted to plainly know your heart? How can you further deepen and develop those relationships so that you are a good gospel friend to them and they can be one toward you in times of adversity? When was the last time you plainly opened up or allowed them to plainly open up to you? Oh, what a friend we all have in Jesus, but how can we better become gospel friends like him to one another?

YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,



SHAWN WEIR