

September 16, 2018

The Many Faces of Jesus: "Brother, Friend"

Proverbs 17:17

"John 15:12-17

When it comes to Christology (how we understand the person of Jesus), some of us have a high Christology because we think of Jesus as Holy/Wholly Other. Others of us have a low Christology because we think of him being in every way like we are... Yet, I think our faith is at our best when we carry with us both a high and low Christology.

If we have only a low Christology, then the person of Jesus is nothing more than we are – simply human with all that entails.

And if we have only a high Christology, then the person of Jesus is way more than we are – and thus cannot relate to us at all.

I think the Church (with a capital C) has stressed a high Christology maybe to the exclusion of a equal focus on "Jesus the man" part of the God-man equation, and thus we have missed out on a relationship with Jesus that can be deep, as we can have with a very close friend.

Psychology Today, published an article entitled "The 13 Essential Traits of Good Friends" (Posted March 3, 2015). I would like to use it as a launching point for our emphasis today on how Jesus' friendship with us and our friendship with him can be life changing for all involved!

Friendship has as its base three traits: integrity, caring, and congeniality. Given that, let's look at each one in some depth, rather than just say, "Oh yeah, I know that, it's a no brainer."

Integrity, Caring and Congeniality are the keys to maintaining long-term connections. And let us not forget, another key element of whether friendships last or fizzle, is that friendship relies on mutual interactions. And thus, we need to examine our own contribution to the dynamic of a friendship, including a friendship with Jesus.

In friendships, there are certain personal characteristics that are essential if there is to be a healthy and lasting friendship.

First, the traits of integrity: trustworthiness, honesty, dependability and loyalty. These are related to core values held in most cultures.

Trustworthiness is often the “make or break” element in any interpersonal relationship. Can Jesus be trusted? Any breach, regardless of perceived magnitude, can devastate a relationship. Trustworthiness is comprised of several components, including honesty, dependability, and loyalty, and while each is important to successful relationships, honesty and dependability have been identified as the most vital in the realm of friendships.

Honesty requires that we speak openly from the heart and incorporate objectivity into our words. Jesus has been honest with us – we will suffer, we will weep, we will feel abandoned, betrayed and alone, we will not get a “yes” answer to every prayer we pray, and this is just a bit of the types of honesty he gave to his disciples and gives to us as his current day followers.

Yet, can the same be said of us regarding our honesty with him. We take what we have known in being with other human beings and project that onto Jesus. Like, being honest with

him, because at times we have had serious fallout in a friendship when we were honest.. Yet, this is when we need a high Christology, for the person of Jesus in this case is Holy, Wholly Other. Jesus rewards and appreciates honesty and hates judgment and is crushed when pretending and deception is our modus operandi. And area of integrity is dependability. In other words, can you count on Jesus and can he count on you when it comes to your friendship. Now, we can expect perfection from him, because that is who he is. Yet, he does not demand the same for us, because this side of heaven, that is impossible. Yet, the reality is this, what we put into a friendship is what we get out of it. The degree to which we are faithful to Jesus life pattern and following in his footsteps is the degree to which we will have a significant and key friendship. If he is not significant in our lives, and we do are not working at being dependable in our friendship, then that will be the degree to which we feel separate from Jesus. That is not because he is not with us and always dependable, but rather due to the fact that he will not barge, push, and shove his way into our lives.

Let me just say a word here about dependability which shows itself by standing up for friends, especially when they can't stand up for themselves. It is Jesus friendship with us that causes him to send the Holy Spirit as the Advocate after he leaves the earth and ascends to heaven, for all who seek to follow him.

Being able to trust another person involves being comfortable with vulnerability. If our friend is not vulnerable with us, it is likely we will not be vulnerable with them. It is important to note, that Jesus showed extreme vulnerability throughout his life, and especially as he prepared for his death, sweating blood in the Garden of Gethsemane, being willing to forgive those

who crucified him, and asking that this cup pass from him as he faced the cross.

Jesus shows us how essential vulnerability really is, for in him so doing, he gave us salvation. In the end, it will be what saves us every time.

How is Jesus doing when it comes to friendship with us and us with him?

1. I am trustworthy.
2. I am honest with others.
3. I am very dependable.
4. I am loyal to the people I care about.
5. I am easily able to trust others.

So, how are we doing? Check or no check?

Now, onto traits of caring, as it relates to friendship.

Traits of caring include empathy, listening, withholding judgment and the ability to offer support in good and bad times. The traits require personal insight, self-discipline and unconditional positive regard for our friends.

Listening is essential to allow the communicating of intimate thoughts, feelings, and experiences. This sharing is a gradual process of give and take that deepens over time. Jesus is always willing to listen to us. How are we doing when it comes to listening to him. Only in the give and take of each is a true friendship built and maintained.

How is Jesus doing when it comes to friendship with us and us with him?

6. I experience and express empathy for others.
7. I am able to be nonjudgmental.
8. I am a very good listener.
9. I am supportive of others in their good times.
10. I am supportive of others in their bad times.

And so we have when it comes to friendship: integrity, and caring. Now, onto the third component of friendships – congeniality. This includes self-confidence, the ability to see the humor in life and being fun to be around. This trio has also been associated with overall well-being and happiness in life.

Self-confidence is an interesting thing when it comes to friendship. When we are in the regular presence of someone with self-confidence we too can become more self-confident. In having a friendship with Jesus, we should be ever more aware of our worth, and how good we really are and how much we have to offer others. The love he has for us, should improve our self-love, if not, your Christology may indeed be too high. A lower Christology can help you develop higher self-esteem.

The way some Christians look would make you think Jesus was dower and boring. Let's face it, it is more fun to be around better company than with those who walk around with a dark cloud hanging over their head. The former enjoy life, handle challenges in proactive ways and keep negative experiences in perspective. Jesus enjoyed people, he loved a good party or social get-together, he turned the negative in his life into something beneficial.

Jesus had sense of humor. People who have the *ability to see the humor in life* help us deal with the curveballs (or spitballs) life tosses at us. Sometimes we take ourselves, and life too seriously. We all benefit from friends who are able to keep us from taking life too seriously. Jesus was able to laugh at those things that may have made others cry. He was able to see the humor when he dealt with his sometimes clueless and thick disciples. I am always grateful for any of my friends who can help me laugh at myself.

How is Jesus doing when it comes to friendship with us and us with him?

11. I am self-confident.

12. I am usually able to see the humor in life.

13. I am fun to be around.

So, how are we doing? Check or no check?

“A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity.” (Proverbs 17:17)

“What a friend we have in Jesus. I see grace on every horizon. And forever and ever his heart is my home.” (Matt Maher, “What a Friend We Have In Jesus”)