

Bible Lessons



“I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

John 15:15

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April • May • June

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Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

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*Publishing the Bible truths in the interest of Jesus Christ and His Church.
In this issue: Reflections contributed by Darrell Johnson, Harlan Sorrell,
LaDawna Adams, Fari Matthews, and Bob Wilson.*

NOTICE

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Website editor: Angela Gellenbeck

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THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1ST QUARTER 2021

A Call To *Friendship*

A theme slowly developed—from fleeting impressions here, and marked solid concepts there—in my studies over a period of time. I came to recognize the gentle nudges in the same direction as the Spirit of the Lord working them all together into one unit. Though not a “doctrinal” study as such, yet the putting together of the scriptural concepts in this series presents important guidelines for this important part of human relationships from God’s point of view, and will help remind us of the great blessing God had in mind when He gave us the gift of *friendship*.

In this study we will discover some common elements of friendship in the various Bible examples: a mutual covenant, faithfulness, selflessness, revelation, and intercession. We also found an amazing connection with the word *perfect*. It has been a rewarding spiritual journey for me. I pray it will be for you.

—Angela Gellenbeck

APRIL 4, 2021

A CALL TO FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST

John 15:11 These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

MEMORY VERSE: For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. —**II Chronicles 16:9a**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus has called us into a close friendship relationship with Him, which He initiated with a covenant—He laid down His life for us—and into which we enter with a surrender of our lives to Him. His part of the friendship is faithful devotion and personal revelations of His heart; our part is faithful devotion and obedience to what He reveals.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 15:11 “My joy”: gladness; source of joy; calm delight. From a root which means *God’s grace and favor*; therefore, the awareness of that grace, the recognition of it, is our source of delight and joy. It is the joy “which Christ Himself possessed in the consciousness of His love towards the Father, and of the Father’s love towards Him... In the consciousness of their love to God, and of God’s love to them, there would be in them, as part of their true life, joy which no sorrow could ever overcome...The state of which He has spoken to them—the loving and being loved of God—is the ideal perfection of human life. It supplies satisfaction for all the deepest desires of our being. The capacities of the whole man are fulfilled in it, and the result is fullness of joy. They have learned little of the true spirit of Christianity whose religion does not impart to them a joy which sheds its light over the whole of their lives” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). “It is in Him, gazed upon by the faith and love of an obedient spirit, sought after by aspiration and possessed inwardly in peaceful communion, confirmed by union with Him in the acts of daily obedience, that the true joy of every human life is to be realised” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

John 15:13 “Friends”: “someone dearly loved (prized) in a personal, intimate way; a trusted confidant, held dear in a close bond of personal affection” (*HELPS Word Studies*).

John 15:15 “Not”: no longer. “Servants”: bond servants; slaves.

II Chronicles 16:9 “Perfect”: Hebrew *shalem*; complete; entire;

wholly devoted; in a covenant of peace or friendship with; friendly, open, safe.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Just before His crucifixion, Jesus shared with His disciples the precious lesson of the vine and the branches; this lesson illustrated the close, abiding relationship He desired to have with them. He not only proved that a union with Him is the only way we can produce righteous fruit, but He placed upon believers the solemn obligation of abiding in Him. He also introduced the part the husbandman has in the fruit-bearing: His Father wields the pruning knife to purge the Vine of dead, lifeless branches no longer bearing fruit and off-shoots on the fruit-bearing branches that would stifle the full growth of fruit beginning to form. He then told His disciples all this was revealed to them, “that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.”

Jesus then introduced this concept: “I have not called you servants, but friends.” It may seem at first glance in contradiction with what He had taught on other occasions and was teaching again in verse 20, about the relationship between Him, as Lord or Master, and them as His servants. The apostles later on still referred to themselves as being the bond-servants of Jesus Christ. They deemed it an honor to lay down their lives for Him and suffer the rigors of labor for Him— they wished not a life “free” from Him. But in HIS mind, in the deeper and more personal sharing of His purpose and making known to them the secrets and mysteries of the gospel, He took them into a level higher than that of servants who are mere automatons; servants who have not been taken into the confidences of their masters, whose obedience is mechanical and borne out of fear and bondage. Everything Jesus’ disciples would do now would be done from the higher principle of love. The recognition of His love for them and grace given freely to them, although they were unworthy, would be the source of their delight and complete, fulfilled joy.

Paul refers to this change of relationship in Galatians 4. He explained that while the children of Israel were under the law they were like servants; their obedience was by coercion, under fear of being cut off. But when Christ came and they believed in Him, they were adopted as sons, and the spirit of Christ was sent into their very

hearts, crying, “Abba, Father.”

A child and his Abba—dear daddy; and a friend with a cherished, close friend. These familiar, close, human relationships show us how we are with Christ.

Our memory verse may seem at first to be a strange addition to the lesson. But consider the definition of the word “perfect.” It has to do with the covenant of peace made with a friend; the covenant that establishes the close, free, open relationship of trust, confidence, and mutual devotion. We will speak more about this covenant and the word “perfect” in future lessons.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the source of joy of the believer?
2. Explain Jesus’ part of the covenant of friendship.
3. Explain our part of the covenant of friendship.
4. What Old Testament scripture refers to the covenant of peace between friends?
5. How does the relationship of friendship with Christ differ from mere servitude?

LIFE APPLICATION

The study of this lesson has led to new joys, new discoveries, and new challenges: JOY when I realized that the source of our joy is the recognition of Jesus’ love for us, of which He gave ultimate proof, in that He laid down His life for us. You can’t dispute that. You can’t say, “But I don’t *feel* that He died for me.” It is a historical, proven fact that He did die, and He stated emphatically WHY He died—for love of you and me. We were unworthy. But He loved us anyway and gave His life for us.

If both young people and even the older ones can get a vision of the beautiful truth that they don’t have to be “good enough” for God to love them and stop struggling—if they would simply receive with wonder and adoration the truth in this scripture, God promised to fill them with “joy and peace in believing” (Romans 15:13).

The study opened up the new discovery that the joy given me by Christ is complete and fulfilling. His joy is sufficient enough for any

circumstance into which life propels me, because it is sourced in Jesus' love for me and not something I must manufacture myself.

I am newly challenged by the terms of the covenant by which Christ bound Himself to me in eternal friendship—challenged by the call He has given me to that friendship with Him and the the no-uncertain terms He laid down for my part in the covenant. He has called me to friendship, but He is still God. I cannot be His friend if I will not obey Him. He has called, chosen and ordained me, but I must yield up my life to Him. He has revealed the secrets and purposes of His heart, and my heart must be completely open and devoted to Him.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

We all know people of honor and prestige who are so far out of our league that we would be hard pressed to garner their attention, let alone become their friend. The only way we could possibly have the privilege to call them our friend would be for them to initiate the friendship. Christ is such a friend. *We love him because he first loved us.* We choose him because he first chose us and called us to be his friend. But our relationship is conditional. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

A command may seem like a strong term on which to base a friendship, until we understand the essence of it. First, let us take note that Christ does not *demand* but rather *commands* that we love. A demand is when something is forced upon us, whereas a command, though forceful, can be altogether voluntary. Love is an act of the will. No one can force anyone to love them. It is impossible. A demand may result in outward compliance without ever attaining an inward submission of the heart.

However, a person can *command* respect by their actions, the aura of their presence, their demeanor and character. It is not merely their title or the authority associated with their position. It is not just the words that they say or the instruction that they give. It is because of who they are at the very core of their being. That is what *commands* the respect. The respect simply comes as a voluntary response to knowing them and being in their presence.

Love is commanded in much the same way. To know Christ is to

love him. His love for us is not just in word only but in deed and in truth. He loved us to the point that he was willing to die in our stead. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* Knowing the depth of his great love for us is the impetus that *commands* and *constrains* us to love him in return.

—Darrell Johnson

APRIL 11, 2021

ABRAHAM, THE FRIEND OF GOD, (PART ONE)

Joshua 24:2 And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. (Genesis 11:27-32).

3 And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac.

Acts 7:2b The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,

3 And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.

4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.

5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. (Genesis 12).

Genesis 12:1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

9 And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.

MEMORY VERSE: But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. —**Isaiah 41:8**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The Lord God called Abram to leave his native country and idol-worshipping relatives and journey to a land promised to him. When Abram responded by believing and obeying Him, God appeared to him and promised to bless all nations through him and through his seed.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Joshua 24:2 and 3 “The other side of the flood”: beyond, or east, of the river Euphrates. “Nachor”: Nahor, Abram’s brother; the grandfather of Rebekah, who married Abram’s son, Isaac.

Acts 7:2 “Mesopotamia”: the region “between the two rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris...The name is Greek, and the region had also other names before the Greek name was given to it. In Genesis 11:31 and Genesis 15:7 it is called Ur of the Chaldees. Mesopotamia and Chaldea might not exactly coincide; but it is evident that Stephen meant to say that "Ur" was in the country afterward called Mesopotamia” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

Acts 7:4 “Chaldeans”: referring to a country anciently situated on both sides of the Euphrates and extending to the Persian Gulf. Ur and Babylon were cities of Chaldea. “Charran”: Greek for “Haran.”

“The city where Terah settled on his departure from Ur (Genesis 11:31); whence Abram set out on his pilgrimage of faith to Canaan (Genesis 12:1). It was probably “the city of Nahor” to which Abraham’s servant came to find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:10). Hither came Jacob when he fled from Esau’s anger (Genesis 27:43). Here he met his bride (Genesis 29:4), and in the neighboring pastures he tended the flocks of Laban” (Bible Hub’s *Encyclopedia*). Haran was about 600 miles from Ur.

Genesis 12:1 “Now the Lord had said unto Abram”: or, *Jehovah said*. “There is great dissension between commentators concerning the call of Abram; some supposing he had two distinct calls, others that he had but one. At the conclusion of the preceding chapter, Genesis 11:31, we find Terah and all his family leaving Ur of the Chaldees, in order to go to Canaan. This was, no doubt, in consequence of some Divine admonition” (*Clarke’s Commentary*), as Stephen related in Acts 7:2. “While resting at Haran, on their road to Canaan, Terah died, (Genesis 11:32); and then God repeats his call to Abram, and orders him to proceed to Canaan” (Genesis 12:1). (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Genesis 12:4 “Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran”: “As Abram was now seventy-five years old, and his father Terah had just died, at the age of two hundred and five, consequently Terah must have been one hundred and thirty when Abram was born; and the seventieth year of his [Terah’s] age mentioned in Genesis 11:26, was the period at which Haran, not Abram, was born” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Genesis 12:5 “Souls”: household servants and their families; also, Jewish interpreters explain this to be proselytes—those they had converted to the worship of the one, true God.

Genesis 12:6 “Sichem”: Shechem. It was 400 miles from Haran to Shechem and 20 more miles to the place near Bethel, where he built an altar, in verse 8. “The plain of Moreh”: the *oak*, or *lofty oak*, of Moreh.

Genesis 12:8 “Called upon the name of the Lord”: “Dr. Shuckford strongly contends that **בשם** **קרא** **בשם** **קרא** **בשם** **קרא** **בשם** does not signify to call ON the name, but to invoke IN the name. So Abram invoked Jehovah in or by the name of Jehovah, who had appeared to him. He was taught even in these early times to approach God through a Mediator; and that Mediator, since manifested in the flesh, was known by the name Jehovah. Does not our Lord allude to such a

discovery as this when he says, ‘Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad’? (John 8:56). Hence it is evident that he was informed that the Christ should be born of his seed, that the nations of the world should be blessed through him; and is it then to be wondered at if he invoked God in the name of this great Mediator?” (*Clarke’s Commentary*).

Genesis 12:9 “The south”: the Negeb, the dry, parched, desert regions to the south of Judah; the scene of many of Abram’s wanderings.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today we begin a brief study of Abraham, to be continued in the next lesson. It is impossible to cover every detail even in two lessons; I suggest the reader make it a rewarding personal study. The more I explored, the more I discovered, and my heart is just filled with awe at the divine truths revealed in the story of Abraham.

We are introduced to Abram, as his name was called in this part of his life, and his family in the last part of Genesis 11. The passages we quote from Joshua and from Stephen in the book of Acts shed light on the details of Abram’s cultural upbringing, his divine call, and his journey to Canaan. Stephen asserts that Abram was called of God before he ever went to Haran. Stopping there until his father died, he received a second call. That is detailed in Genesis 12. The verses from that chapter in our lesson today highlight God’s promise and call, Abram’s obedience, his age at the time, the appearances of God to him, and the altars he built all along the way. The last part of the chapter tells of Abram’s detour into Egypt during a time of drought, and his experiences there.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Name an important and frequent action taken by Abram in every place he journeyed and upon every visitation by God.
2. How did God initiate His part of the friendship with Abram?
3. How did Abram respond in his part of the friendship with God?
4. What promises did God give to Abram?
5. When God spoke to Isaiah years later, what title did He give Abram (Abraham)?

LIFE APPLICATION

Abram heard the call of God, and he believed and obeyed. That simple action made him a friend of God, Who still identified him by that name many years later. Hebrews 11 expounds upon Abram's faith, letting us know that Abram obeyed "not knowing" where he was going. That's pretty hard for a man to do! It meant something to God as well, and God continued His call in Abram's life. He began to appear to Abram and talk with him personally, as a Friend.

The Hebrews writer also states that Abram looked for a city that had foundations, and whose builder and maker is God; confessed that he was a pilgrim and a stranger on this earth; and desired a heavenly city. Abram's faith took in something beyond the physical; he began to see, with spiritual eyes, heavenly and spiritual realities.

Believing and obeying and then being granted spiritual vision just go together, don't they? That's what Christ had in mind when He called us to be His friends. He wants to share spiritual secrets with us, but we cannot see nor understand them unless we believe and obey Him as Abram did.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

From the beginning of time the Creator has longed for an intimate relationship with His creature, man. He created man in His own image with a spiritual endowment that would make such a relationship possible. Although Satan, through subtlety, marred that relationship between God and man in the Garden, there were a few through the ages, like Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and David who aspired to have an intimate friendship with God. Through the blood of Christ, we today have free access to a relationship with God wherein we "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." (See Hebrews 10:19-22.)

Think about the following words written 143 years ago by another man who was a close friend of God: "God is daily giving me more of His great fullness and conforming me more and more to His glorious image. This is because I am earnestly endeavoring to consecrate more perfectly every moment of my time to Him and because I spend more time with God alone in the closet. I have on

several occasions besought God to conform me more perfectly to His nature and, without any particular emotions that might indicate the answer, I claimed the desire of my heart and, by faith, thanked Father that He had granted my petitions. To the glory of God I can say that, as I went on my way, I found from hour to hour that, as my faith was, so was it meted out to me. Oh, how sweet it is to go to our heavenly Father for all our heart's and soul's need, and in the name of Jesus ask for it, rejoicing that we know we have the desire of our heart! Surely, 'happy are the people that are in such a case; yea, happy are the people whose God is the Lord.'"

—D. S. Warner, April 3, 1878

May we all seek a closer friendship with the Friend of friends.

—Harlan Sorrell

APRIL 18, 2021

ABRAHAM, THE FRIEND OF GOD, PART TWO

Genesis 13:14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD.

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,

saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.

Genesis 17:1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Genesis 18:17 And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;

18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

Genesis 26:5 Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

MEMORY VERSE: And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. —**James 2:23**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As Abram continued to follow God and worship Him, God gave him all the land of Canaan, made a covenant with him, revealed to him His plans to destroy Sodom, and fulfilled His promise to him of a son and heir.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Genesis 13:18 “In the plain of Mamre”: by the *oak* of Mamre. Mamre was an Amorite with whom Abram made a league (Genesis 14:13) when he rescued Lot from captivity.

Genesis 15:6 “Abram believed in the Lord”: or, Abram *leaned on* the Lord. “The metaphor in the Hebrew word is that of a man leaning all his weight on some strong stay” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

Genesis 15:18 “Made a covenant”: *cut* a covenant (Hebrew). “...Or rather the covenant sacrifice; for as no covenant was made without one, and the creature was cut in two that the contracting parties might pass between the pieces, hence cutting the covenant signified making the covenant” (*Clarke’s Commentary*). “The covenant is not only God’s binding Himself anew by solemn acts to fulfil His promises already made, but it is His entering into a far sweeter and nearer alliance with Abram than even He had hitherto had. That name, ‘the friend of God,’ by which he is still known over all the Mohammedan world, contains the very essence of the covenant” (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Continuing from the last lesson, which ended with Abram going south, we find that he actually visited Egypt to find relief from a famine in Canaan. There Abram feared the Pharaoh would notice Sarai’s personal beauty and desire her, so he, in fear for his own life, identified her as his sister. Pharaoh did take her to his house, but God intervened and plagued Pharaoh, and he restored her back to Abraham.

Genesis 13 is the story of the separation between Abram and his nephew Lot because of strife between their herdsmen over the land. Abram felt a peaceful resolution would be to give Lot his choice of the land, while Abram took what was left. After Lot rather selfishly chose the well-watered plain of Jordan, which included the wicked cities, God visited Abram and promised him all the land he could see in every direction. Again Abram built an altar to God.

In Genesis 14 we read of the coalition of kings who seized the cities of the plain, carrying away Lot, his family, and his possessions. Abram took 318 of his own trained servants and rescued his nephew. The last part of the chapter includes the blessing of Melchisedek, king of Salem, upon Abram, to whom Abram gave tithes of all the goods he had recovered from the battle. The king of Sodom offered the spoils to Abram to keep, but he refused.

Genesis 15 details the promise renewal to Abram and the covenant by which God ratified His promise.

Genesis 16 is the account of Sarai’s bargain with Abram to take her slave, Hagar, as his wife and establish an heir in this way. Abram

agreed, and a son, Ishmael, was born when Abram was 86 years old.

In Genesis 17, thirteen years later, God again visited Abram, changing his name to Abraham, and Sarai's to Sarah, promising that Sarah would bear a son the next year, and re-establishing His covenant. The elements of this covenant involved the rite of circumcision.

Genesis 18 gives us the story of the personal visit God made to Abraham. He again promised that Sarah would embrace a son within the year, and He made known His plan of destruction for the wicked cities of the plain. In this passage, Abraham made intercession for Sodom, pleading for mercy. God patiently dealt with Abraham, promising He would spare the city if ten righteous persons could be found there.

In the next chapter we read of God's mercy to Lot, because He "remembered Abraham" and his earnest intercession for the people of Sodom.

Chapter 20 is the story of Abraham and Sarah's interaction with king Abimelech, who tried to take Sarah as a wife after Abraham and Sarah had fearfully hidden their relationship as husband and wife while traveling in Abimelech's country. God mercifully rescued Sarah and Abraham by intervening and dealing with the king in a dream.

Chapter 21 tells of the birth of Isaac and the sending away of Hagar and her son, Ishmael. This was when Abraham was 100 years old. Later, Abraham made a covenant of kindness with King Abimelech, and again built an altar and called on the Lord.

Chapter 22 is the story of God giving Abraham the supreme test by calling him to offer his son, Isaac as an offering on the altar, and God's wonderful intervention and provision of a substitute. Chapter 23 tells of the death and burial of Sarah; chapter 24 is the account of finding a wife for Isaac, and chapter 25 tells the end of Abraham's life at age 175.

Details from the story of Abraham are mentioned many times later in both the Old and New Testaments.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Share the rest of the story from Genesis 13 about Lot and Abram.
2. What verse from Genesis 15 is repeated several times in the New Testament?
3. In Genesis 17:1, what did God tell Abram to do? How does that correspond with a verse from our first lesson?
4. What was God's testimony of Abraham in Genesis 18?
5. What was God's testimony of Abraham in Genesis 26?

LIFE APPLICATION

The story of Abraham shares, among many other vital spiritual applications, the elements of the close friendship with God to which we are called by Christ. Among these are the very things Jesus outlined: first, a covenant made by God which was sealed with the shedding of blood—Abraham's offering of a burnt offering; God's initiation of circumcision. These point to the covenant Christ sealed with His own blood and the spiritual circumcision of the heart accomplished by God in the sending of His Spirit.

Secondly, as Abraham believed God, trusted Him and fully relied upon Him, and obeyed Him, so our part in friendship with Christ involves our implicit trust and obedience, as Jesus said.

Another application we can make is that God, as Abraham's friend, did not hide the things He planned to do. I believe that the revelation God gives the soul is one of the sweetest parts of our friendship with Christ. In John 14:21, we read one of Jesus' precious promises: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

As God revealed and shared, Abraham responded by earnest intercession. Likewise, when Jesus reveals His plans and purposes to us, we respond by communing with God in prayer and intercession for others.

Note also that God called Abraham to be "perfect." We were introduced to this word in the first lesson about friendship with Christ. Its meaning to Abraham was that God wanted him to be completely submissive and open to God's dealings. Abraham erred in judgment and grew fearful and hesitant at times, but God "found his

heart faithful...and made a covenant with him” (Nehemiah 9:8), and gently but continually dealt with him in patience, calling him to deeper trust and commitment a little at a time; and so He deals with us.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I asked my wife for help getting started on this reflection concerning friendship. She looked at me, smiled, and said, "Communication." That word has a history with us. It is not my strongest point. I didn't receive much in-depth conversation growing up. Added to that, I am quiet, reserved, and was very shy as a child. As a result, my wife has had to dig info out of me; how I am feeling or what I am thinking. Different times she has explained, "I can't read your mind." Our quietness can sometimes starve the emotional needs of our spouse or family. It is very vital to recognize that we all have emotional needs that are very real and if we ignore them, we are sabotaging our relationships.

Conversation is a window to the soul. There are different levels of conversation. Many of us tend to have shallow (safe) conversation that concern things "out there." I used to think that small talk was unimportant but now realize that conversation needs to begin somewhere and can lead to deeper and more meaningful conversation as deeper friendship is desired. The more we can open up (become vulnerable), sharing our battles, victories, losses, experiences, perceptions, and feelings, the more our loved ones and friends can know the real us.

As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend. Our lives can be so blessed, enriched, and helped by meaningful conversation. Listen, observe, consider, speak!

—Bob Wilson

APRIL 25, 2021

MOSES, GOD'S FACE-TO-FACE FRIEND

Exodus 33:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp:

but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.

Numbers 12:1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

2 And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.

3 (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)

4 And the LORD spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out ye three unto the tabernacle of the congregation. And they three came out.

5 And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth.

6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.

8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

MEMORY VERSE: And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel. —**Deuteronomy 34:10-12**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Moses had a very special relationship with Jehovah, in that God appeared to him in a burning bush, spoke audibly with him face-to-face, as a friend, and made him mediator of the Old Covenant and founder and organizer of the kingdom of Israel.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Exodus 33:11 “Face to face”: not at a distance, but “mouth to mouth; not from heaven, as at a distance, and not by an angel, dream or vision. “As a man speaketh to his friend”: “freely, familiarly, plainly, cordially, openly, without any reserve or show of authority, or causing dread and fear; for he also spake to the children of Israel “face to face”, but then it was out of the fire in a terrible manner which they could not bear” (*Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible*).

Numbers 12:1 “Because of the Ethiopian woman”: either Zipporah, whom he had married forty years earlier, while he was in Midian, or possibly another wife, a recent proselyte (not a Canaanite, with whom God had strictly forbidden marriage) who had come along with the Israelites in the Exodus; Bible commentators are very divided on this issue.

Numbers 12:3 “Meek”: afflicted; humble; lowly; poor. This was either an added sentence by a later prophet, or a sentence spoken by the Lord which Moses, as His servant, included objectively.

Numbers 12:8 “The similitude of the Lord shall he behold”: referring either to Moses’ beholding the burning bush, the “back parts” of the glory of the Lord in Exodus 33:23, or the particular manifestation of God when He spoke face to face with Moses. Not the face or essence of God, because “no man can see my face and live” (Exodus 33:20).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The passages we are reading today begin with the dark time of God’s great displeasure with the Israelites when they worshipped the golden calf in the wilderness (Genesis 32). The Lord had plagued the people and commanded those who were on “the Lord’s side” to slay those responsible for the idolatry. Moses pleaded with God to forgive them; it seems God was planning to forsake them and bring upon them even more judgment. His presence descended to the door of Moses’ little place of worship and He spoke to Moses, face-to-face.

The rest of Genesis 33 is the resulting dialogue between God and Moses, as Moses presented God with three requests: 1) “Show me thy way, that I may know thee.” 2) He identifies with and intercedes

for the people in his plea for God to go with him. 3) Moses' last desire is to see God's glory, even something beyond his face-to-face communion.

God granted the first two requests and assured Moses that He would be with him and also bring up the people to the promised land. The last request He granted in part. He promised to cover Moses with His hand as He passed by behind him, and removed His hand so that His "back parts" might be seen, but not His face.

The next passages tell what happened when Miriam complained to Moses about his wife, getting Aaron to side with her as she made her complaint. God called the three to His presence outside the tabernacle. His anger was kindled against Miriam and Aaron as He defended Moses and stated His close relationship with him. God sent leprosy upon Miriam, after which, at Aaron's plea, Moses cried to God to heal her. God separated her for seven days and then answered Moses' prayer and brought her back healed.

The memory verse from Deuteronomy 34 was, according to Bible commentators, very likely written at a later time, perhaps by Joshua or Samuel. "Among all the succeeding prophets none was found so eminent in all respects nor so highly privileged as Moses; with him God spoke face-to-face—admitted him to the closest familiarity and greatest friendship with himself. Now all this continued true till the advent of Jesus Christ, of whom Moses said, 'A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me;' but how great was this person when compared with Moses! Moses desired to see God's glory; this sight he could not bear; he saw his back parts, probably meaning God's design relative to the latter days: but Jesus, the Almighty Savior, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, who lay in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared God to man" (*Clarke's Commentary*).

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. How did God speak to Moses? Explain what this possibly means.
2. Discuss Moses' statement about his own meekness. What New Testament apostle had to commend himself when up against the Jewish opposition to his apostleship?
3. What is the possible meaning of "the similitude of the Lord"?

4. Where in the New Testament is verse seven quoted?
5. Describe how intercession, discovered in this and the last two lessons, is an essential part of true friendship.

LIFE APPLICATION

There are three characteristics of Moses brought out in the lesson that are essential to friendship with Christ and with people. The first is the meek and humble spirit Moses had in dealing with God and others. We may object, saying, "Oh, but he did this and this in anger." Yet when we consider the mountainous task to which Moses was called and how much he bore, time after time after time, I believe we can say, "That took much humility." What a challenge: would I be willing to take on the kind of responsibility to which Moses was called? Would I stick with it after 10, 20, 30, 40 years?

The second is faithfulness. To be a friend of God as Moses was, we must have that quality in our lives. Commitment. Self-sacrifice. Perseverance. Endurance. Patience.

Third. Intercession is what I see looming tall in the examples of Abraham and Moses. This is really challenging me. Do I pray for my spouse, my children and grandchildren, my friends, and all souls, as these great Bible men did? This type of intercession involves putting myself in another's place; identifying with him or with her in their sins and errors, sicknesses, griefs, losses, fears, and temptations. Am I willing to do this?

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

How precious it is that the Lord spoke to Moses as a man speaks to his friend. In Philippians 2:6 we observe this same close relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father. "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." This lesson is a reminder of the many ways in which the life of Moses was the foretelling of Christ, the fulfillment. Here are a few examples:

As Intercessor

Moses:

“Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written” (Exodus 32:32).

Jesus:

“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

Forgiveness Amidst Betrayal

Moses:

“And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee” (Numbers 12:13).

Jesus:

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

God's Brilliant Light

Moses:

“Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him” (Numbers 34:29).

Jesus:

“And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matthew 17:2).

We are thankful for the example of Moses. But Moses was just a man and many times he grew weary under the stress of the people. But we have a high priest—Jesus Christ—that we can come boldly to and be confident that we will find grace and help in time of trouble.

—LaDawna Adams

MAY 2, 2021

DAVID AND JONATHAN

1 Samuel 18:1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his

bow, and to his girdle.

1 Samuel 19:1 And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.

2 But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself:

3 And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee.

4 And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good:

5 For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?

6 And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul swore, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.

7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

1 Samuel 20:12 And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee;

13 The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father.

14 And thou shalt not only while yet I live shew me the kindness of the LORD, that I die not:

15 But also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever: no, not when the LORD hath cut off the enemies of David every one from the face of the earth.

16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies.

17 And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

41 And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.

42 And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

I Samuel 23:16 And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.

17 And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth.

18 And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.

MEMORY VERSE: How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. —**II Samuel 1:25-26**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: David and Jonathan exemplified true, faithful friendship and all the elements we find in our friendship with Christ—covenant, steadfast devotion, intercession, self-forgetting service and loyalty.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Samuel 18:1 “Was knit”: was bound up; the same term was used to describe Jacob’s love for Benjamin (Genesis 44:30). “Knotted, tied together firmly by indissoluble bonds” (*Pulpit Commentary*). “As his own soul”: as *himself*, similarly to what Christ taught—“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” “The friendship of David and Jonathan was the effect of Divine grace, which produces in true believers one heart and one soul, and causes them to love each other. This union of souls is from partaking in the Spirit of Christ. Where God unites

hearts, carnal matters are too weak to separate them. Those who love Christ as their own souls, will be willing to join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant” (*Matthew Henry Commentary*).

I Samuel 18:3 “Made”: literally, *cut*; to make an alliance or bargain; originally, by cutting flesh and passing between the pieces. “Covenant”: treaty; alliance; league.

I Samuel 20:41 “Fell on his face”: as related by Josephus, “Did obeisance and called him the savior of his life.” Exceeded”: David wept more. “Was completely mastered by his grief” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jonathan, oldest son of King Saul, heard and observed David, youngest son of Jesse, speaking to his father concerning the victory God gave him over Goliath, champion of the Philistines. I Samuel 18 tells us that the soul of Jonathan felt an affinity with David, so that he loved him and made a covenant with him. As per common cultural elements of a covenant in that era, Jonathan’s covenant included gifts of his royal garments and weapons.

From then on Jonathan pledged undying loyalty to David. Their mutual courage (Jonathan had just previously won his own victory over the Philistines) and zeal for Jehovah, His cause, and His law; and Jonathan’s acknowledgement that God had chosen David, and not himself to succeed Saul as Israel’s king, cemented them together in a bond stronger than that of biological brothers.

David desperately needed a divinely-appointed protector, and Jonathan became that protector. He reasoned and pleaded with his father to lay down his quarrel with David. Over and over he alerted David of his father’s rage and plans to take David’s life. David swore before God of his innocence of ambition to be king; he repeatedly refused opportunities to take Saul’s life. He constantly regarded as a sacred, personal code the admonition, “Touch not mine anointed.” In answer to Jonathan’s entreaty, David vowed to show everlasting kindness to Jonathan’s family, which promise he afterward kept when he sought out Jonathan’s crippled son, Mephibosheth, and made him part of his family and royal household. With great emotion, David made obeisance to Jonathan as they parted after Jonathan warned him of Saul’s intense anger.

Jonathan refused to be envious at David’s future ascendancy to

the throne. In their first covenant, he gave David his weapons, symbolic of his recognition that the kingdom really belonged to David. At their last meeting, he acknowledged, “Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee.”

Our memory verse includes a small portion of the emotional ode David wrote after Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle. In view of David’s lament in this passage, there are attempts by some religious writers to interpret the relationship between these two friends as romantic and sensual. They are ignoring the facts that both David and Jonathan were, first of all, believers in Jehovah, and adherents to His laws. In truth, the cause of Jehovah is what united their hearts in the first place. Since homosexual relationships were strictly forbidden by God, it is unthinkable that their relationship was of that nature. Also, their covenant of loyal friendship, with its lavish bestowal of gifts, was well within the customary practices of the times. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had all made similar allegiances and covenants with confederates in their day. David’s statement that Jonathan’s love to him was “wonderful, passing the love of women,” serves to establish that the *nature* of their love and mutual covenant was different from the relationships each had with women.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. By what action did Jonathan and David pledge their allegiance to each other?
2. How did Jonathan show he was not envious of David?
3. What was David’s promise in his covenants with Jonathan? Did he fulfill it in the future?
4. How did Jonathan show he knew David’s future place as Israel’s king?
5. Name the qualities in both David and Jonathan which made them devoted to each other.

LIFE APPLICATION

A God-given friend is one of life’s greatest blessings. David’s friend, Jonathan, was in the unique place as protector, confidant, encourager, and source of wisdom, help and admonition to David in

some of the most difficult years of his life. We can learn much from this godly, faithful man!

Jonathan's offer of faithful friendship, made sure by a covenant, reminds us of Jesus' vow of love for us, that He was laying down His life for us and would never leave us or forsake us. We too, in our vows of "eternal trueness" to our brothers/friends/fellows in the household of God, are to be willing to lay down our lives for one another. While we may not have to be killed in the place of a friend, we will have daily opportunities to show selfless love to others by giving up our time, helping do an unpleasant, repugnant task, protecting a brother or sister's reputation, or supporting one another in fasting and praying.

Jonathan, motivated by his reverence to God and the knowledge of His will and order, gave up his hopes of personal honor and kingship and supported David. Jesus gave up the glories and honor of heaven to give us the privilege and honor of reigning with him. We give up earthly honor and fame to suffer with Him and His people. We yield our preferences, tastes, hopes and dreams to help others.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

It was a sunny October day in Fresno, CA during the fall of 1988, and a shy eighth-grader, having attended private, Christian schools up to that point and struggling to adjust to public school life for the first time, was waiting for the school bus to arrive and head home. Standing under a tree—alone—and watching students and teachers pass by, he was startled when his Algebra teacher walked past and casually stated to him and another youth standing nearby and waiting for the same bus: "That's nice, there are two Christians standing next to each other." The young man thought to himself, "What? Did I hear that right? Another Christian?!?" Working up the nerve to approach the other boy, but too excited to pass up the opportunity, he cautiously asked, "Are you a Christian?" The other boy nodded, and a friendship was born.

As you might have guessed, I am the shy, young man in that story, and I later learned that our math teacher and my friend attended the same church, which was probably the impetus for his

statement. Either way, Tim and I became good friends and were pretty much inseparable during our eighth and ninth grade school years. However, when I moved to Sacramento, CA in 1990 I feared that our friendship would end. I completed high school and began attending a university nearby, and was I surprised to learn just a couple of weeks into my freshman year that my old friend was attending there as well. He had looked me up by calling my parents, as he had remembered my mother's very unique first name and there was obviously only one person with her name in the phone book! Our friendship was re-established, and as roommates our 2nd and 3rd years of college, we built a friendship to last a lifetime.

In many ways, I've often looked at our friendship similarly to that of David and Jonathan. We have similarities, but there are obvious differences, too. He's very tall, I'm of average height. He's white, I'm black. He's the youngest of eight children, I'm the oldest of seven. The basis of his Christian faith is Calvinism while mine is Arminianism, and in college we had many lively debates over our differences! However, our mutual respect for each other's walk with God, along with the understanding that we both know our friendship is God-given, has allowed us to overcome our differences and support each other during the most difficult times of our lives. His experiences with church persecution helped me when I went through similar experiences. We both supported each other in waiting to find the companion God had for us, and he served as the best man at my wedding a few years before I stood up for him at his. In all of our ups and downs in life, whether they be family illnesses and deaths, political, economical, or ecumenical upheaval, we've been able to strengthen our friendship and grow in maturity, too. We pray for each other, accept each other's counsel and wisdom, and listen when the other has something that needs to be expressed. Truly, "no pow'r of earth or hell, withal, can rend us from each other." In such a polarized world, it is a wonderful blessing to have such a friendship as this!

—Fari Matthews

MAY 9, 2021

I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

2 And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

3 His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.

4 And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them.

5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

6 Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them.

7 And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

8 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

9 Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?

10 Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

11 But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.

12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

Job 2:11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place; Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite: for they had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him.

12 And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

13 So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great.

Job 42:7 And it was so, that after the LORD had spoken these words unto Job, the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath.

8 Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly, in that ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, like my servant Job.

9 So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did according as the LORD commanded them: the LORD also accepted Job.

10 And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before.

MEMORY VERSE: And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. —**Luke 22:31-32**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Job, a perfect man before God, was allowed by God to be severely tried by the devil, so that he lost his children, possessions, and good health. After his friends critically judged and chastised him, God rebuked them and Job prayed for them—upon which God turned Job's affliction completely around and gave him twice as much as he had before—a type and example of Christ's intercession.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Job 1:1 “Perfect”: complete; blameless; a man of integrity.
“Upright”: straight; level; right. “Eschewed”: to turn aside (from the wrong path).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The purpose of the lesson today is to primarily show the example of Job praying for his friends after a time of grievous adversity and subsequent chastisement and persecution from them. In reading various commentators’ opinions as to the location of Uz, the place where Job lived, and the age in which he lived, I found great disagreement. Some scholars even put forth that the whole story is a parable and not about a real person. Some hold that Job lived in the time of Isaac, some say he lived around the time of the giving of the law, and others maintain that he was from the time period after the Babylonian captivity. As to the setting of the story, many believe he lived in the desert/wilderness area between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and others insist it was Edom where it all took place. Various opinions are also given about the authorship of the poetic book. So that information is not really the point of the lesson.

One important thing we do want to note about Job is that he was a man of prayer. Very early, every day—continually—the scripture points out, he made burnt offerings on behalf of his family, interceding to God for them. Could this be the “secret” of Job’s life of integrity before God?

We skimmed over the part of the story where Satan asked God if He would allow him to afflict Job’s body. God allowed this up to the point of taking Job’s life, and Job was smitten with boils completely covering his body. It was at this dark point in his experience that Job’s wife railed on him, suggesting that he curse God and die. Job held fast his integrity with God and would not curse him. He was then visited by his three friends. Chapters 3-37 contain the dialogue between Job and his friends; God’s answer to them is in chapters 38-41.

In the final chapter of Job, God commanded Job’s friends to offer sacrifices as repentance for their folly and failure to speak the right

words; He also commanded Job to pray a prayer for them that God would accept. After Job prayed for his friends, God turned his captivity—that is the point of the lesson. What a beautiful foreshadowing of Christ Himself. Though rejected, forsaken and persecuted by His own friends, He still prayed for them and loved them unto the end. He prayed for us—those who would believe on Him—that God would keep us from the evil of the world, just as Job prayed for his family and friends.

For our memory verse I have included the place where Jesus told Peter that Satan would attempt to destroy him. “But,” Jesus assured, “I have prayed for thee.” Did Peter remember Jesus’ words when he followed his master “afar off” instead of loyally sticking by Him? Did he recall those words when the Lord turned and looked at him after he had, even by oaths, emphatically disowned His Lord? The words “that thy faith fail not” mean literally, “That thy faith fail not utterly, or finally.” Did the words of Jesus save him from utter despair when he was out weeping bitterly? I believe they did.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Explain the actions and purposes of Job’s three friends during his time of affliction.
2. How did God judge them and what did He tell them to do?
3. Share how Christ likewise prayed for those who had rejected and denied Him.
4. Share how we also enter into this important element of true friendship—praying for others.
5. Share a personal example of how this took place in your own life.

LIFE APPLICATION

Years ago an older minister advised me, “When you read the Old Testament look for JESUS.” Following that tip has greatly enriched my study of the stories in the Old Testament, and it certainly has influenced how I look at Job. While every detail, of course, doesn’t imply a type and shadow, I believe the simple application of Job’s example to the life of our Lord is entirely within the realm of

accurate Scriptural interpretation. We may widely differ in our opinions, but we may all be comforted in the reality that as our true, divine Friend, Jesus did then, and does now, pray for us (Hebrews 7:25). Where would you or I be without His intercession?

We in turn are to be that kind of friend to those around us. I think of the story about the five missionaries who were killed by natives in Ecuador in the 1950's. Their widows did not forsake the village in anger; rather, they forgave and prayed for the murderers. In time, they found that it was only ignorance and superstition that was the motive for killing, and reaching back into the village, they were able to bring several of those very people to a saving faith in Christ.

Earnest prayer and intercession is the way to enter into the very life of Christ in us. He prays; we pray. He loves and intercedes *through* us. In this lesson we see the word *perfect* again. Keeping a heart of forgiveness for the weaknesses and failures of our friends, and praying for those who don't always treat us well *completes* our experience; it is a part of that openness and perfection of true friendship.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Two motto plaques that hung on the wall in the home of my grandparents, Bro. Murphy and Sis. Natalie Allen, read, "Prayer Changes Things" and "Jesus Never Fails." I'm glad to now have those same plaques hanging on the wall in my home.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-6 we read: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

In Isaiah 53:12, Romans 8:34, and Hebrews 7:25 we read about the tender and earnest intercession that Jesus, our Savior, has made and is even now making for us. What a comfort it is to know that He

is, even now, interceding and praying for us! Truly, we have “No Friend Like Jesus” (*Evening Light Songs* #103). And yet, what a challenge to know He also made us a “holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). May we ever be faithful in prayers and intercessions. Paul exhorted, “Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18).

It is also comforting to know that “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27).

—Harlan Sorrell

MAY 16, 2021

A FAITHFUL FRIEND

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24 A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

Proverbs 19:4 Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.

6 Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts.

7 All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.

Proverbs 27:5 Open rebuke is better than secret love.

6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Proverbs 27:10 Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother’s house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.

MEMORY VERSE: Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a

kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities. — **Psalms 141:5**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A true friend remains faithful at all times, may attach himself more closely and faithfully than family, and does not stop loving, or forsake; though others may flatter or offer deceitful surface affection, kind admonitions and reproof remain as precious gifts a true friendship may offer.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Proverbs 17:17 “A brother is born for adversity”: translated by some as, “At all times, a friend loves, but in adversity he becomes a brother.”

Proverbs 18:24 “A man that hath friends”: the Revised Version, and many other commentators have, “He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction.” Others interpret the clause just as it is, that to have friends, or one who will stick close to you in trouble, you must be a friend to all. “There is a kind of factitious friendship in the world, that, to show one's self friendly in it, is very expensive, and in every way utterly unprofitable: it is maintained by expensive parties, feasts, etc., where the table groans with dainties, and where the conversation is either jejune and insipid, or calumnious; backbiting, talebearing, and scandal, being the general topics of the different squads in company” (*Clarke's Commentary*). The verse was omitted in the Septuagint and Arabic translations. “A friend that sticketh closer”: in Hebrew, *a lover*. It is a stronger word than that translated ‘friends’ in the first clause of the verse; and is used of Abraham when he is called, ‘the friend of God’” (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*).

Proverbs 27:5 “Open rebuke” and Psalm 141:5: “Let the righteous smite me”: “Friendly reproofs; which, though they may be severe, at least thought so, and may grieve and wound, and cause pain and uneasiness for the present, yet, proceeding from a spirit of love, faithfulness, and integrity, and designed for the good of the person reprov'd, ought to be kindly received...but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful; flow from a deceitful heart, and not to be

confided in, as the kisses of Joab and Judas” (*Gill’s*). “Reproof given faithfully and plainly, with openness of heart, and without mincing the matter, and palliating the offence; but speaking out freely, and faithfully laying before a person the evil of his sin, in all the circumstances of it, as the Apostle Paul did to Peter, when he withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed (Galatians 2:11). Now such kind of reproof is better than such love to a person as will not suffer him to tell him of his faults, for fear of grieving him, or losing his friendship; or than such love as does not show itself in deeds, and particularly in faithful reproofs; for so to act is to hate a person, and suffer sin to be upon him (Leviticus 19:17)” (*Gill’s*).

Proverbs 27:6 “Faithful are the wounds of a friend”: or, as the Septuagint, “More to be trusted are the wounds of a friend than the spontaneous kisses of an enemy.”

Proverbs 27:10 “Thine own friend and thy father’s friend...a neighbor who is near”: the kind of friend who is faithful and loves at all times is better to be trusted during a time of trouble than a biological brother or relative who is distant in the relationship. One commentator pointed out that due to polygamy in the Bible times, brotherhood was weakened (as was the marriage relationship, which Christ restored); note the example of David’s sons or David’s brothers. Jonathan provided the close relationship to David that he should have had with his brothers. “Forsake not”: an admonition to be faithful in friendship.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The Proverbs contain many exhortations on the subject of “Friendship.” Today we are looking at the concept of *faithfulness* in friendship. In these verses we learn that there are surface friends who are only there when times are good and gifts are being distributed. When trouble comes, they vanish. These friends are takers rather than givers, and the whole friendship is one-sided. Having many surface friends can bring destruction and weariness.

In contrast, a true friend loves at all times: in wealth or poverty; in good times or in troubled times. They stick by you even closer than blood relatives. Adversity causes these friends to be “born” into our lives; it reveals the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of an individual.

The scripture passages also bring to light an often overlooked element of faithful friendship: the kindness shown by a friend who faithfully admonishes when it is necessary. The Bible says much about the treachery—the deceitfulness—of flattery, and the stories of David and other kings and prophets provide many examples. A true friend will not flatter, but speak the truth in love. We can see this in the New Testament as well, as Jesus often rebuked his close disciples, and Paul admonished his dearest friends and brothers in the Lord. David speaks of this “kindness” he may have received from his friend, Jonathan; he added that he would pray for his friend who had reproved him in this way. In our friendship with Christ, we cherish His loving rebukes and admonition.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Express the difficulty in Proverbs 18:24; what two ways may the verse be interpreted?
2. The passage from Proverbs 19 speaks of the surface friendship that exists because of wealth. Could you provide an example from real life?
3. Share a personal experience where a friend lovingly rebuked you.
4. Why should an old friend or a family friend not be forsaken?
5. Explain reasons why a distant biological brother is not as favorable as a close friend in the time of calamity, as presented in Proverbs 27:10.

LIFE APPLICATION

As we progress further into this study, I am finding myself more and more challenged. The Word pierces deeply into words, actions and motives! The word *faithful* takes on new meaning, and I have to ask myself some questions:

Have I been faithful in my friend’s times of adversity? Do I visit? Do I willingly take care of needful tasks to relieve her? Am I available to help at a moment’s notice? Or is my friendship one-sided? Am I there only when the favors are being handed out? When my friend is in good financial standing and lives in a beautiful home in an upscale neighborhood? Or do I desert the friend who has suffered loss and

no longer has the ability to host or treat her friends to expensive meals or material gifts?

What if my friend is being misunderstood or is on a “side” not well-favored? Do I remain faithful, or do I become silent and cool?

If the Lord lays it on my heart, and if after earnest prayer I am burdened to speak with my friend concerning a fault (Matthew 18:15), am I “able to admonish” (Romans 15:14)?

If my friend comes to me with a burden to reprove me of my fault, do I take David’s attitude and feel that it is a “kindness”? Or do I let the friendship slide into ruin because my pride is hurt and I feel disgraced?

Do I put myself into my friend’s place of suffering, misunderstanding, or grief and intercede faithfully for him? How often do I REALLY pray for my friends?

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The quest for a deep and genuine friendship can be a painful one. It requires us to be vulnerable and it exposes our insecurities. Rejections, misunderstandings, and misjudgments are often part of the process, and few of us are willing to take the risk. So, we choose the safer option. We relegate ourselves to more superficial relationships where we can control what is seen and what is said. But a true friend sees us as we are—warts and all. And they choose to love us anyway. They see us at our highest point and at our lowest and they still choose to love us and support us.

When we fall, they are there to pick us up. They are experts at keeping us balanced and humble and are exceptional at administering reality checks. When we hurt, they hurt. When we laugh, they laugh *with* us but never *at* us. These are characteristics of a true and faithful friend.

We all desire at least one such friend in our lifetime. But for us to have one, we must be one. *A man that has friends must show himself friendly.* Genuine friendship, by its very nature, is reciprocal. We have an innate desire to love and to be loved. It is universal. This level of friendship may be somewhat elusive among our peers, but it is ever available in Christ.

Within the body of Christ, we forge bonds that are closer and stronger than family ties. This is the essence of Christian friendship

and fellowship. It is based on our love for Christ, the head and our love for his saints, the body. We come to realize that the church body is simply an extension of Christ. So, to love our brother *in* Christ is to love Christ himself. And to find a friend in our brother is to find a friend *in* Christ.

—Darrell Johnson

MAY 23, 2021

A FRIEND'S HEARTY COUNSEL

Proverbs 12:25 Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.

Proverbs 22:11 He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.

Proverbs 27:9 Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.

17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.

II Timothy 1:16 The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:

17 But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.

18 The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

MEMORY VERSE: And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not. —**I Samuel 23:16-17**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The gracious words and encouraging counsel of a friend serves to strengthen the purpose, refresh the soul, lift up and make glad the heart, and sharpen the intelligence;

even a king chooses one who has sincere, gracious speech to be his friend.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Proverbs 12:25 “Heaviness”: anxious care. *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible* suggests the kind of anxiety of an oppressed people under compulsory labor or tribute.

Proverbs 27:9 “Sweetness”: agreeable, pleasant, attractive speech of one’s friend. “As balsam and fragrant perfumes marvellously refresh and comfort the natural spirits, when they droop and are tired; so doth the very presence of a true-hearted friend, and much more his faithful counsel, rejoice a man’s soul; especially when he is at such a loss, that he knows not how to advise himself” (Bishop Patrick in *Benson Commentary*).

Proverbs 27:17 “Sharpeneth”: to make sharp and keen. As “learned men sharpen one another’s minds, and excite each other to learned studies; Christians sharpen one another’s graces, or stir up each other to the exercise of them, and the gifts which are bestowed on them, and to love and to good works” (*Gill’s*). “Sharpening the manner and forming the habits and character; that one helps another to culture and polish [his] manner, rub off his ruggedness, round his corners, as one has to make use of iron when he sharpens iron and seeks to make it bright” (*Keil and Delitzsch Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*).

II Timothy 1:16 “Onesiphorus”: meaning “profit-bringer”. “A Christian friend of Paul at Ephesus, who came to Rome while the apostle was imprisoned there for the faith, and at a time when almost everyone had forsaken him. This is supposed to have occurred during Paul’s last imprisonment, not long before his death. Having found Paul in bonds, after long seeking him, he assisted him to the utmost of his power, and without regard to danger; for which the apostle implored the highest benedictions on him and his family” (*ATS Bible Dictionary*). “Refreshed”: literally, to cool by blowing; revive; bring comfort.

I Samuel 23:16 “Strengthened his hand”: to fasten upon; sustain; encourage.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We have cited several of Solomon’s proverbs, a passage from Ecclesiastes, and two Bible examples as texts for this simple lesson, which addresses a God-given purpose of friendship: to use our speech to build up, encourage, and strengthen our friend who may be oppressed, laboring under a load of anxiety, dull of inspiration or courage, or needy of direction, positive instruction, or a heartening lift!

Examples in history of pure-hearted, gracious-speaking individuals who became close advisers and friends of kings include Hushai, David’s friend, and Daniel, friend of King Darius.

In the example of Paul in prison, it touches the heart to think of this dear brother in Ephesus, who obviously didn’t know where Paul was incarcerated, but searched about the towns and neighborhoods until he found him. It doesn’t say how long he searched or what kind of necessities he brought to Paul, but whatever it was, it was refreshing to Paul’s spirit. He also obviously shrugged off the stigma of being identified with a man and a group of people who were being persecuted and hunted as heretics. Paul used the words “often” and “many” to describe the kind of service Onesiphorus gave to him, so we know it wasn’t just one time. When we study, as we find positive examples detailed in the scriptures, we are justly challenged to copy those examples. In this case, Onesiphorus set the standard pretty high for us!

We again mention Jonathan’s encouragement to his friend, David. As we noted in an earlier lesson, this was the last meeting of the two friends. I would love to have heard his bracing words of courage as Jonathan charged David to remain true to God!

Another scriptural example is that of Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian eunuch who heard of Jeremiah’s plight down in the miry dungeon, went to the king and obtained permission to help Jeremiah, and led a rescue party to lift him up out of the pit. God later sent a message to Ebedmelech through Jeremiah, assuring him that because of his faith in God, he would be delivered in the time of danger (Jeremiah 38:6-13; 39:15-18).

These examples challenge us to be the kind of friend who refreshes and strengthens.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What three positive things come from the bracing (sometimes abrasive) challenges, good words, and hearty counsels of a friend, as shown in the first few verses in our lesson?
2. Share a personal example or story about a friend who helped you when you had fallen.
3. Share how Onesiphorus helped when Paul was imprisoned.
4. What are the background circumstances of Jonathan's encouragement to David, as stated in our memory verse?
5. What other Biblical examples of the strengthening help of a friend can you share?

LIFE APPLICATION

Friend of my many years!
When the great silence falls, at last, on me,
Let me not leave, to pain and sadden thee,
A memory of tears,
But pleasant thoughts alone.
Of one who was thy friendship's honored guest
And drank the wine of consolation pressed
From sorrows of thy own.
I leave with thee a sense
Of hands upheld and trials rendered less,
The unselfish joy which is to helpfulness
Its own great recompense.
The knowledge that from thine,
As from the garments of the Master, stole
Calmness and strength, the virtue which makes whole
And heals without a sign.
Yea more, the assurance strong
That love, which fails of perfect utterance here,
Lives on to fill the heavenly atmosphere
With its immortal song.

By John Greenleaf Whittier

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Iron Sharpeneth Iron

Iron sharpeneth iron, a proverb true;
Fine edge admire—a process due!

Friction—oh, that reality dread—
Allowed to work, will sharpen instead.

Truth exterior, not hard to bear
But cutting of soul—not even dare.

Let not friend become enemy
When words of truth pierce into thee.

Prophet of old— “tis enough,” said he.
Another resigned to the fate of the sea.

In temptation great, as they, so we
Must bravely face truth, honestly.

Refusing, fleeing, excuses to make
Blunts the soul, failed destiny create.

The Lord sharpens the countenance of man
By many tools, but especially the friend.

—Bob Wilson

MAY 30, 2021

THE DEATH OF FRIENDSHIP

Betrayal, Shame and Arrogance

Psalm 55:12 For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him:

13 But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance.

14 We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.

Talebearing

Proverbs 16:28 A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

Proverbs 18:8 The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

Unforgiveness

Proverbs 17:9 He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separated very friends.

MEMORY VERSE: Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD. **Leviticus 19:16; 18.**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Even very close friends can be separated by selfish, hurtful actions such as betrayal, shame, self-exaltation, talebearing, or unforgiveness. To keep a close friendship, one must continually cover faults with love, keep the covenant of trust and loyalty, and live in a spirit of forgiveness.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 55:12 “Reproached”: say sharp things against; defy; taunt; rail against; insult. “Magnify”: rise up against; exalt oneself.

Psalm 55:13 “Mine equal”: from a root which means *arranged in a row*; as *in the same row* as I; in the same rank or importance in society. “My guide”: intimate friend; chief friend. “Mine acquaintance”: from a root meaning “to know”; translated in Job 19:14 as “familiar friend.”

Psalm 55:14 “In company”: with the throng.

Proverbs 16:28 and 18:8 “Whisperer”: from a root which means *roll to pieces*; slanderer; talebearer. “Wounds”: from a primitive root which means *to burn in*; also, *dainty morsels*, a simile of a slanderer’s words; figuratively, *bites greedily swallowed that burn or rankle*. Some “take the verse to describe the avidity with which people swallow in tales of scandal. They find their way to the innermost

recesses of man's nature" (*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*).

Proverbs 17:9 "He that covereth a transgression": he who "passes by and buries in oblivion a transgression that hath been committed against himself; or that concealeth, as far as he may, other men's faults against their friends or neighbours" (*Benson Commentary*). He who "does not strike on the great bell when his neighbour has sinned however grievously against him, does not in a scandal-loving manner make much ado about it, and takes care not thereby to widen the breach between men who stand near to one another, but endeavours by a reconciling, soothing, rectifying influence, to mitigate the evil, instead of making it worse" (*Keil and Delitzsch*). "Seeketh love": finds or obtains the best way, or takes the best course in preserving love and friendship. "Repeateth a matter": brings it up again and again; returns to old grievances.

Leviticus 19:16 "Talebearer": "a trader, a peddler, and is here applied to the person who travels about dealing in scandal and calumny, getting the secrets of every person and family, and retailing them wherever he goes" (*Clarke's Commentary*). "Thou shalt not go after the slanderous (literally, *triple*) tongue," which means, "slander affects three persons: the slanderer, the slandered one, and anyone who repeats the slander" (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*). "Stand against the blood of thy neighbour": to stand silently when you know the truth; or endanger the life of an innocent man by bearing false witness.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The passage in Psalm 55 probably refers to the dark time in David's life when his son Absalom revolted against him and gathered a growing number of Israelites to support him and take the kingship from him. Ahithophel, David's close friend and advisor, fell in with Absalom and advised him against David. After another friend, Hushai, in loyalty to David, defeated Ahithophel's counsel, Ahithophel hung himself in shame (II Samuel 17:1-23).

These verses also seem to point to Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Judas had been chosen just as all the other disciples had been. He had walked with Jesus into the temple and heard Him teach. He had been sent out to heal, cast out devils, and preach alongside the others. No doubt he, at first, had rejoiced in the good news of the kingdom, as Jesus described in the parable of the sower, and had begun to bear

fruit, but the love of money, as a poisonous weed, gradually choked the growth of true riches in his heart. The sorrow expressed so poignantly by the writer was, in prophecy, wrung from the heart of Jesus as He watched His chosen friend slip away. Judas also hung himself in shame and despair.

The verses from Proverbs contain word pictures which so aptly describe talebearing: *roll to pieces, morsels greedily swallowed, burn, peddler, triple tongue*. These are just a few verses from an often-repeated theme in Proverbs, that of the use of the tongue. Life and death are in the tongue's power; its wounds can be like a piercing sword—these ideas show the negative influence. A wholesome tongue is a tree of life; the sweetness of the lips increase learning—these show the positive influence of the tongue.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. To what two Bible examples may the verses from Psalm 55 refer?
2. Discuss the hurt caused by gossip.
3. According to the Word Definitions, what does it mean to “repeat a matter”?
4. What New Testament scriptures refer to covering transgression?
5. How may we apply these scriptures to both our relationships with earthly friends and our friendship with Christ?

LIFE APPLICATION

The pathos and love expressed in David's lament is almost too much; when we extend it to Jesus's sorrow over the unfaithfulness of His friend—well, no wonder Isaiah said it like this: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” No doubt many a friend, pastor, husband, wife, or parent has watched someone beloved walk away. Some have described it as being worse than death. For indeed, the very closest earthly friendship of all is in marriage, and very close to that is the friendship between believers.

It would do us well, then, to solemnly consider the things which cause the demise of a friendship. We would be more careful with our words. We would guard more closely the affections of our hearts. We

would more deliberately and positively and proactively do the things that safeguard the relationship.

Hanging onto little things, and bringing them up over and over again—is it worth the destruction of a marriage? The whispered conversation, hasty email or text message; the decision to “vent” on social media—what price will I pay for such folly? What will it cost me if I do not cover the human failures and foibles of my friend with grace and forgiveness? The one I am to love *as my other self*?

I can think of no more lethal whispering than that of Satan’s whisperings to the soul; here and there, a little doubt sown, a little scorn, a little resentment. He is accurately described as *the accuser of the brethren*. He will accuse Jesus to you. He’ll accuse the saints of God and your own heart, if he can. Don’t allow the whisperings of the enemy to kill your sweet friendship with Jesus or His people.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

True friendship is a rare and precious gift. It is worth taking the time to establish and cherish. The wise man said, "He that hath friends must show himself friendly." There are many ways in which you can build a friendship:

- Give of yourself freely.
- Overlook faults.
- Forgive quickly.
- Rejoice in success.
- Comfort in failure.
- Be vulnerable.

There are also pitfalls to avoid that can destroy or tear down a friendship:

- Being self-centered.
- Giving liberal criticism.
- Being jealous of accomplishments.
- Constantly reminding of past hurts.
- Always being too busy.
- Failing to encourage or compliment.

I am glad that Jesus gave us his perfect example of friendship. He called his disciples his friends and he spoke of Lazarus as his friend. There was also the disciple John who leaned on the bosom of Jesus at the last supper. Jesus taught that there is no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend. He put these words into action when he willingly died for us on Calvary. Why? Because he is our friend. What a friend we have in Jesus!

—LaDawna Adams

JUNE 6, 2021

A TALE OF THREE FRIENDS

Luke 11:5 And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

6 For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?

7 And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

8 I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

9 And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

10 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

MEMORY VERSE: For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. —**Matthew 6:32b**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus told a story of three friends who represent the persons who make up the triangle of intercession: the Father and two “friends” who come to Him in prayer for each other in times of need.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luke 11:5 “At midnight”: at a most inopportune and inconvenient time.

Luke 11:7 “My children are with me in bed”: *or, my children and I have all gone to bed.* “The customs of Orientals differ in this respect from our own. Among them it is not uncommon indeed it is the common practice for a whole family—parents, children, and servants—to sleep in the same room—parents, children, and servants—to sleep in the same room” (*Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*).

Luke 11:8 “Importunity”: unabashed boldness; “literally, because of his shamelessness. The word is not used elsewhere in the New Testament, and exactly expresses the pertinacity that knows no restraint” (*Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers*). The Latin Vulgate adds here: “If he shall continue knocking.” “The sense is obvious: If the churlish and self-indulgent—deaf both to friendship and necessity—can after a positive refusal, be won over, by sheer persistency, to do all that is needed, how much more may the same determined perseverance in prayer be expected to prevail with Him whose very nature is ‘rich unto all that call upon Him’” (Romans 10:12). (*Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus’ first teaching on prayer was given in His Sermon on the Mount. Some time later, the disciples wanted Him to instruct them again (Luke 11:1), and again He gave them the manner of prayer and what to pray. Then he related a parable that opens up to us the secrets of intercession, which, as we have already seen in previous lessons, is a vital part of our friendship with Christ.

In the story there are three friends. The first friend comes to the home of his friend while traveling on a journey. The second friend is unprepared and doesn’t have sufficient food on hand for both his own family and the visiting friend and his family. So he goes to the home of a third friend, asking for enough bread to feed the whole group.

At this point, the story sounds a lot like another story Jesus told about prevailing in prayer—the unjust judge and the widow (Luke 18:1-8). Both stories can be a little confusing. Is Jesus saying that our heavenly Father is like the unjust judge? or, in the case of

these three friends, is Jesus likened to the annoyed friend who refuses to do the favor for friendship's sake, but finally gets up in desperation because his friend won't quit knocking? No, certainly not!

The lesson Jesus wanted to impart was this: God desires for our prayers to be in earnest and not lethargic. He had already taught that it is not a prayer of repetitive words—"much speaking"—that receives an answer; rather, continuing to come to Him because we are convinced He is the ONLY source of help, and that we GREATLY NEED the assistance or favor for which we ask. Unwavering persistence—not giving up— is the attitude of the heart in which God delights.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Share the background verses of this simple story.
2. What is the definition of importunity?
3. What other "prayer" story did Jesus relate that illustrated importunity?
4. Is the parable saying that there is some "inopportune" time to pray?
5. Whom might the three friends in the story represent in "real life"?

LIFE APPLICATION

Friend Number One: "A friend of mine in his journey is come to me." This represents the needy person in our lives for whom God desires us to exercise intercession. Who has "come" into your life today? Obviously, if you are married, your spouse is THE one who has come to you. A spouse comes with needs—spiritual needs, emotional needs, physical needs. I must recognize that I alone cannot meet all of these needs. In intercession, God can make me aware of new ways I can help in these needs, unrecognized by me before I went to God in prayer about it; or He may inspire me with faith to access divine help not known before.

The same way with my children. A child comes into my life totally

dependent upon me to supply their needs. Children have physical, spiritual, and emotional needs as well. I am becoming more aware and convicted about my responsibility to intercede for my spouse and children. “I have nothing” is increasingly the cry. “But, Lord, You do! You know how to meet the individual needs of each child! Show me how this child recognizes and receives love! Give me the wisdom to direct this child to You, that he might learn, as he grows, how to come to you directly for his needs.”

Additionally, we all have friends whom God sends our way, and most likely, we ourselves have been given to someone whom God has chosen to be a friend to us, to help us, to pray for us, to be faithful to us.

Therefore, I am Friend Number Two, who is in the middle, the one interceding and praying for the friend who has come to me. Am I a faithful friend who takes the burden and goes to the only One I know who can supply, and does not give up until help is given? Abraham prayed and interceded (until he asked for pardon and patience for his continual pleading!) for Sodom and his loved ones who lived there. Moses interceded for the people of Israel. Job interceded for his children and later, his friends. Jesus is our Mediator and intercedes for us to the Father. He “ever liveth” to make intercession for us; His life in us is the life of intercession for others.

The Third Friend is the heavenly Father. Jesus shares with us the close relationship He has with His Father; further, He became the Atonement for our sins so that we could approach the Father! He is teaching that our Father is much more than an annoyed friend who finally comes to the door; He is more than a tired, uncaring judge who wearily hands down the desired assistance. No! He “knows” what things we truly need. He “waits” that He may be gracious unto us (Isaiah 30:18), because He is a God of judgment, or method. He has divine purposes and plans, the knowledge of which we cannot see immediately. He has a blessed “afterward” that yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and He sometimes gives us an exercise of faith that we may obtain it (Hebrews 12:11).

An almost-hidden gem of truth is in the phrase, “Although he will not rise and give him because he is his friend.” This describes the mutual trust between friends. “I know you will not be offended if I deny your request right now. You’re my friend! You respect my space

and my right to choose.” or on the other side, “You’re my friend! I will love you if you deny me. But there is no where else I can go. If I keep asking, you will help me, and not be angry with me.”

What a blessed lesson on friendship is given in these few words! May we continue asking, seeking and knocking at the door of our heavenly Friend until we, strengthened by faith and endurance, rejoice to see the “end” of the Lord (James 5:11), and the positive effects of our prayers poured out on our friends and family!

“What a friend we have in Jesus! All our sins and griefs to bear.

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!”

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

During my early school years I read of many who had learned to trust the Lord for their daily needs. One such character that has always stood out in this regard was the German minister and missionary Johann Georg Ferdinand Müller, more commonly referenced as George Müller. Mr. Müller ministered in England for the majority of his life, and after his conversion and call to ministry began to learn about depending solely on God as provider for all things. As his ministry grew he was called to a special care for the souls of children and orphans, and during his lifetime his schools ministered to over 120,000 children and his orphanages cared for over 10,000 orphans (*Wikipedia.org*). The following is just one anecdote portraying his routine of interceding for others before his Heavenly Father:

"One morning, all the plates and cups and bowls on the table were empty. There was no food in the larder and no money to buy food. The children were standing waiting for their morning meal, when Müller said, 'Children, you know we must be in time for school.' Then lifting up his hands he prayed, 'Dear Father, we thank Thee for what Thou art going to give us to eat.'

"There was a knock at the door. The baker stood there, and said, 'Mr. Müller, I couldn't sleep last night. Somehow I felt you didn't have bread for breakfast, and the Lord wanted me to send you some. So I got up at 2 a.m. and baked some fresh bread, and have brought it.'

"Mr. Müller thanked the baker, and no sooner had he left, when

there was a second knock at the door. It was the milkman. He announced that his milk cart had broken down right in front of the orphanage, and he would like to give the children his cans of fresh milk so he could empty his wagon and repair it."

—(<https://www.georgemuller.org/devotional/category/answers-to-prayer>)

—Fari Matthews

JUNE 13, 2021

A FRIEND OF JESUS

Ruth

Ruth 1:16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:

17 Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

John the Baptist

John 3:27 John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.

28 Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.

29 He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.

30 He must increase, but I must decrease.

Paul the Apostle

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

MEMORY VERSE: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. —**John 15:13-15**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Three Bible examples show the characteristics of a true friend of Jesus: Ruth, when she covenanted to remain close to Naomi and the true God; John the Baptist, when he in humility acknowledged the divinity of Jesus and His rightful place as Lord of all; and Paul, when he left behind his own righteousness and set his heart steadfastly toward knowing Jesus, loving Him, and reaching the goal of the high calling of Jesus.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ruth 1:17 “The Lord do so to me...”: “a frequently recurring formula in connection with an oath, by which the person swearing called down upon himself a severe punishment in case he should not keep his word or carry out his resolution” (*Keil and Delitzsch*).

Philippians 3:8 “Excellency”: to hold or rise above; superior.

“Dung”: refuse; that which is to be cast away or thrown to the dogs.

“Win”: gain or acquire.

LESSON BACKGROUND

There are probably many more examples in scripture when we think of knowing Christ, having Him for our friend, and being a devoted, faithful friend to Him; I have chosen the testimonies of three, one in the Old Testament and two in the New Testament.

An Israelite man named Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons had sojourned in the land of Moab during a time of famine. Elimelech soon died and left his wife and sons, each of whom then married Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth. After ten years, both sons died and Naomi chose to return to Judah and her hometown of Bethlehem. She said to each of her daughters-in-law, "Return each of you to your mother's house." They both wept as she kissed them, and wanted to go with her. She again prevailed upon them to return to their homes. This time, Orpah decided to go, but Ruth held on to Naomi.

Ruth's words of friendship and commitment were not only to her mother-in-law. Yes, she committed to go with Naomi back to Bethlehem, stay with her and be a companion and helper to her, leaving her relatives and her homeland. But there was more. She was placing her trust and belief in Naomi's God, the true God, and leaving behind the false gods she had previously worshipped.

The testimony of John the Baptist, who was actually Jesus' own cousin, just six months older, was spoken when, after he had baptized Jesus in the Jordan and identified Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he met up with Jesus again while Jesus was also baptizing those who had repented. John's disciples then came to John with a question about Jesus. John's answer demonstrated an humble belief in Jesus as the Messiah. He called Him the bridegroom, the one who has the bride, but referred to himself as the friend of the bridegroom, who rejoices to hear the bridegroom's voice. His own joy was fulfilled, he acknowledged, when he heard Jesus' voice. He further witnessed of Jesus' heavenly origin and the fullness of the Holy Spirit upon Him. The words of John's personal covenant with Jesus can be found in his simple statement: "He must increase, but I must decrease." John knew that he was only a voice, only a forerunner, a herald to the King of kings. After he was put into Herod's prison, he seemed to have second

thoughts and sent some of his disciples to question Jesus: “Are you really the One?” Jesus sent back an answer to John which must have satisfied him. Shortly afterward, Herodias, Herod’s wife, requested him to be put to death. When Jesus heard the news, he went out into the desert, no doubt to grieve and commune with His Father.

Paul’s covenant of friendship with Jesus is written to the saints at Philippi. He felt the solemn call to “know” Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Having experienced being a blameless, law-keeping Pharisee, he aspired to a superior knowledge and a righteousness which exceeded the righteousness he had known. Now he desired to gain Jesus Himself; to know and experience the power of His resurrection and to fellowship in His sufferings and death. He had been apprehended by this amazing Lord of Glory; stopped and arrested by a blinding heavenly light, and called by a voice like thunder. He wanted to possess, to hold in his hands the very thing which arrested and held him.

In the verse immediately following (Philippians 3:14), Paul says, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” Wait a minute, he just said in verse 12 that he did not count himself as already perfect! But here it is again—the concept of being perfect. Completely open to Christ. Completely surrendered to Him. Feeling everyday that there’s probably more openness and surrender that I’m reaching for, but as far as I understand, I’ve done as much as I know to do. Paul had already suffered much for Jesus. He had been working and preaching and traveling in His service. But here he said that he didn’t count himself to have gained much at all, in comparison with how much more there was to gain in Christ. There was a prize he stretched toward with all earnestness. There was a high calling for which he pressed.

In the memory verse, we repeat the words of Jesus that express that high calling. Not servants—that had to do with the righteousness of the law; but friends. “I have called you friends.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Whom did Ruth entreat with her words of consecration and devotion, and what is the deeper meaning?
2. What did John the Baptist call himself, in relation to Jesus, and

- what deeper truth about Jesus did he recognize by this?
3. With what words did John state his covenant to Jesus?
 4. How did the increase/decrease actually take place?
 5. Toward what “prize” did Paul press, and what particular details of that calling did he desire to experience?

LIFE APPLICATION

In earlier lessons we spoke about the importance of covenant in friendship. There was the example of Abraham’s covenants and David and Jonathan’s covenant. Today we can see the vows and covenants made by Ruth, John the Baptist, and Paul, each very emotional and heartfelt, yet very deliberate and expressive of utmost devotion. The elements of these vows reveal to us the path to our own dedication and covenant with Christ.

First, a vow *to remain*. *“I don’t want to ever leave you. Where you are, that’s where I want to be. Where you must stay, in whatever circumstances you are, I’ll go with you. Even where you die (Calvary!) I want to be there, too. Your God, your Father, will be mine too.”* Truly, that’s the covenant we make if we want to be Jesus’ friend.

Secondly, a vow *to humble myself*. *“Lord, You must increase. Your hold on my life must be greater and greater, while I must let go of myself more and more. May Your kingdom come and possess all of my life. ‘No reserve now to myself will I make.’ Let me go lower, and lower still.”*

Third, a vow *to suffer and die with Him*. As we said in the beginning, this is the ultimate expression of love. Jesus laid down His life for us. We lay down our lives for Him and for the brethren, our friends in Him. “We love Him, because He first loved us.”

In these examples we again see the revelation element of our friendship with Christ. As Ruth pledged her faithfulness, she was given instructions about what to do. As John submitted himself to Jesus, he asked and received answers to his questions. And Paul was told, as he lay prostrate before Jesus on the road to Damascus, “Rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee” (Acts 26:16).

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In many ways, social media has redefined friendship and, I believe, has contributed to the shallowness of modern relationships. “Friend” is no longer just a noun that describes a person, it has become a verb. Facebook has given us the option to *friend*, *unfriend* or be *friended* at the click of a button. We can make a *friend request* to a total stranger without there being even the remotest possibility of ever meeting them. We seek for friends and followers on various social media platforms and somehow feel that it will add significance to our lives.

But what about Jesus? He too, seeks friends and followers but on a far deeper and more intimate level. He doesn’t just want to “lurk” to see where we’ve been and what we’re doing. He genuinely cares and wants to be a part of our lives. His commitment is to help us through our most difficult days—to be there when we need a shoulder to lean on. He understands us like no one else can. He speaks with us when everyone else is tired of listening. He mends our broken hearts and wipes away our tears. He gently nudges us out of our moments of self-pity, leads us beyond our failures and becomes our greatest champion.

He loved us even when we were unlovable. He is a true friend who understands our pain, our emotions, and our frustrations. He was tempted just like we are tempted. The victory that he won is the same victory that he shares with us. He is a generous giver of gifts and of grace. Every need that we will ever have, he willingly supplies.

And the best part is that he took our place and bore our punishment. He died so that we wouldn’t have to die. That is the epitome of a genuine friendship! Oh, what a friend we have in Jesus! How can we not be his followers? How can we not befriend him?

—Darrell Johnson

JUNE 20, 2021

PAUL'S FRIENDS

Barnabas

Acts 9:26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Acts 15:36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.

38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Aquila and Priscilla

Acts 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.

3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

Romans 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

Timothy

Acts 16:1 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek:

2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Philippians 2:19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.

20 For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

21 For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

22 But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.

27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

30a Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life.

Luke

II Timothy 4:11 Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

MEMORY VERSE: I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

—**Philippians 1:3-5**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Some of Paul’s close friends in the gospel work were Barnabas, Aquila and Priscilla, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Onesiphorus and Luke. Without their assistance, the gospel message could not have been shared as fully and in so many places.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 9:26 “Assayed”: try; attempt; endeavor.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Barnabas: His name means, “son of exhortation or consolation.” An early convert to Christianity, he sold a field and gave the proceeds to the disciples. Acts 11:24 describes him as a “good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.” As our scripture portion describes, when Paul was just converted and the other disciples were afraid of him, Barnabas went to allay their fears and recommend Paul. He later brought Paul to be his associate, and a year later the two men were sent to carry alms from the Antioch church to the brethren at Jerusalem. They were ordained as missionaries, and went, taking young John Mark as their helper on a mission trip to the Gentiles. Both were called apostles (Acts 14:14).

Some differences arose between them; first when Barnabas went along with Peter in a course reprov'd by Paul, and later when Paul felt that John Mark had not been a stable support on their journey, and he refused to take him on a later journey. The scripture presents their dissension just as it was, without glossing over it. We can know that the apostles were just human and had their own failings and human errors. We don't know all the details concerning their relationship from that point, but several places (I Corinthians 9:6 and Colossians 4:10) show that Paul continued to hold an esteem for Barnabas, and, writing from prison toward the end of Paul's life, he actually recommended John Mark as being profitable, as well.

Aquila and Priscilla: We are introduced to this married couple in Corinth. It was certainly God who led them together; they had fled east and south to Corinth from Italy, when the emperor had ousted all the Jews from that territory, and “Paul was coming thither from the east and north. He was 'prevented by the Spirit from speaking in Asia,' and driven across the sea against his intention to Neapolis, and

hounded out of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berea; and turned superciliously away from Athens; and so at last found himself in Corinth, face to face with the tentmaker from Rome and his wife" (*MacLaren's Expositions*). Later, God led the two of them into Apollos' life as well; they took him into their instruction, and he became a powerful apostle and preacher of the gospel. Their faithfulness to Paul was shown in a touching way, when he thankfully acknowledged that they had even put their own lives on the line for him.

Timothy: When Paul came to Lystra with Silas, he met Timotheus, and received such good reports about him, he desired to take Timothy with them. Because of the upheavals the Jews were causing about circumcision, he made the decision to have Timothy, whose father was a Greek, circumcised. Timothy accompanied Paul and Silas on their exciting trip through Macedonia, but apparently was not jailed with them at Philippi.

The reference in Philippians lets us know how dear Timothy was to Paul, who regarded him as a spiritual son. No other person is mentioned as often or was with him as constantly as Timothy. He could accompany him on dangerous journeys, and could be sent on difficult missions. He was right there by Paul's side in his last days.

Epaphroditus: We have already mentioned Onesiphorus in an earlier lesson as a true and faithful friend to Paul, but we also want to mention another man who brought gifts to Paul while he was in prison—Epaphroditus. Paul wrote in Philippians 4:18 that this offering was as a "sweet-smelling sacrifice" to God. Paul held him in high esteem and acknowledged that he would have greatly grieved if Epaphroditus had died from the serious illness he had.

Luke: Luke is said to be the author of the gospel bearing his name; also the book of Acts. As a writer, he often accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys. There is only brief mention of him, in obscure ways—a testimony of his humility and lack of self-promotion. The verse we cite in II Timothy is very telling; Luke faithfully went with Paul even to prison. Traditionally thought to have been trained as a physician, no doubt Luke ministered to Paul's physical needs and was a spiritual comfort and boost to him as well.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. His name means “son of consolation.” _____
2. A married couple who risked their lives for Paul. _____
and _____
3. Paul’s son in the gospel, who came to be with him in the end.

4. He brought gifts to Paul in prison, and was healed of a serious
illness. _____
5. He was the quiet, faithful companion on many of Paul’s missionary
journeys. _____

LIFE APPLICATION

One thing is very evident as we make this brief skim throughout the life and labors of Paul: the story is not just about him. If it were not for the unseen hand of the analytical, thoughtful biographer, Luke, we would not even know about the missionary journeys. His details bring to life the story of the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem throughout Asia and westward toward Europe.

We would probably never know Apollos, another mighty minister in the New Testament; and Paul’s life may have been cut short, had it not been for the faithful labors and self-sacrifice of a little lady and her husband, who led somewhat of a migrant life following the apostles and ministering to their needs. Able to carry their trade wherever they went and winning enough souls at one place to have a “church” in their home, their ministry was certainly a comforting boost to the fledgling morning-time church of God.

And Timothy! What a tender relationship these two had, reminiscent of the close fellowship of David and Jonathan. Paul’s gentle reproof and strengthening words to Timothy are an example to the elders and youngers even to this day of the beautiful bonds of friendship between brothers.

The faithful ministries of Epaphroditus and Onesiphorus were essential to the spread of the gospel in the early church. Their faithful service to both Paul in prison and the saints going through famine provides a model for us to follow in being faithful friends and helpers. And there were others—Silas, Phebe, Mary, Urbane, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and on and on!

Paul mentioned Demas and other friends who walked away from him. There was tension between him and Barnabas. People even tried to pit him against Apollos. So things weren't always perfect, just as we experience disappointment and relationship struggles today.

We find answers in the self-sacrifice Christ showed us; we find hints of hope in the later chapters of the story of Paul and Barnabas. We find instruction in the way these humble, early church servants proved their love for Jesus and for each other.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

What a blessing and encouragement it must have been to the heart of the apostle Paul when, sitting in the lonely prison cells especially, his friends sought him out and ministered to him. Whether or not they realized it at the time, by doing so they were ministering to and befriending Jesus. In Matthew 25:40, Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Hebrews 13:1-3 says, "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body."

There are opportunities all around us to be a friend, to minister to someone in need, to spread some cheer, to do some little deed of kindness for Jesus' sake. Let us watch for them.

In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul said, "... ye know the house of Stephanas ... that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." Almost every time I read this scripture I think of the late Sis. Ruth Murphey. I heard her bring a message on this text about 50 years ago during one of the Myrtle, Missouri meetings. She spoke on being "addicted" to ministering for Jesus' sake. She was one who lived what she preached too! I well remember how, when she would hear of someone sick or in need, she would get in her car and drive hundreds of miles to help in any way she could. She would enter the homes of the sick or needy and take over the responsibilities of cooking and cleaning, as well as praying and assisting in the care of the sick one. If she perceived that she could be of help in any way,

she would be there if she could. She brought her final message during the Myrtle, Missouri camp meeting in August 1984, using the text in Proverbs 10:21 that says, “The lips of the righteous feed many” Shortly after leaving that meeting she took her sick bed and the Lord called her to her reward in September 1984.

Truly, “The memory of the just is blessed” (Proverbs 10:7).

—Harlan Sorrell

JUNE 27, 2021

A FRIEND TO THE END

Proverbs 27:10a Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.

Matthew 10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.

33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Luke 21:16 And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.

17 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.

18 But there shall not an hair of your head perish.

19 In your patience possess ye your souls.

John 6:66 From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.

67 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?

68 Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

69 And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

MEMORY VERSE: Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. —**John 13:1**

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Christ, is a faithful and constant friend unto the end; we ought also to be faithful to Him and not forsake Him.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 10:32 “Confess”: to assent; agree to; covenant. To publicly declare to; to declare openly and speak out freely. “the habitual acknowledgment by lip and life, unwithdrawn to the end (*MacLaren’s Expositions*).

Matthew 10:33 “Deny”: refuse; disavow; repudiate; disown; to show estrangement to a thing. (Luke 9:26 says, “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words.”) “Used of those who by cherishing and disseminating pernicious opinions and immorality are adjudged to have apostatized from God and Christ” (*Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*).

Luke 21:16 “Friends”: someone dearly loved in a personal intimate way; a trusted confidante (*HELPS Word Studies*).

Luke 21:19 “Patience”: steadfastness; constancy; cheerful endurance.

John 13:1 “He loved them unto the end”: to the uttermost; absolutely, utterly; with a fulness of love; forever.

LESSON BACKGROUND

As a solemn parting admonition, we are again citing the words of Solomon, “Thine own friend, and thy father’s friend, forsake not” in the final lesson of this series. We have endeavored to prove the unutterable love and awesome significance of Jesus’ call, “I have called you friends.” We have studied the examples of Abraham, Moses, and Job, and have taken their stories apart and applied them in a spiritual way to our present experience. We have used as benchmarks the devotion between David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and the New Testament gospel workers. We have seen the intercession, self-sacrifice, and faithful covenants that are so vital to true friendship, and rejoiced in the revelation that Christ shares with us.

We cannot help but return to the constant, undying love of our Savior, our truest, and dearest, friend as the greatest example of all. In our scriptures today, after the admonition, we are reminded of the awesome majesty of the One who will someday stand before us all as Judge; who will sweep away the unworthy chaff and gather the

wheat into his garner. He will read the hearts of all men—not just the words, but the lives—and rightly discern those who have truly owned and confessed Him as Lord in their lives and those who have denied him. “I have called you friends,” He said, but we must remember that His friends are those who obey Him. “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

The end times will be, as our Lord predicted, times in which many deceivers will be going about, and many will be deceived, many will be offended, love will wax cold, and faith will be hard to find. The temptation for Jesus’ disciples will be to eat and drink with the drunken and smite their fellows (Matthew 24:48-51). This is the atmosphere about which Jesus admonishes, “In your patience possess ye your souls,” speaking about the warm, fervent devotion which suffers long, never fails, and endures to the end, even in an environment which is totally adverse to faithful love.

To those who love Him and obey Him, the end will be the final and most glorious of all the revelations our friend, Jesus, gives us, as we shall “see Him as he is” (I John 3:2), and know, even as also we are known (I Corinthians 13:12).

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Apply “thine own friend, and thy father’s friend” in a spiritual way.
2. The betrayal spoken of by Jesus will be by what close associates?
3. Use that and other passages (such as Matthew 24) to describe the environment in which Jesus’ followers will live in the last days.
4. What firm statement of Peter’s will need to be the testimony of every true believer?
5. Share what it means to be loved by Jesus “unto the end.”

LIFE APPLICATION

“But suppose you do think of forsaking Christ, where are you going to get another friend to take his place? You must have a friend of some sort; who is going to sit in Christ's chair? Whose portrait is to

be hung up in the old familiar place when the old Friend is discarded? To whom are you going to tell your griefs, and from whom will you expect to receive help in time of need? Who will be with you in sickness? Who will be with you in the hour of death? Ah! there is no other who can ever fill the vacuum which the absence of Christ would make. Therefore, never forsake him.

“Let this be your resolve by his grace, instead of forsaking him you will cling to him more closely than ever; you will own him when it brings you dishonor to do so; you will trust him when he wounds you, for "faithful are the wounds of a friend;" you will serve him when it is costly to do it, when it involves self-denial; resolved that by the help of his ever-blessed Spirit without whom you can do nothing, you will never in any sort of company conceal the fact that you are a Christian. Never under any possible circumstances wish to be otherwise than a servant of such a Master, a friend of such a Lord.

“Come now dear young friends who are getting cool towards Christ, and elder friends to whom religion is becoming monotonous, come to your Lord once more and ask him to bind you with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar. You have had time to count the cost of all Egypt's treasure; forego it and forswear it once for all. But the riches of Christ you can never count; so come and take him again to be your All-in-all” (*C. H. Spurgeon*).

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

As I read through this week's lesson a line from a song I've sung numerous times kept coming back to me: "I have a Friend so precious, so very dear to me..." According to Hymnary.org, this hymn was written by a Mrs. Mary Ann Elizabeth Lancaster, née Shorey, born in London, England in 1851. Writing under the nom de plume "L. Shorey" she spoke of her inspiration for the lyrics in 1906. The hymn was "written one Sunday morning in the summer of 1890. While busy with household affairs some thoughts suggested by the sermon heard the previous evening (on Matthew 11:29) at Leytonstone, began to shape themselves in rhyme." The complete hymn was first printed on December 26, 1890 in leaflet form, and was later published in sheet form as *My Lord and I*, set to a melody said to have been sung in France by the persecuted Huguenots [four] hundred years ago.

Is it any wonder that the author's inspiration came from one of the great invitational sermons of Jesus? Matthew 11:29 states: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." A great many Christians down through history have been inspired by those very words to be bound to Christ, to learn of Him, to allow Him to be their "all-in-all," and their dearest Friend, as the song describes so well!

*I have a Friend so precious, so very dear to me.
He loves me with a tender love, He loves me faithfully;
I could not live apart from Him, I love to feel Him nigh;
And so we dwell together, my Lord and I.*

*Sometimes I'm faint and weary, He knows that I am weak;
And as He bids me lean on Him, His help I'll gladly seek;
He leads me in the path of light, beneath a sunny sky;
And so we walk together, my Lord and I.*

*I tell Him all my sorrows, I tell Him all my joys,
I tell Him all that pleases me, I tell Him what annoys;
He tells me what I ought to do, He tells me what to try;
And so we talk together, my Lord and I.*

—Fari Matthews

