
What Does It Mean to Be Friends with Jesus?

by Michael Card

It seems too simple a question, doesn't it? What does it mean to call Jesus your friend? Or more importantly, what does it mean when He calls us His friends? We have over simplified and sermonized endlessly on the question, skirting all around the issue but never getting to the point. We have reduced the profound concept of becoming His "friends" to the shallow notion of being His "buddies."

Perhaps the most simple and direct route is to go to the Gospels and simply talk to Jesus' closest friend.

Of course, that person is Simon Peter. After their first meeting on the shore of the lake of Galilee in John 1, it seems Simon rarely left Jesus' side. In time Jesus even moved into Simon's large home in Capernaum, which was located just one door down from the synagogue. If Jesus could ever be said to have had a home, it was Simon's.

Theirs was a genuine friendship with its ups and downs. Peter is the only disciple to say "no" to Jesus. Jesus saves his highest praise and most severe rebukes for Simon Peter. Though Jesus surely was close to more than one of His disciples, theirs is the only fully-formed friendship in the gospels. Let's look briefly to their friendship as a paradigm and see what we can find in answer to our original question: What does it mean to be friends with Jesus?

***Being friends with Jesus means allowing yourself to be defined by Him. (Mt 16:13-23)**

Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" It is Peter who responds, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God." In a few moments Jesus answers back, "You are Peter, the Rock." Real friends help to define each other. In the give and take of genuine relationship, as "iron sharpens iron," the imprint of the true friend becomes indelible on the soul of the other.

***Being Jesus' friend means hearing Him say, "Don't be afraid." (Mt 17:7)**

The Synoptics tell us that the Three were terrified as they witnessed the Transfiguration. It was the only time any of His disciples would see His unveiled glory. Mark tells us Peter did not know what to say he was so afraid. Matthew says that after it was all over, Jesus told the Three, "Don't be afraid." Most often when He was revealed in a new dimension Jesus had to comfort them with those words. When their nets were miraculously

filled for the first time in Luke 5, Jesus responds, "Don't be afraid, from now on you'll catch men." When he approached the boat, walking on the water he called out, "I am, don't be afraid." (Mk 6:50) It is what he tells the women at the tomb as well. (Mt 28:10)

In time, if we walk long enough with Jesus as our friend, He will reveal Himself in newer, deeper and sometimes even fearful ways. "Don't be afraid," He whispers. "I am." If we don't have to be afraid of God, we don't have to be afraid of anything.

***When Jesus is your friend you are certain there is Someone in your life who understands your fragileness, struggles and hurts. (Heb 2:18)**

Jesus never called Peter or any of the others to do anything or to go anywhere He had not already been. Before He calls them to become "fishers of men," Jesus demonstrates how it is done by first catching them. Before He sends them out to speak His word and do His work, Jesus spends a period of concentrated time preparing them. He would not call upon them to take up the cross until He had first demonstrated that He was determined to go on before them to Golgotha.

As we come closer to Jesus as our Friend, as we get to know Him better through His Word, we will understand that he experienced the full range of human weaknesses. In the gospels we see him hungry and thirsty. We see him misunderstood by his own family. We see a man who tasted all our sufferings during His lifetime on earth and who took upon Himself all our sin and sorrows on the cross.

***When Jesus is your friend you know you will never be excluded by your failures or shortcomings. (Rom 8:38)**

Even though Peter had denied even knowing Jesus to the stragglers in the courtyard at Caiaphas', later, when He is raised from the dead, Jesus sends word, "Tell the disciples...and Peter I am going ahead of you to Galilee." (Mk 16:7) Even though Luke tells us their eyes met across that courtyard when Jesus heard Peter utter his third denial, still Jesus was willing to turn and go from that place and die on the cross for Peter and for you and for me, knowing the worst in all of us.

We cannot earn more of His love with good behavior. Even as we do not forfeit His love when we fail. He loves us as we are and not as we should be. We don't change so that He will love us. He loves us so we can change. "It is His kindness that leads us to repentance." (Rom 2:4)

These have been only a few fragmented attempts to answer our original question. I leave the question to you now and encourage you to lean into the Scriptures. Listen to your life and find more and better answers on your own. How has Jesus defined you? When have you heard Him say, "Don't be afraid?" Has He met you in your weakness? Have you experienced His unqualified love?

I encourage you to consider Jesus' own answer to this question. You can start by looking at John 15:8-17.

