

Friendship Love

Rich Nathan

May 21 & 22, 2016

The Father Loves You

John 15:9-16

Today I want to talk about friendship. Not only friendship with each other, but friendship with God. Some of my favorite songs are about friendship. I still thoroughly enjoy it when a music festival closes with all the bands on the stage and they sing the Beatles classic, "I Get By with a Little Help from my Friends".

I love Bill Withers old song, "Lean on Me".

Lean on me when you're not strong,
And I'll be your friend,
I'll help you carry on

I even like singing along with Toy Story's "You've Got a Friend in Me" by Randy Newman.

Picture of Toy Story

Friendship is one of the chief ways, along with romance and family, that we express love to another human being.

The Expression of Love

But even though we have so many popular songs about friendship, and even though there are so many buddy movies out in the movie theaters, including superhero buddy movies

Pictures of current superhero buddy movies

Sociologists have labeled our period of history as

The Age of Loneliness

Right now, sociologists tell us that most people experience

The Absence of Friends

Just a few years ago, there was a very disturbing study which indicated that more Americans than ever have no one that they can confide in regarding personal problems and troubles. See, there are some things we only discuss with people who are very close to us. And nearly one-quarter of all Americans say that there is no one in their lives who they can talk to about really important matters. There is no one they can use as a sounding board for very personal matters. And the average American has only 2 non-family members to confide in.

There was a major multi-year sociological study that was completed by sociologists from Duke University and the University of Arizona. They discovered that compared to a similar study done in 1985 the number of people that Americans have in their closest circle of confidantes has dropped from an average of 3 to 2 today. In other words, there has been about a 50% drop in the average number of folks that people can confide in. And compared to 1985 nearly 50% more people say now that their spouse is the only person they can confide in. But if their spouse gets sick, or they have trouble in the relationship with their spouse, this means there is a huge number of folks who have no one to turn to for help at all. One of the sociologists said that the image of those folks standing on their roofs in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina still haunts her because those people did not know anyone with a car.

And that is a picture of America – that in times of trouble more and more of us find that we have no safety net of close friends and confidantes.

You know, when you're in kindergarten it's really easy to make a friend. Do you remember? In kindergarten you just walk up to someone and you say, "You wanna be my friend?" And they say, "OK." And then you start playing together.

But you sure can't do that in middle school without having someone think you are weird. It's particularly hard to make friends once we get out of college. We often talk about the loneliness of the elderly, but there was a recent study that indicated that young adults out of college often feel more lonely and worry about feeling alone and depressed more than people who are over 65. This is a huge problem because there is a link between loneliness and depression, loneliness and anxiety, loneliness and addiction, loneliness and suicide. And of course, one of the many factors that people who study loneliness have pointed to is the cheapening of the meaning of friend through social media outlets like Facebook and Instagram.

The most reproduced cartoon in *New Yorker* magazine history is a 23-year old cartoon by Peter Steiner.

Cartoon

The basic point is that if your only connection with someone is through the internet, through email, through social media – that other person is probably not your friend. There is no substitute for face-to-face meeting with a real flesh and blood person.

There are tons of reasons why we need deep connections with people outside of our families. I just want to mention two obvious impacts that friends have.

The Impact of Friends

The first really important impact that friends have is on our health.

The Impact on Health

Over the last year, scientists have actually identified the links between loneliness and illness digging down to the molecular level. They've discovered the mechanisms by which being lonely will result in a person being much more unhealthy. Being lonely activates the genes that are responsible for inflammation and it turns down the activity of genes that produce antibodies to fight infection.

Being lonely makes a person feel constantly on alert. You go through life on high alert. Let me give you some frightening statistics.

- Loneliness is associated with a 29% increased risk of a heart or angina attack
- Loneliness is associated with a 32% increased risk of having a stroke
- Loneliness is as potent a cause of early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- Loneliness is twice as deadly as obesity
- Loneliness increases the risk of dementia, high blood pressure, alcoholism and accidents

In short, we human being were not created to go it alone. The individualistic mindset of America that devalues deep community and devalues face-to-face friendships with people that we can share anything with, our individualistic culture is literally killing us.

But friendship doesn't just have an impact on our health. Friendship has an impact on history.

The Impact on History

You know, almost anyone growing up in America today is familiar with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. but a lot of folks don't know very much about his best friend, the Rev. Ralph Abernathy, Sr.

Picture of MLK and Abernathy

There's a wonderful scene in the movie, *Selma*, where King is sitting in jail wondering about where the Civil Rights Movement is headed and whether it's going to succeed. And his cell mate, Ralph Abernathy, responds with a lesson to him from the Gospel of Matthew about the futility of worrying.

These two men were inseparable during the Civil Rights Era. They were together at the birth of the Civil Rights Movement and the Montgomery Boycott. In fact, their churches were just down the street from each other in Montgomery. They were co-founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. You look back at old photos, they're always marching arm-in-arm. They ate together with their spouses and kids who called each of the men "uncle".

Martin made virtually no decisions without consulting his best friend, Ralph. And Ralph was there when Martin was murdered. He just went into the bedroom to put on a little cologne when the shots rang out and killed Dr. King on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. They really believed they were like Jesus' disciples being sent out two-by-two into the world.

They weren't the only best friends to change the course of civil rights. In the area of women's rights there's a new book out for young adults titled, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: A Friendship that Changed the World*

Picture of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony on a porch

Elizabeth was married, she had many kids. Susan never married, she was a Quaker. She became a teacher. Yet the two of them travelled the country together and gave speeches in favor of women's rights for 51 years. Here's what one newspaper columnist said on the occasion of Elizabeth's 80th birthday in 1895.

"At the present day, every woman who seeks the legal custody of her children, or the legal control of her property, every woman who finds the doors of a college or university opening to her; every woman who administers a post-office or a public library; every woman who enters upon a career of medicine, law, or theology, every woman who teaches a school, or tills a farm or keeps a shop, everyone who drives a horse, rides a bicycle, skates at a rink, swims at a summer resort, plays golf or tennis at a public park or even snaps a [Kodak camera]; every such woman I say owes her liberty largely to you and [Susan B. Anthony]!"

In the last century, two entire worlds were created because two friends

Picture of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien

Spurred one another on to write the Narnia Chronicles where Lewis created the world of Narnia. And the Lord of the Rings Trilogy where Tolkien created the world of Middle Earth.

Friends can change the world. Friends can create worlds together.

I've been doing a series titled, "The Father Loves You" and we've been looking at different aspects of God's love for us. I believe there's nothing more foundational for doing life well than that we know in the deepest part of your being that God loves us. So, today as we continue in that series my message is simply titled, "Friendship Love".

Let's Pray.

John 15:9-16

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

Now in verse 10, Jesus promises his followers an experience of God's love.

The Experience of Love

Slide John 15:10

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Previously, Jesus promised his followers an experience of peace.

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

And then in John 15:11, Jesus promises his followers an experience of joy

John 15:11

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Why is it worth it to become a follower of Christ? What do you get out of it? Well, among many other things that you get out of it Jesus says you get to experience love and peace and joy in your life. Wouldn't you like to feel loved? Wouldn't it feel great to feel loved by God? You not only get to feel love, you get to feel peace. Is there anyone in the world who would say, "I don't really need to have more peace in my life. I got all the peace I ever need. I never get anxious, I never get disturbed, I never get worried."

And along with love and peace, Jesus says that he'll make you happy. He'll give you his joy.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Christian life is not just a set of rules or obligations. Do this. Don't do that. That's the way Christianity is often portrayed in the media, and that's, unfortunately, the experience that many people have growing up in religiously rigid families or in Fundamentalist churches.

"You know, my experience of Christianity was nothing but rules," they say. I don't know, parents, if you've ever seen this basic principle regarding disciplining our kids:

Rules without relationship —————> Rebellion

God does not give us rules without first establishing relationship. Throughout scripture, before God gives a command he gives people an experience of himself.

Here's what we read in Romans 5:5

Romans 5:5

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

What you see in the Bible is this wonderful connection between the Holy Spirit and God's love. And it is even indicated by Paul's choice of words here in Romans 5:5 when he speaks of love being poured out into our hearts. This is not a common expression in the Bible, "poured out". In fact, there are only a couple of usages in the scriptures of "poured out". One is in reference to the blood of Jesus that the Bible says was "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." And the other is in reference to the Holy Spirit. I think this passage is sort of a harkening back to Joel's prophecy in Joel 2:28-29 when the Old Testament prophet Joel, prophesying about Pentecost, says:

Joel 2:28-29

"And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

The idea is really very simple. In the Apostle Paul's mind, the experience of God's love is the result of the experience of God's Spirit. Saying that God's love is poured out in our hearts is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit is poured out in our hearts.

So Paul is saying very simply that the way we get through painful times is by a deep experience of the Holy Spirit. He is saying that knowing that God loves you when everything around you is pointing in the other direction, where all your circumstances are screaming at you saying that God doesn't love you; God doesn't care about you; maybe there is no one out there looking out for you; maybe God has turned his back on you and doesn't hear your prayers, the way that you keep going is knowing that God is for you and that you will ultimately be embraced by God in glory, is the result of an internal work of the Holy Spirit in your soul.

God's love is not simply a deduction that you draw out from the pages of scripture. God's love is not simply the result of a logical process in your mind. Paul says that you are carried along in painful times not by your own strength. You may have no strength left. If it was up to you and me, we absolutely would throw in the towel and give up on our faith. But we surprise ourselves. We keep going; remarkably we keep going because the Holy Spirit is carrying us along. It is so important that you have an experience of the Holy Spirit.

There is a massive study of Paul's letters that was just completed by one of the foremost New Testament scholars named Gordon Fee. He is a New Testament scholar of the first rank. Here is what Gordon Fee says about the Holy Spirit:

The Holy Spirit in Paul's writing was always thought of in terms of the personal presence of God. The Spirit is God's way of being present. Whatever else the Holy Spirit was for the apostle Paul, he was always an experienced reality.

Whatever else he was, the Holy Spirit is always experienced. There was no thought in the New Testament of a Christianity that is not felt and experienced.

Paul in Romans 5:5 is answering the question how can I know that God loves me and a part of his answer is "because I feel his love." Notice the location of the love of God that is poured out. Paul says in Romans 5:5: "...because the love of God is poured out". Where? In my head? In my mind? The love of God is poured out in our hearts, the deepest part of us, the place of our experience and our feelings.

You will find, throughout the Bible, that the place of the Holy Spirit's activity is chiefly in the heart. What many of us need to pray for to connect up your head, what you have been taught, what you have believed, your doctrine, with your heart, what you're experiencing, what you feel. The one foot drop between head and heart is sometimes the greatest distance a Christian has to cross. To feel the Holy Spirit's presence is to feel God's love which gives us assurance of our ultimate salvation.

You say, "I have not experienced as much of Christ's love or Christ's peace or Christ's joy as I want." Or "I don't know if I've ever felt God's love in an unmistakable way. How can I feel more of God's love?"

Jesus says this in

John 15:10

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

Jesus tells us how to remain in and experience his love. It is not mystical experience. It is not inner healing. It is not right doctrine. All of those things have their place. But Jesus makes it all so simple for us in verse 10. "If you keep my commands, you will experience my love."

God's love for you and me is unconditional. Our obedience doesn't provoke him to love us and our disobedience doesn't provoke to stop loving us. But if you and I are to live in an experience of God's love, stay rooted in God's love, live out of a center in the love of God, then there is a condition. And the condition is that you and I obey Jesus' commands. Anyone who is in conscious disobedience to the commands of Jesus and thinks that they are experiencing the love of God is just kidding themselves. We can't live like hell and experience the love of heaven. It is impossible.

So, if you are conscious of something that Jesus is telling you to do, and you refuse to do it; or you are conscious of something that Jesus is telling you not to do, and you keep on doing it, you are not going to experience in any ongoing way, in any continual way, in any remaining, abiding way the love of Jesus for you.

Obedience is linked to an experience of God's love over and over again.

Graphic of Experiencing God's Love

Over a dozen times in John's writings, he links obeying God with experiencing God's love. For example, here's what we read in John 14:23-24

John 14:23-24

Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

Here’s what we read in

John 15:14

You are my friends if you do what I command.

Here’s what we read in

1 John 3:24

The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

You say, “I want to experience more of God’s love in my life. How can I do that?” Jesus said, “Obey me.”

Be obedient to what I’m telling you to do and you will experience more of my love in your life. So, in what areas should a Christian obey God? When you think about obeying God, in what areas should you obey God if you want to experience more of his love? Let me make this really simple. You know, many religions have a basic confession of faith. For Jews, the basic confession of faith is called the *shema*. It comes from the book of Deuteronomy.

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.”

For Muslims, the confession of faith is called the *shahada*. There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.

Is there a similar confession of faith for Christians? There is! The most basic confession for Christians is contained in three words.

Jesus is Lord

Here’s what we read in Romans 10

Romans 10:9

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

So, in what way should we obey in Jesus? Over what areas? Should a Christian say, “Well, Jesus is Lord here.” For Christians, we’d say that Jesus needs to be Lord of all or he’s not Lord at all. In other words, the lordship of Christ needs to be over every dimension of our lives. We need to obey Christ in everything. Jesus is to be Lord over us intellectually. That means that I need to submit my thoughts to Jesus. Jesus asserts his authority of our minds when he says, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.” We constantly, as followers of Christ, submit our minds to Jesus. What we believe about God. What we believe about men and women. What we believe about the sacredness of life. About sexuality. About immigrants. About money. About politics. All of this is the result of submitting our minds to Christ.

We submit to Christ as Lord, not only intellectually, but relationally. The way we do our relationships in marriage and our commitment in marriage. The way that we honor our parents. The way that we choose to forgive those who have offended us. The way we carry on our friendships. The way we relate to our customers and clients. The way we relate to our boss. The way relate to our co-workers. The way we relate to those in our small group. The way we relate to our larger community. The choice to forgive is a chief way we submit our lives to Christ as our Lord. All of those things are governed by this confession, “Jesus is Lord!”

Intellectually, relationally, vocationally, Jesus calls us and we obey. He calls us to serve in his church. He calls some of us to leave our homes and our lands and go to another country, another place to spread the good news of the gospel. He calls some of us to different professions. To teach. To be a student. To medicine. To home repair. To homemaking. If Jesus is Lord then we need to obey his call to the vocations that he has given us as father, as mother, as son, as daughter, sister, brother, friend. If Jesus is Lord we’re called to obey him morally, spiritually, financially. As we obey and yield ourselves increasingly to him, we experience him. Again, if Jesus isn’t Lord of all in our lives he is not Lord at all. The key to our personal experience of Christ’s love is to obey him.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Christian martyr who was murdered by the Gestapo in Nazi Germany right before the end of the Second World War, said this,

“Only the person who follows the command of Jesus without reserve and submits unresistingly to his yoke, finds his burden easy and under its gentle pressure receives the power to persevere in the right way. The command of Jesus is hard, unutterably hard for those who try to resist it. But for those who willingly submit, the yoke is easy and the burden is light.”

For those who surrender and submit in all ways to Jesus, those people get to experience God’s love. Jesus describes his love as friendship.

The Exposition of Love

John 15:12-16

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

Jesus here describes love for us in terms of his friendship with us. These words about friendship were not spoken in a vacuum. The ancient world did a lot of thinking and writing about what it meant to be a friend. Jesus mentions three things that characterized friendship in the ancient world and I want to finish by speaking about these three qualities of friendship because I think we see them in this text.

The first is

The Quality of Self-Sacrifice

John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

The ancient world affirmed that a real friend will sacrifice themselves for you. In the first century, it was common in both Greek culture as well Jewish culture to talk about the importance of self-sacrifice. What makes Jesus' words different than the Greek and Jewish writers is that Jesus didn't just talk about self-sacrifice and laying down his life for his friends. He actually did it. Jesus' whole life is an expression of the ideal of friendship. His whole life is an exposition of self-sacrificial friendship. He embodies friendship.

Let me make this really personal and practical for you by asking you a question. Are you a real friend to anyone? You say, "Of course I am!" Let's not answer so quickly. Is there anyone outside of your family that you regularly sacrifice yourself for? To be a friend means that you're willing to pay a price. Is there anyone that you pay a price for? See, in America we value self-sufficiency. We should meet our own needs. Jesus values self-sacrifice.

Jesus paid an enormous price to turn us who were his enemies into friends of God.

There is a great cost to long-term friendship. Do you know that? The reason why most people don't have long-term friends is because they aren't willing to pay the cost. The friendship becomes inconvenient.

- I have a new love in my life, so my friend is now inconvenient.
- My friend is going through a difficult time. They are depressed and are a drag to be around. They aren't nearly as much fun as they used to be, so I'm going to drop them as a friend. So I move on.
- My friend no longer works with me. It's harder to connect. Maintaining the friendship is just too inconvenient so I moved on.
- My friend is always sick so if I want to see them, I've got to go to their house.
- My friend is not traveling in the circles that I want to advance in. So I moved on.
- My new friends don't really like my old friend so I guess I can't be friends with my old friend. So I moved on.

True friendships are expensive. And if you want to be a friend, true friendship does not come cheaply. Jesus says I'm that kind of friend. I'm the kind of friend that never moves on no matter how inconvenient being a friend with you becomes! Jesus offered up his life to be our friend.

I love stories of self-sacrifice. Let me share with you this story:

A century ago, the *New York Times* printed a story about a priest and a boy, who drowned after rescuing many people. It took place in 1906 at a college in Chicago named St. Bede College, a Catholic college for boys. The boys went skating one day with a young, handsome, priest.

More than twenty of the boys grouped and the photographer was waiting for them to become settled for a picture, when the ice opened under their feet.

In an instant the boys were struggling in ten feet of water. The ice was thinner than they had thought, and broke into fragments as the struggling boys grasped it.

Father Simon was a short distance away when the ice broke. As quickly as he could he reached the hole, throwing off cassock and coat as he ran. Then, ordering the other boys to keep away from the cracked ice, he plunged into the river.

One by one he carried five of the boys to the edge of the ice and held them there until the others pulled them to safety.

In all there were twenty boys in the water. Reuter, who was a senior, was one of them, but he could swim. It would have been an easy matter for him to have dragged himself on to the strong ice, but the priest called him to help those who could not swim. Reuter obeyed. Two of the boys who were saved owe their lives to him. When young Reuter had rescued the second boy his strength was exhausted, but he tried to swim out again for another, one of the two who were drowned. The effort was too great, however, and Reuter, together with the boys he would have saved, sank.

Meanwhile the priest was in the water dragging the boys to the edge of the ice and calling instructions to those who were pulling them to safety. When he had rescued all but one of the boys then above water Father Simon clung for a moment to the ice. His strength was gone, and his pupils begged him to save himself. But the priest struck out again. At the last he failed. Numbed and exhausted, he was forced to give up, and with a last glance toward the boy for whom he gave up his life he sank.

By this time other priests had arrived, and while Father Simon and the boy disappeared, the other priests with crosses raised high in the air, read the services for the dying.

John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

There's another quality of friendship that Jesus mentions. We read about it in verse 15

John 15:15

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

The Quality of Self-Disclosure

One commentator named R.V.G. Tasker says this,

"Christ offers an intimacy with God which not even the greatest men knew before he came into the world. The idea of being the friend of God also has a background. Abraham was the friend of God.... But this phrase is lit up by a custom which obtained both at the courts of the Roman emperors and the Eastern kings. At these courts, there was a very select group of men called *The Friends of the King, or the Friends of the Emperor*. At all times they had access to the king... He talked to them before he talked to his generals, his rulers, and his statesmen. The friends of the king were those who had the closest and most intimate connection with him. Jesus calls us to be his friends and the friend of God. That is a tremendous offer!"

There is a tremendous frankness of speech that Jesus says he allows to his friends. He speaks to his friends openly and frankly and he allows us to speak openly and frankly to him.

There is a word that is used several dozen times in the New Testament. The Greek word is "parresia." It is sometimes translated "boldness," or "confident." Sometimes it is translated "outspokenness," or "speaking plainly." The word was borrowed from Greek politics. It describes the right of a free citizen to express his opinion when the city

assembly got together. It had to do with the right of a free citizen to say everything that was on his mind, to speak plainly. And it also had to do with the courage to speak one's conviction.

The word "parresia" also was borrowed from the world of friendship, where one friend didn't hold anything back from another friend. They didn't have to butter up or flatter a friend before speaking plainly.

This word, parresia, is used regarding our prayers to God on a number of occasions. For example, in Hebrews 4:16 we read this:

Heb 4:16

16Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Now, the NIV translates the word "with confidence." The old King James Version reads this way:

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

But the one that I think comes closest to capturing the meaning of the word, parresia, is the Message version of the Bible. Listen to this paraphrase:

We don't have a high priest who is out of touch with our reality. He's been through weakness and testing, experienced it all—all but the sin. So let's walk right up to him and get what he's so ready to give. Take the mercy, accept the help.

Let's walk right up to him. There is a frankness, a boldness, an outspokenness that you find with people in the Bible regarding their relationship with God.

Let me ask you something. Are you able to be completely self-disclosing with anyone in the world? No secrets, no hiding, no cover-up. Because if you are, that person is your friend. Are you able to be completely open and honest and utterly transparent with God? Because if you are able to be completely frank and open with God, then you are saying "God, you are my friend."

There are three qualities of friendship that Jesus mentions. The first, as I said, is the quality of self-sacrifice. The second is the quality of self-disclosure. And the third is found in verse 16

John 15:16

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.

The Quality of Sovereign-Choosing

Here is the idea: we think that we have chosen our friends. The truth is if you change the date of your birth by six months, or if your parents didn't move into the house they did on your street, or if you didn't choose the college you decided to go to, or if you were put in a different unit in the Army, or if you didn't work right across the hall, you wouldn't be friends with this other person. Christians understand what no one else understands, that is that friends are chosen for us by Sovereign God.

God is at work in friendship. Christians understand that friendship is not just having shared interests, a shared love of sports or shared opinions about something or shared hobbies. Christians say that it is God who sovereignly arranged for us to be friends. Jesus says, "You didn't choose me, I chose you." And we would say, "I did not just choose my friends. Friendship is chosen for me."

That's the beauty of being involved in church and in joining a church small group. Because in both cases, you are trusting God to pick your friends – not based simply on common backgrounds or common interests, but on a common friendship with Jesus.

If you have chosen to trust in Christ as your Savior and you have submitted your life to Christ as your Lord, the friendship that Christ gives you spills over into an experience of friendship with others in the world. Friendship is a gift of God's love. He invites us to be his friends. And then he invites us to share that friendship with others that he chooses for us.

Let's pray.

Friendship Love

Rich Nathan
May 21 & 22, 2016
The Father Loves You
John 15:9-16

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