

# John 15:1-17

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, we've been looking at what does it mean to be ministry-minded? What does it mean to serve? And it all starts, doesn't it, with the servant king, the Lord Jesus, the son of man who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And then we looked at what does it mean to serve as sons of the Father. And then last week, as the bride of the king, and this morning I want us to look at what does it mean to serve as friends of the boss.

I look at John 15 and verse 15. It's a remarkable verse. John 15 and verse 15. Jesus says, no longer to his disciples do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends. I've called you friends. It's the ultimate name-dropping, isn't it? To call Jesus friends. Or to say we are not only friends of Jesus, but that Jesus regards you and I as his followers as his friends.

[ 1 : 17 ] It's the ultimate in name-dropping because his name is above every name. And so if you know someone who's got a really well-known name, you'll know people like this.

They drop it, don't they, into every conversation. Some of you will remember Dan Quayle. It's ancient now, but he was the vice president to George Bush Senior.

I think I've got that right. And in their kind of vice presidential debate, Dan Quayle, who was not short on confidence, compared himself to John F. Kennedy.

And Lloyd Benson, who he was debating, came back. And Lloyd Benson said this, Senator, Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. And Senator, you are no Jack Kennedy.

That is very clever. It's a double whammy, isn't it? Because in one breath, this guy was able to tell the nation I was friends with John F. Kennedy.

[ 2 : 17 ] And at the same time, he made Dan Quayle look like a dirty name. He made a fool of him. And name-dropping, there's a real skill to it. There's a way of doing it.

Somebody has said drop names are like toupees, you know, a wig. And badly done, they are obvious and show bad taste. Carefully deployed, they weren't wonders. They're kind to laugh. But I want us to think about this morning what a great privilege it is to have the name of Jesus associated with our name. I want you by the end of this sermon to be bold enough to name-drop. To drop the name of Jesus this week, wherever you go. And so let's explore, what does it mean to be friends with Jesus? To have Jesus as your friend? And not only to call him friend, but to have him call us friends, which is not quite the same thing.

I no longer call you servants, but friends. I don't know how many friends you've got on Facebook. Maybe hundreds. Some of you might have thousands.

[ 3 : 28 ] But in real life, you don't measure friends by quantity, do you? There's a proverb that's 3,000 years old. It's a proverb of Solomon's.

It's very up to date. It says this, A man of many companions may come to ruin. But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. How many friends do you have on Facebook?

Probably lots. But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. And Jesus is that friend. And I no longer call you servants, he says to his disciples, but friends.

And not to have a friend is really important, isn't it? To have a friend is important. Some of the saddest words I've ever read were by John Paul Getty. He was one of the richest men in the 20th century.

He was a multi-millionaire many times over. And he's reported to have said at the end of his life, I've never known love. I've never known what it is to have a friend.

[ 4 : 30 ] And I think that shocks us. I hope it shocks us. It saddens us. For a human being, at the end of their life, no matter how much money they've made, how much they've managed to

accumulate for themselves, the fact that they never had a friend, it's tragic.

And why do we find it tragic? We find it tragic because my first point is this. We were made for friendship. We were made for friendship. In the book of Genesis, in the account of how God created the world, we're told that human beings, you, every human being that's ever been made, has been made in God's image.

You have been made in God's likeness. That's the explanation for who you are. We've been made in God's image. And God is the three-in-one God, isn't he?

Look at verse 9 of John chapter 15. Look what it says there. Can you notice there are three loves intertwined in verse 9.

As the Father has loved me, Jesus says, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

[ 5 : 45 ] As the Father loves me. That is the love of the Father for his Son. As the Father has loved me, and then there is the love of Jesus for his disciples, so I have loved you. And then there is the love that you and I are to have for one another as Jesus' disciples, which we are to remain in.

And it's all bundled together in that one verse, isn't it? A three-fold cord is not easily broken. So as the Father has loved me, Jesus says, that's where it all begins.

In the beginning, God. Before the beginning was God. There was something before there was anything.

God is not some solitary God. He's not like Allah on his own, like Muslims believe. But in the beginning, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That's what we mean when we talk about God being love. You see, before the beginning, before there was anything, there was God, there was friendship, there was relationship.

[ 6 : 53 ] There was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Do you remember how John puts it in John 1? That great passage, he says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God, and the Word there is literally towards God.

There was a relationship, a face-to-face relationship in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There was a living, and a loving, and a delighting in one another.

Face-to-face, they were planning, and communicating, and sharing with each other. In the beginning, there was friendship. It's at the bottom of everything. It's at the roots of all reality.

It's why in Genesis chapter 2 and verse 8, there is this jarring note. We read through the early chapters, and Genesis 2 verse 8 is shocking, because in Genesis 1, when there's an account of creation, we're told that it was good at the end of each day.

It was good, it was good, it was good, it was good. And then you come to Genesis chapter 2 verse 8, and it was not good. And you haven't got to the fall yet.

[ 8 : 06 ] Sin has not entered into this world and ruined creation. It was not good, Genesis 2 verse 8, for the man to be alone. It was not morally wrong for him.

The fall hasn't happened yet. It was not evil. It was not sinful. That hasn't happened yet. But we are told it was not good for the man to be alone.

Adam was lonely. And he was lonely, not because he was sinful. Sometimes we are lonely, aren't we, because of our sinfulness.

And we can't live with one another because of our selfishness. But that wasn't why Adam was lonely. He wasn't lonely because he was selfish, or sinful.

Adam wasn't lonely because he was imperfect. Adam was lonely because he was made in the image and the likeness of God.

[ 9 : 12 ] And he needed someone to love. He needed someone to share his life with. He needed someone to talk to. He needed someone to work with. And it's important for you and I to see that. So it may be this morning, if you are lonely, it doesn't necessarily mean that there's anything wrong with you.

It's because you've been made for friendship. We need friends because we need God. And we've been made in the image and likeness of God. And Jesus here invites us into that friendship.

No other religion does this. No other deity does this. No other God invites you into friendship and into relationship.

But as the Father has loved me, Jesus says, so I have loved you. And I want your joy to be complete. I want you to remain in this kind of relationship.

This kind of friendship that creation demands. But the cross defines. Look at verse 13. Greater love has no one than this.

[10:19] That someone lay down his life for his friends. Not only is it that we were made for friendship, but the second point is this.

Christ died to give me that friendship. It's what Jesus died for. So don't forget the context here. Don't forget, this is the night before he goes to the cross.

And Jesus is facing up to what he's about to go to. It's staring him in the face now. He knows what is going to happen. And it's something he doesn't go into stoically, does he?

He cries and cries out to his Father. He sweats blood in contemplation about what's about to happen. Why should he go through with that?

He's about to make the supreme sacrifice. Greater love has no man than this. That he lays down his life for his friends. And you are my friends, he says to his followers.

[11:24] And tomorrow I'm going to go out and I'm going to lay down my life in the most gruesome and violent and awful way. And isn't this the most amazing thing? Death usually ends a friendship.

Isn't that why it's so, so painful? Death normally ends a friendship. But in the case of Jesus, his death secures the friendship.

It's interesting, isn't it, when you compare this passage with Romans chapter 5. And in Romans chapter 5, Paul says, it was while we were his enemies.

Jesus says to, Jesus says in John, we are his friends. You've got to hold both those things together. We are his friends.

That greater love than this. There is no greater love than this. That a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends and I'm going to lay down my life for you. Paul says, it was when we were powerless. It was when we were sinners.

[12:26] It was when we were his enemies that Christ laid down his life for us. There's no contradiction there. Because the reality is this, Jesus actually makes us his friends by laying down his life for us.

Is it the truth of Christianity that God turns his enemies into his friends through the cross of his son? That's the way it works.

There's so many examples we could use. Maximilian Colby, he was a Catholic priest who died in Auschwitz. And near the end of his time in that prisoner of war camp, a prisoner had apparently escaped, if you know the story.

All the people in the camp were paraded in the blazing hot sun. And one man from each line was selected at random, including a sergeant whose name I can't pronounce.

And apparently this man, as he was singled out to be executed, he just cried out, he cried out, I've got a wife, I've got children, I'll never see them again. And at that moment, a man stepped forward from the ranks and offered to take that guy's place.

[13:37] He was prisoner at 16670, Father Maximilian Colby, a Roman Catholic priest and an elderly man. And he was towards the end of his life and the SS commander in charge, Butcher Fritz, as he was known, didn't care who went to the bunker, as long as there were 10 of them.

So he just nodded and Maximilian Colby laid down his life for this man. He just swapped places with him. Greater love has no man. It's such an inspiring story. But Maximilian Colby was an old man who was going to die anyway.

You don't want to detract from his heroism. And it's a great and inspiring story for you and I. For Maximilian Colby to give his life for someone else, but it's only anticipating what is going to happen anyway.

We're going to die, aren't we? We're already dying. In fact, Jesus Christ is the only one who's ever lived who did not have to die and yet he chose to. Greater love has no man than this that he laid down his life for his friends.

And so this friendship that Jesus is talking about is what we were made for. And it's what Jesus died to bring us into. And so this, at the very heart of our Christianity is to have this kind of relationship with God.

[15:05] He died to make his enemies his friends. I want to give you four points of application to explore what does it mean to have Jesus as your friend.

First thing to say is that Jesus is a loyal friend. Jesus is the kind of friend who lets you in but never lets you down. Does that make sense to you?

Jesus is the kind of friend who lets you in but never lets you down. You are my friends verse 14 if you do what I command. No longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his

master is doing.

But I have called you friends for I all that I have heard from my father I have made known to you. You see this relationship is not the kind of relationship that you might have with your boss at work. A servant does not know his master's business does he? You don't know probably what your boss is thinking lots of the time what his plans are.

[16:20] He doesn't let you in just tells you what to do. And Jesus says I am not going to call you servants I am going to call you friends because everything I have learnt from my father which again is an amazing expression I have made known to you.

So here is the friend who sticks closer than a brother he is loyal to us he lets us in so that we can share confidences we can unburden ourselves to him. He lets us in which is isn't it a very dangerous thing to do.

To give someone that amount of information at work you might have done that and you found yourself stabbed in the back you can't be totally free in the workplace out there in society in general. But here is a friend that you can be totally free with you can share confidences with him he lets you in on all the secrets all the things that the father has shared with him he shares with us.

and we can share our secrets with him we don't have to stand on our P's and Q's we don't have to go through the protocols we don't have to make an appointment with his PA to get him he says I no longer call you servants you are friends.

It's a lovely little story in one of Gordon MacDonald's books about a monk and his apprentice and the monk and the apprentice are travelling to an abbey in a nearby village and at the city gates they part for the evening and they say we'll meet the next morning according to plan they meet the next morning and they begin the long walk back to the abbey and the monk notices something about the apprentice there's something in the atmosphere he notices that the young man is unusually silent there's certain vibes coming off his friend and he asks the apprentice is there anything wrong what business is it of yours comes the terse reply and the monk is sure that his brother is troubled but he said nothing and the distance between them as they began to walk increased and the apprentice walked slowly as if to separate himself from his teacher and when the abbey came in sight the monk stopped at the gate he waited for the student to catch up and he said this he said tell me my son what troubles your soul the young man began to react again but he saw the warmth in his master's eyes and he began to melt and he says he said after a great deal of silence

[18:55] I've sinned greatly I've sinned greatly last night I slept with a woman and abandoned my vows I'm not worthy to enter the abbey at your side the teacher put his arm around the student and said we will enter the abbey together and we will enter the cathedral together and together we will confess your sin and no one but God will know which of the two of us fell isn't that lovely that's the kind of friend we have in the Lord Jesus he is the friend of sinners he became sin for us he identified himself as the sinner at his baptism what is going on there he stands in the place of sinners and he puts his arms around us and we've all got skeletons in the cupboard haven't we and we've all got things that we don't want people to know even the youngest of us here and Jesus knows because there are no secrets with him and he is the one to whom the secrets of our hearts they are an open book and he comes to you and he puts his arm around you and he says come on let's go and confess this together and no one will know which of us is a sinner he was made sin for us he who knew no sin that we might be put right with God you see he lets us in but he never lets us down

Jesus will never use that information against us the devil well yeah he's the accuser of the brethren he will remind you all the time of your sin but Jesus is the friend of sinners and he lets us in and so we can share confidences we can unburden our hearts we can confess our sins to him and he will never use that information against us not ever even on the great day of judgment when the books are open and the secrets of my heart is revealed my friend will be there and all of my sin he's taken and if anyone dares on that day to accuse us or to dredge it up he is there by our side even at the great day of judgment he lets us in but he never lets us down he's a loyal friend why wouldn't you want a friend like that there aren't too many people around like that are there and so one of the really hard things about growing up particularly in our culture today for the children that are here you children look up for a minute friendship is difficult isn't it particularly as you get into teenage years and you have friends and sometimes those friends turn out to be very very different than you thought and it breaks your little heart you struggle with that and you think well can I trust this person or you might think

I'm all alone in school I'm all alone but here is a friend who will never break your heart here is a friend who is loyal wouldn't you want a friend like that the second thing I want to say about Jesus' friendship is it's a productive friendship it's a fruitful friendship look at verse 16 it says this you did not choose me but I chose you and appointed that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit may abide my last Charles Kingsley is the author of *Waterbury Down* he was once asked what's the secret of a happy and buoyant life he simply said I had a friend I had a friend Solomon in Ecclesiastes chapter 4 says two are better than one and he gives us all sorts of reasons why that is so it's a lovely little cameo picture of friendship he says two are better than one so you've got a good return for their work that kind of relationship it's a fruitful relationship it's productive there was research done on social incentives in the workplace that was the title of the research paper it was published in the review of economic studies and it looked at the productivity of fruit pickers and the networks of friends that they form on the farm so workers were named asked to name up to seven friends and what they did is they watched and observed on the days that they worked alone to estimate their average productivity and then that was compared with the performance when they worked with their friends and one of the authors of the researcher prophet LSE said our research suggests that getting people to work with their friends could be one way for companies to motivate their workers without necessarily paying them off it seems to work doesn't it two are better than one two are better than one they have a good return for their work Jesus says I no longer call you servants I no longer call you employees you no longer have to clock in and clock out I no longer call you servants you are my friends and I've chosen you you didn't choose me I chose you and I appointed you literally the word there is I ordained you I set you apart to go and bear fruit and so what's the purpose of this friendship why has Jesus made you his friend it would be that you go and bear fruit for service what kind of service no Christian was ever chosen by Jesus to stop and to stand around and watch Jesus said I choose you and I have set you apart and I want you to go to go that's what happens at the end of our meetings isn't it the benediction is sending you out with God's blessing we gather on the Lord's day to scatter during the week Jesus says let me let you into my father's business secret that you would go into the world and that you would bear fruit now what kind of fruit are we talking about are we talking about character and conduct or are we talking about converts and there's a bit of disagreement on that I've appointed you to go and bear fruit I think suggests converts

[ 25 : 59 ] I wouldn't want to drive a wedge between the two because godly character fruitful character does attract doesn't it underwrites our testimony but I think he's speaking here about the actual going and bearing fruit and can you just see look what it says there it says fruit that will last and my father and my father and Claire's dad is writing a book on eldership and I'm helping him a bit on it and this is what I read this week in it he says this I cannot guarantee my children will be converted but in the grace of god I expect them to be converted god has been merciful to me in my house I can trace my believing family line back to at least 1790 and that is exceedingly precious to me if I bring this up to the present that represents eight generations of believers brackets all

Presbyterians isn't that amazing after my mum and dad my mum and dad are the first generation of Christians in their family so ours goes back to 1940 but in Claire's 1790 there was a moment in 1790 when god reached down from heaven and broke in isn't this what it's all about that when the gospel breaks into a family there is the kind of gospel fruit that lasts for generations it's not our testimony for so many of us so what is the kind of thing that will transform Ealing in West London well it is this friendship with Jesus I've chosen you for a purpose and so you mums isn't it what you're doing is that you are sending the gospel out in your children and your grandchildren that they may bear fruit fruit that will last so that people will see lives transformed and so there will be little communities little houses of light all around this area and further afield not only in our children's lives but in our grandchildren our great grandchildren it's an exciting thing

I think that Jesus shares with us his friendship is a loyal friendship he lets us in but he never lets us down his friendship is fruitful and productive and it's a shared friendship that's the third thing it builds community it's not virtual community but it's real three dimensional community I like social media I waste ridiculous amounts of time on it but it's with people you never see isn't it or people that came once and you kind of connect in that way it's a it's a phantom community it's not real community you see with couples sometimes don't you when they get together and they turn in on themselves and no one can get in no one can get in that's not what friendship with Jesus is about it's not like that friendship with Jesus is a shared friendship it builds community and so the

Christian life is not all about just you and Jesus me and Jesus it's not some nice glowing relationship between me and Jesus to be a friend of Jesus is to be a friend of mine that ought to be our slogan it would be a great mission statement for the church you know those you meet with those people and you say well I know that person and they say to you if you're a friend of them you're a friend of mine it's a great thing and Jesus says I've chosen you to be my friends and you are no longer servants you are my friends and any friend of Jesus should be a friend of mine there's a lovely little verse in 1 Thessalonians come with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 I always find Thessalonians hard to find strange Thessalonians I found it there you go 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and let me read you verses 9 and 10 look what he says about this church he says

Paul says about this church now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia but we urge you brothers do this more and more what do friends of Jesus do they love one another and that's what he commands in John 15 verse 12 this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you verse 17 these things I command you so that you will love one another friends of Jesus love each other they're not just friends on Facebook as good as that is they're friends in real life so look around look around go on don't be shy look around know who these people are know the empty seats and the people that they should be here and these are people from Christ died and they are his friends and any friend of [ 32 : 04 ] Jesus is to be a friend of mine that's my command Jesus says 11 commandments we believe in don't we as the father has loved me so you should love one another so put yourself out for one another lay down your life for one another and as the father has loved me so I love you Jesus gave his life but tragically we don't sometimes give each other the time of day the last thing I want to finish with is if you're a friend of Jesus Jesus gives you permission to use his name look at verse 16 he gives you permission to use his name so whatever you ask the father in my name he may give it to you Jesus says feel free to use my name and that means doesn't it reflecting on what you want if you're going to use Jesus name if you're going to ask in Jesus name it means that you're going to think about what you're asking for don't come to me after the service and say well I asked that I win the lottery in Jesus name and I've never done it or something ridiculous like that or I asked that

I pass my exams without doing any work in Jesus name and that didn't happen that's not what it's talking about if you're going to ask in Jesus name it means that you're going to think about what you're asking and Jesus says when you come to the father use my name by all means and you can ask whatever you want but you need to think about what you want Thomas Merton wrote this he said this why do we have to spend our lives striving to be something that we would never want to be if only we knew what we wanted why do we waste our times which are just the opposite of what we were made for and so we need to reflect on what we want don't we to pray in the name of Jesus is to want what he wants and so what does he want for you it's not what I want for myself but what does Jesus want for me what are these good works that he has prepared beforehand for me to walk in and not only that to pray in Jesus name is to recognize

Lord I need you I need you to help me fulfill this commandment you've given you told us that as your friends we love one another and quite frankly that is hard work sometimes so Lord help me and give me direction and give me help and empower me to do this and that is what it means to use Jesus name use my name Jesus says by all means and not only in prayer but in everything remember what Paul says in Colossians he says whatever you do whether it's in word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus and to be a friend of Jesus means that you are Jesus representative you bear his name in everything you do and it means wanting to honor his name every Christian stands for Christ every Christian is a representative of Christ every one of us is an advert for or against him and we either commend him to others or we repel them from him so it's a great privilege isn't it to have his name to be able to drop his name into conversations but let's not do it in a way that embarrasses him you know what it's like isn't it you're cut up by some driver that's got a fish on the back of their car there's a joke isn't there why do people say they've got a friend in Jesus find it hard to make friends with anyone else we bear his name what about if you're not a friend of Jesus Jesus says if you're not with me you are against me and I suspect as I finished this morning in this room I doubt that there's anybody who's rabidly anti-Christian furiously anti-Christian but maybe apathetically so you're not against him but you're not for him and your heart isn't head

over heels in love with Jesus and he's not what you think about during the day and you're not eager to follow him and you've got no interest really in his plan for your life and you're not for him you put up with a bit of church but you're not for him and Jesus says if you're not for me you are against me and so let me encourage you if that is you name drop because the bible says all who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved and let me encourage you if you've not done that this morning do it now and to come to God in the name of Jesus to use his name and wonderfully doors open don't they it's amazing if you drop the right name it gives you access use the name of Jesus this morning and what you'll find there is a father's welcome and forgiveness for all your sin and access to the father's heart i no longer call you servants i call you friends greater love has no man than this that he laid down his life for his friends and you are my friends so use my name by all means you