



Nurturing the Priceless Gift

*Jesus conducts us to
the best chair in the
room and offers us
a glass of tea.*

*I've found a Friend, oh, such a
Friend!
He loved me ere I knew Him;
He drew me with the cords of love,
And thus He bound me to Him.
And round my heart still closely
twine
Those ties which naught can
sever,
For I am His and He is mine,
Forever and forever.*

To make contact with God the Father (on a metaphorical level), we must reach up, for God has never left His throne in heaven. To make contact with the Holy Spirit, we must reach inward, for though He moves effortlessly between heaven and earth, the Spirit dwells within our grasp in our own, internal God-space. But to make contact with Jesus, we must reach out, for though He dwells right now, physically, in heaven (at God the Father's right hand), Jesus is that part of God most like ourselves. As such, He walks in our shoes, He has experienced the limitations of flesh, and He understands the way we think.

Too seldom do we take advantage of this priceless gift: the steadfast friendship of our Lord Jesus. There never has been anyone like Him. He is undiminished God, yet—as Jesus explained to His disciples—He "...did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He now sits at the exalted right hand of God, where the inhabitants of heaven worship Him as The Lamb, yet His occupation in that seat is to act as our constant advocate to the Father.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins,

we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

1 John 2:1

The term "Christ" means that Jesus is the Anointed One, or Messiah, yet after His resurrection, instead of immediately taking his rightful place upon the throne of earth, He returned to the Father, and to His place in our hearts, where He shares with all of us His kingly riches.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Romans 8:16-17a



We call Jesus "Lord," which He certainly is, but instead of living in a castle on a hill, where He might "lord it over" his lowly, miserable serfs, Jesus lives *with* us, in the house just next door, and He spends His hours walking with us, talking with us, and loving us.

But we have been away from Him for a while. Oh, not that we have forgotten Him, or failed to write from time to time. But we have, admittedly, neglected the relationship, relying for far too long on mutual history to sustain the friendship. We have assumed, quite correctly, that our old friend would always be there, no matter what, so it has become convenient to set aside the nurturing of this relationship in favor of those more fragile. Knowing Jesus as we do, we knew He would forgive our bad manners.

Friendship, however, like a sound marriage (a not inappropriate comparison), must be nurtured and fed. Attention to it must be paid. A measure of effort must be expended to sustain the active, healthy, intimate relationship.



Jesus invites us inside with an affectionate embrace, and immediately we are in familiar surroundings. Every house has its smell, and the home in which Jesus lives bears the mingled aromas of good food and warm hospitality. Every house smells of the family living within, but Jesus' home smells of the co-mingled aromas of everyone who has ever visited. Something of every previous guest lingers so they will feel at home upon their return.

The living room furniture is familiar to us, and we remember every detail from our childhood: the overstuffed chair that molds itself to our bottom, its arms slightly worn from use; the old rug that around its edge reveals the hardwood floor beneath; the same pictures hanging on the walls. Everything is clean without being sterile, tidy without being fussy. It is a room in which we are comfortable removing our shoes.

Jesus conducts us to the best chair in the room and offers us a glass of tea. And it takes no time at all for us to be reminded why Jesus is our dearest friend. The better qualities of a friend too often become corrupted in our relationships with others. We've seen it not only in our closest friends, but also in ourselves. Initial diplomacy and plastic manners are offensive when displayed late in a relationship. Honesty is admirable, but few like to live with the unceasing woes of someone who carries transparency to the extreme. And there is little to recommend a friend

for whom the sweetest sound is the sound of his own voice. Because humans are imperfect, friendships between them are imperfect—and we should expect no better.

But friendship with Jesus is different, for in it at least half of the relationship is perfect. Jesus doesn't stop being polite, but He never displays any of the plastic manners so common to us. We can be agreeable for effect, or to gain someone's favor, but Jesus is agreeable because that is who He is.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Matthew 11:29

Yet even with His good manners, that quality in Jesus never degenerates into an insipid cordiality that never asks to have its own way. He is never a milquetoast.

And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."

John 2:14-16

Our sense of comfort in Jesus' presence is based on the knowledge that His honesty is authentic, and based on truth. We don't mind occasional discipline, but we mind very much being either patronized or abused. Put simply, we know that Jesus will never yell at us unless we really deserve it.

For many people the grace of Jesus begins and ends at the cross. To them, "grace" is synonymous only with "undeserved salvation." But Jesus not only demonstrated God's grace in His sacrificial act at Calvary, He behaves graciously in His relationships with those who are friends with Him *through* that act. For those who live next door to Jesus, every day is filled to overflowing with His grace. Jesus never is too busy, never too distracted to be a

part of our sorrows or joys. His friendship is constant, never wavering. His humanness means that His part of the relationship is compassionate and tactile; His deity means that He can be this perfectly, to everyone, beyond the limitations of place or time. It was not just for the pages of His word that God became man in Jesus. It was for the millions upon millions of those who would answer His call, that they would know His strength combined with grace, His authentic transparency, and the tenderness of His heart.

To be continued...

*I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend!
He bled, He died to save me;
And not alone the gift of life,
But His own self He gave me.
Naught that I have my own I call,
I hold it for the Giver;
My heart, my strength, my life,
my all,
Are His, and His forever.*

*I've found a Friend, oh, such a Friend!
So kind, and true, and tender,
So wise a Counselor and Guide,
So mighty a Defender!
From Him who loves me now
so well,
What power my soul can sever?
Shall life or death, or earth or hell?
No; I am His forever.*

James G. Small

