

Spiritually Training for a Lifetime of Friendship With God

My resources are at God's disposal. He may sometimes ask me to take a risk to meet those needs—to do more than I think I can. But I err when I think of resources—whether time, money or spikenard oil—as merely transactional. As if meeting needs alone is the only thing or the most important thing God desires of me. If meeting needs is my primary focus, I've missed a foundational step: friendship with the king. In order to meet any need, I have to first hear the whisper of God for that need.

"I no longer call you servants," Jesus said to his followers, "for a servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I have heard from My Father have I made known to you" (John 15:15).

Friends talk. They share hearts and get their fingernails dirty in one another's stories. They carry the load for the other. And sometimes they are simply present.

We often assume that God, however, is somehow pining away for just one thing: our A+ effort so this broken world can finally be fixed, as if He is anxiously waiting to see which one of us will respond and how well we will do. We make our relationship with Him transactional. We give; He gives in return. We mess up; He withholds His love from us.

We make our worth dependent on our ability to meet the needs around us. And, if we're honest about the darker parts of our hearts, our actions for others can sometimes be an attempt to feel good about all we can do for God.

But to a friend, time is an investment of the heart, not just

the hand.

Friends spend time.

Every day I am flooded by opportunities to change the world by meeting the needs around me. Any servant can meet a need, but what about sons and daughters? Do beloved children exchange chores for room and board or even for affection? Or, how would parents respond to children who gladly cleaned the house and mowed the lawn but refused to spend time talking with and enjoying them, the very ones who have loved and cared for them their whole lives? We know this isn't the way things should operate in a healthy family, and yet we often and subconsciously relate to God in this way.

On any day, I am overwhelmed by the needs of the world, but my greater need is to interrupt this kneejerk cycling between the cries of the world and my response so that I can cultivate friendship with God. It's there that I learn that it's the friends of God who truly change the world. It's there that I have the depth of friendship that then informs the way I respond to the world's needs.

When I let friendship with God become my first priority—talking to Him, hearing from Him, letting His Word shape my thinking—I align myself with an agenda that does, in fact, help meet the needs of others. But instead of being driven by my limited cost/benefit analysis, I get to tap into the wisdom of the greatest King of the earth and heavens. And as I scoot nearer to Him, my senses are awakened. I move from being an efficient and productive worker to a friend who can touch and see and engage with God. I grow to love the things and the people He loves—with my actions, with my time and with my presence.

Lovers will always outwork workers.

As Mary did with her fragrant oil, I want to spend myself on Jesus. I want to move His heart with an extravagant

outpouring. The world changes from an exchange such as this. Instead of frantically scurrying to meet the latest need, I slowly pattern my life toward pouring myself out at His feet—toward giving Him the best of my affection, sometimes in a hundred small glances a day. It's from that place of connection that I hear His heartbeat for the needs around me and see His perspective on my unique role. It's from there, that place of carrying His heart, that I learn how and when to respond to others' cries.

We're training for a lifetime of friendship with God—an eternity. Yet training and friendship may seem to be oppositional words. We train for road races and learning the piano and acquiring new job skills. We take parenting classes and computer classes. But friendship? Shouldn't that just happen?

Not exactly.

When transactional beings who live in a world focused on productivity meet a relational God, we do need training for how to settle into friendship with Him. Re-patterning. Spending time with Him in private orients us toward that re-patterning. {eoa}

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