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FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

Genesis 18:1-8

By

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Genesis Lesson 37

Friendship With God
Genesis 18:1-8
(2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; James 2:23; John 14:21, 23)

When Jimmy Carter was President of the United States, on several occasions he spent the night in the homes of common Americans, picked somewhat at random. It was an attempt on his part to show that he was in touch with the average American, that he understood the way we live and the concerns we have.

I'm sure that it would be a memory of a lifetime to have the President spend the night in your home. But I've also wondered what kind of panic it would have created in many homes to receive a call from the White House asking if the President could stay in your home. What kinds of maintenance and repairs would you have to do to get your house ready for a presidential visit? Would it need fresh paint inside and out? How much cleaning would you have to do? Would you have to buy new furniture? What about the carpets? What about your yard? Would you want to hire a gardener to do some major landscaping or at least some weeding and bush-trimming? It could get expensive just to have the President as an overnight guest!

What if you got a call from heaven saying that the Lord Jesus Christ and a couple of angels planned to visit your home? How much lead time would you need to get it ready? You'd want to clean and paint and do the yard work. But also, what would Jesus think about the magazines and paperbacks laying around your house? What about the TV and videos that frequently play? Would you be embarrassed for the Lord to see all the stuff you're spending your money on? Would you be comfortable for Him to see the way you normally live? Of course you'd want to warn the kids to behave perfectly while the Lord was there, or they'd catch it later! And, you and your wife would want to make sure there weren't any flare-ups between the two of you. No doubt after your guests left, you'd all heave a sigh of relief and get back to life as usual!

But what if the Lord didn't just come for a visit? What if He moved in as a permanent resident? Every time you come home, He is there, watching everything that takes place. Would you view it as a blessing or as a burden? As Christians, we talk about having a personal relationship with God. But, if the truth were known, many of us don't want it to be *too personal!* It's one thing to invite the Lord in for an occasional meal, when the house is in order and the kids are on their best behavior. But having the Lord move in as a permanent resident and observer of all that goes on would be a bit too much! We couldn't let our hair down and be comfortable with His constant presence.

The extent to which we block God out of certain areas of our lives is a measure of the distance in our relationship with Him. Friends are comfortable and open with one another. Close friends don't block each other out of certain areas. They don't hide how they really live. A close friend feels free to drop by and catch us when the house is a mess, and we don't feel uncomfortable with the visit. Those who are friends with the living God welcome Him into the most intimate and personal areas of life, and count it a privilege to know Him and be known by Him.

Believers are privileged to enjoy friendship with God.

This is one of the lessons that emerges from one of the most remarkable incidents in human history, recorded in Genesis 18. The Lord Jesus Christ, in human form 2,000 years before He was born to the virgin Mary, along with two angels in human form, visited Abraham (see 18:1, 10, 13, 17, 22; 19:1). The three heavenly visitors ate a meal and then the Lord revealed to Abraham and Sarah that the promise concerning a son would be fulfilled the following year. The two angels left and went toward Sodom to rescue Lot and his family before the Lord rained fire and brimstone on that wicked city. The Lord stayed behind and revealed to Abraham what He was about to do. Abraham then interceded with the Lord on behalf of Sodom.

It is based on this chapter that three times in Scripture Abraham is called the friend of God, once by God Himself* (2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8*; James 2:23). There is debate as to how soon Abraham recognized the heavenly character of his guests. Some say that he didn't know it until after the meal, when the Lord called Sarah

by name (without being introduced) and repeated the promise about Isaac. The verse in Hebrews 13:2 about some entertaining angels without knowing it may lend support to this view. Others say he recognized the Lord immediately. I'm inclined to agree, because Abraham had seen the Lord before (12:7; 17:1), and it seems likely that the Lord would take the same human form in successive visits. Also, Abraham's lavish hospitality, while perhaps typical of that culture, seems to indicate that he knew that these men were special guests. His plea that these men not pass him by (18:3) also would point to Abraham's perception that these men were unique.

Friendship with God is something that sounds wonderful at first, until you stop to think about the implications. Remember, we're talking about being friends with the Lord and His destroying angels, who were on their way to wipe out wicked Sodom and Gomorrah! This is the Lord who knew when Sarah laughed in her heart in unbelief, even though she was not in sight (18:12-13)! He could be a rather threatening sort of friend! Do you want that kind of friend? If we would dare to have a personal relationship with God, this chapter has some principles on how to cultivate friendship with Him.

1. Friendship with God begins when we are reconciled to God through faith.

Scripture teaches that by nature we all are children of wrath, hostile to God and alienated from Him (Eph. 2:1-3; 4:18; Rom. 8:7). This applies to those raised in the church as well as to those who have lived outwardly wicked lives. It applies to decent, law-abiding folks and to those who have committed terrible crimes. It does not matter whether or not we *feel* hostile toward God; what matters is how God views us. Our sin, both the sin we inherit from birth and the acts of sin we commit after birth, separates us from Him and makes us His enemies. It's vitally important that we accept what Scripture reveals about our sinful condition rather than how we feel about ourselves, because Satan blinds the minds of those outside of Christ so that they cannot perceive their true condition or their need for the gospel (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4). He uses false teachers to deceive people by proclaiming peace with God to them when there is not true peace (Jer. 8:11; 23:17).

Because alienation from God due to sin is the universal human condition, we must be reconciled with God through a just resolution of our sin problem before we can begin a friendship with Him. This happens when a sinner believes God concerning His provision of an acceptable substitute who paid the penalty for sin on the sinner's behalf. Abraham believed God concerning the Son who would come forth from him who would be the Savior of the world, and God credited the work of that Savior to Abraham as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). The apostle Paul cites this verse twice in the context of arguing that we are declared righteous by God on the basis of faith, not by works (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). James cites the same verse in the context of arguing that genuine faith always results in a life of good deeds (James 2:23). In other words, we are saved (justified) by faith in Christ alone, but genuine faith in Christ never stops there, but always shows itself in a life of progressive godliness. But the point I am insisting on as foundational is that you must trust in Christ as your sin-bearer before you can develop a friendship with God.

2. Friendship with God requires being available for it.

Friendships take time, and friendship with God is not an exception. Abraham was sitting at the door of his tent when these three heavenly visitors came by, and he wasn't so busy that he couldn't spend the time with them. He wasn't rushing from one appointment to the next, with dozens of things to do crying out for his attention.

I realize, of course, that Abraham lived in a completely different culture than ours. It would be centuries before somebody invented the clock and the telephone, let alone the beeper and car phone! I'm no stranger to busyness. I have to use an appointment calendar to survive. When I was in college, the couple who worked with our church college group were mavericks who decided that the clock is our enemy. So they got rid of their clocks and wrist watches, so they wouldn't be under such tyranny. This was nice for them, but it thoroughly frustrated all of us who had to work with them, because they somehow never managed to get to meetings before everyone else. They were always the late ones who inconvenienced the rest of us!

So I'm not suggesting that we should get rid of our appointment books or throw away our watches! But I am saying that if you want to be a friend of God, you've got to take the time to spend alone with Him. If you're married and you only spend a few minutes a week together as a couple, but you spend hours of time with seductive women (or men), you won't be doing very well in your marriage. If you're so busy that you do not take time regularly for reading, studying, and memorizing the Bible, for prayer, for reading good Christian books, and for being with God's people, but you're spending hours with a world that is trying to seduce you away from God, you will not be growing in your relationship with God. You may have to put it on your daily or weekly schedule. But a friendship with God is not magic. It won't happen if you're not available for it.

3. Friendship with God requires being hospitable toward God.

Hebrews 13:2 uses this incident as an example of the kind of hospitality we are to show toward strangers. Hospitality is a wonderful quality we all need to work at improving. It is a qualification for a church elder (1 Tim. 3:2). A hospitable host makes his guests feel welcome and comfortable. Here Abraham entreats these visitors to stay and be refreshed (18:3-5). Matthew Henry observes, "God is a guest worth entreating." If we covet God's friendship, we should do everything we can to be hospitable toward Him, so that He is welcome in our lives and homes. Abraham demonstrates several ingredients of hospitality:

(1) *Eagerness of hospitality*--As you read these verses you are struck with the eagerness on Abraham's part. He ran from the tent door to meet these men and earnestly entreated them to stay. When they agreed, he hurried into the tent and told Sarah, "Quickly, make some bread"; then he ran to the herd, selected a calf and gave it to the servant who hurried to prepare it. Remember, we're talking about a man who was 100 years old and it was during the heat of the day in Palestine! All of this hurried activity shows how eager Abraham was to fellowship with his heavenly guests.

Do you have that same eagerness to fellowship with the living Lord? Or could your initial enthusiasm have died down over the

years? Spending time alone with God shouldn't be a duty; it should be a delight! In the little booklet, "My Heart, Christ's Home," Robert Boyd Munger compares his heart to a home where Christ has been invited to dwell as the heavenly guest. He goes room by room, showing how the Lord cleaned the dirty books off the shelves of the study, took down the filthy pictures, how He cleaned the dining room of unhealthy appetites and desires, etc.

The drawing room was a comfortable room with a quiet atmosphere. The Lord agreed to meet him there each morning for fellowship. At first, it was wonderful, as they met and the Lord would pull a book of the Bible from the book case and they would commune together. But as the pressure of outside responsibilities grew, that time with the Lord got crowded out. Soon, he was missing several days in a row.

Then one morning as he was rushing out the door, he passed the drawing room and noticed that the door was ajar. Looking in, he saw the Master sitting in there, alone. Grieved, he said, "Master, have you been here all these mornings?" "Yes," said the Lord, "I told you I would be here every morning to meet with you. Remember, I love you. I have redeemed you at great cost. I desire your fellowship. Even if you cannot keep the quiet time for your own sake, do it for mine."

One of the things that strikes me about Abraham's eager hospitality is that he is totally focused on ministering to his guests--washing their feet, feeding them, seeing that they are refreshed. There doesn't seem to be any consideration of what's in it for himself. So often we think about a devotional time from the angle of what's in it for me, but we fail to consider doing it for the Lord's sake. In Acts 13:2, we read of Paul, Barnabas, and some other men "ministering to the Lord." It's not that the Lord is lacking anything in His perfections as God. He doesn't need our ministry to Him in that sense. The Lord and the two angels didn't need Abraham's food or footwashing. But friendship is two-way, and the Lord is pleased to accept our ministry, even as He was willing for Abraham to show hospitality to Him. If you've lost the eagerness of meeting with the Lord, remember, it's not just for you. He wants to fellowship with you because He loves you as a father loves his children. Like Abraham, we need to be eager to meet with the Lord.

(2) *Effort of hospitality*--I'm also struck by the effort Abraham put into his hospitality. He didn't walk--he ran to get everything going to make preparation for his guests, and then he stood by as they ate, attentive to their needs. His effort showed his guests how much he desired their fellowship.

If you only spend time with the Lord when it's convenient, when you feel like it, and it's no trouble, you won't be growing in friendship with Him. Some people feel as if relationships should be totally spontaneous and effortless. I agree that there is a spontaneous aspect to good relationships that keeps them fresh. But relationships also require effort. If you never give any thought or effort toward how to foster your marriage relationship, I would predict that your marriage isn't going very well. It's easy to get busy and let all sorts of things crowd out the relationships you really cherish. To make time for those relationships takes effort.

It's the same with the Lord. You have to say no to some good and enjoyable things so that you can spend time with Him. You have to think about how to foster that friendship. You have to set some goals and do some hard study and reading. Again, I'm not denying the spontaneity and fun of friendship with God. I'm just saying that if you don't put effort into it, you won't be growing in it.

(3) *Expense of hospitality*--Abraham's friendship with God wasn't cheap. He modestly says that he will bring his guests a piece of bread (18:5) and then has Sarah bake enough bread for a small army (about 8 gallons of flour)! He kills a choice calf and adds curds and milk. He spared no expense to entertain his heavenly visitors. Hospitality is expensive.

Friendship with the Lord will cost you. Of course, it cost the Lord everything. But there's also a price you must pay. I've already mentioned the time it costs. It also costs money, because as you get into God's Word, the Lord will put His finger on your finances and say, "I want you to honor Me by being more careful about how you spend the money I entrust to you so that you can be more generous in giving to My work." He will want you to be generous in showing hospitality to others. You also may need to invest some money in good books that will enable you to grow in your friendship with God. I'm amazed at how some Christians spend \$25 or

more each month to get the sewage from the TV cable pumped into their homes, but they won't spend the money to purchase basic Bible study tools.

On one occasion, King David wanted to purchase the site of the threshing floor of a man named Araunah as a place to offer burnt offerings. Later it actually became the site for Solomon's Temple. Araunah offered to give it to his king, but David replied, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, for I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing" (1 Kings 24:24). Again, salvation is the free gift of God. You can't buy it for any amount. But if you've received it, I encourage you to invest some money toward your friendship with God in the ways I've mentioned.

Thus, friendship with God begins by being reconciled to Him through faith in Christ. It requires being available for the relationship and being hospitable toward the Lord. Finally,

4. Friendship with God requires obedience to God.

It is significant that the Lord's appearance here to Abraham (18:1) follows immediately on Abraham's obedience to the sign of the covenant (17:23-27). The Lord reveals Himself to the obedient. Jesus said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.... If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:21, 23). If we want God to make His home with us, we must be growing in obedience to Him.

As I said last week, Abraham's obedience in being circumcised wasn't an easy thing to do. It was painful. It would have invited ridicule. It probably didn't make much sense. But Abraham did it. We'll see in chapter 22 the ultimate test of obedience, when God commands Abraham to offer his beloved son Isaac as a burnt offering. I can't imagine a more difficult command, and yet by this time Abraham had such implicit trust in his heavenly Friend that he obeyed without question! While none of us may reach Abraham's pinnacle of obedience, we must be growing in obedience if we want to cultivate friendship with God. It may not be easy. The

Lord may be asking you to break off a relationship with an unbeliever for whom you have deep feelings. He may be asking you to go to another country to serve Him. Perhaps He is putting His finger on a sin that you love, insisting, "That has to go now!" If you're His friend, you'll obey.

Conclusion

It's always an honor to be friends with someone important, such as a president. Around Washington, certain people are called F.O.B., which stands for, "Friend of Bill" (Clinton). But every Christian has a much higher honor, to be a Friend of God. We begin that friendship by being reconciled to God through faith in Christ and His shed blood. We cultivate the friendship by making ourselves available to God, by being hospitable toward Him, and by growing in obedience to Him. I hope that the thought of God Almighty paying your life and your home a visit wouldn't make you uncomfortable, but that you welcome Him and commit yourself to a growing friendship.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you counsel a Christian who says he has lost the joy of fellowship with the Lord?
2. Can a Christian be close to God without being a reader (of the Bible and of good Christian books)? How?
3. Does being a friend with God mean being "good buddies"? Where is the balance with the fear of God (see 18:27, 30)?
4. How do you square God's unconditional love with John 14:21 & 23? Does God love everyone just the same?

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