

Sermon 08-17-2025

Are you a Friend of God? - Rev. Markus Wegenast

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

1)

This has been a big week in the lives of many of our children, youth and young adults who went back to school. “How will I do academically?” is a question that even some young elementary school kids are worried about. But another top concern is often about friendship: “Will I have friends this year in school? Will I make new friends? Will my old friend stay loyal to me?”...

How many friends do you have?

I don’t have any statistics about how many friends kids have these days, but I found some numbers for adults. According to a 2023 Pew Research study these are some findings on friendship:

- **53% of Americans** say that they have **between 1 to 4 good friends.**
- **38%** state they have **5 or more close friends.**
- **8%** claim they have **no friends at all.**

Now when they did those surveys I don’t know what their definition of friendship was. I could imagine that each of us has a slightly different understanding of what a true friend is – let’s not worry about that for right now.

There was one interesting development across the different studies that I want to share with you. They found that the number of friends reported dropped over the last 30 years.

There’s a downward trend!

One survey found that while in 1990 33% of people still claimed to have more than 10 close friends by 2021 that figure was down to 13%. And the number of people who said they have no friends tripled and in some surveys quadrupled in the last 30 years (from 3% to 8/12%).

I would assume that the pandemic and our increased tendency to polarize as a society has not helped this development – would you agree?

Unless you are a strong introvert the issue of loneliness is higher today than it was a few decades ago. Consider that irony. We have so many more platforms to communicate with each other today, so many social media tools designed to be involved with people, and yet we have a harder time making friends. Isn’t that interesting?

Now we are entering a new area in the history of humankind where some of us begin to develop relationships with an AI entity! We have no idea yet what this will do to us as a society, I guess we will soon find out.

I'm really excited to talk about true – human – friendship with you for the next 7 weeks. I believe God will have some great directions for us.

We will explore scripture together on some deep friendships and what we can learn from them. I purposely want to start talking about a very unique friendship. It's not a friendship about two people, it's a friendship between God and a man, God and Abraham.

2)

The short passage from scripture we just heard introduces us to the very beginning of God's friendship with Abraham. It's a profound friendship with many ups and downs, and it shows us what unique kind of a friend God is.

Now, I realize there was not a single word in today's passage that says anything about God and Abraham to be "friends."

I want you do know that I'm not making that up though, I get this idea from scripture. Can I show you three powerful passage that spell out the curious fact that God and Abraham were buddies?

Isaiah 41:8 (NIrV)

The Lord says, "People of Israel...You are the children of my friend Abraham."

2 Chronicles 20:7

Did you not, O our God, give [this land] forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham?

James 2:23 (probably the strongest one)

Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God...and he was called the friend of God."

Maybe you are wondering what's so special about scripture calling Abraham a friend of God. I want to say this: To me it is one of the most special statements in the Bible to hear that a man was considered God's friend. And for us to fully appreciate this we need to be aware of the context:

The Bible starts with a beautiful story of God creating the world. The world was created good and beautiful including us people. We were made in God's image, and God was pleased with us the way he created us.

But you probably know how the story goes – it didn't stay that way.



We people had our own idea of life on this beautiful planet. Temptation and free will played a real number on us!

The story of Adam and Eve soon goes sour when they disobey God and the Bible tells us pretty grimly that the consequence for us people was that we no longer live in Eden – paradise is lost on us – we no longer live in close friendship with God. We are cast away from the special friendship presence that God built so carefully with us.

It doesn't matter what take on this story in Genesis you have – no matter how metaphorical or how literal you take it – the outcome is the same: The Bible tells us that the world we live in now is not the way God intended for it to be. Our own free will thwarted the initial friendship that God had between us. The New Testament puts it in the sharpest and most heartbreaking of language when it states in Romans 5:10 that we are enemies of God!

“Enemies of God” – Romans 5:10

That is very stark, sobering language, isn't it? I even feel uncomfortable for it to be displayed on these screens. But I feel we need to face this biblical reality in order to appreciate the other biblical reality:

God was not done. God loves us way too much to say, “ok humankind, you messed up, we can't be friends anymore” – no, that's not what God wanted.

And so he started a story with us. A long story, a story that would ultimately lead to his son Jesus coming and offering the whole world renewed friendship with God – but I'm getting ahead of myself.

1700 years before Jesus was born, God started a story with Abraham. Abraham – like all of us – was a descendant of Adam and Eve – outside of Eden/Paradise, not growing up as a friend of God. And that is why it is so important to me that we have not one, not two, but three passages in holy scripture that tell us explicitly: Abraham was God's friend.

Friendship with God is possible – even this side of Eden/Paradise. Just like Abraham you and I too can become friends of God!

3)

What did Abraham do for God to consider him a friend?

Don't you want to know that?

Abraham had his ups and downs with God. He was brave and followed God's lead when God asked him to leave his home for a land that he was to show him which we call Israel today. But Abraham also had times when he grew impatient with God, he struggled leaning in on God when he was in Egypt and lied about his wife Sarah. The biggest challenge that both he and his wife had with God was their delayed family planning. Abraham grew impatient with God again and married a second wife to have kids but God stayed faithful and would give him a son through Sarah as promised.

In all these ups and downs that Abraham had in his relationship with God he never gave up on his friendship with God – not even when God tested him and Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Abraham did not give up on God and neither did God give up on Abraham. And there lies the answer to our question. (repeat)

Abraham trusted God – not always perfectly but never quitting on God. And for God that was all it took to consider Abraham a righteous man, a friend.

This shows us something universal about friendship:

True friendship is marked by trust.

Would you say that's a good way to describe the essence of true friendship? That we trust each other?

...

I looked up some common definitions for friendship – I was curious to see how others would define friendship and here is one that I found particularly interesting – I wonder if you will agree with it:

True friends...

- **Know and understand each other**
- **Like each other**
- **Share interests**
- **Want to spend time together**
- **Help and protect each other**

Does this sound like a good definition of friendship for you? Let's apply this to the God-Abraham friendship?

- Abraham really got to know God in the ups and downs of their relationship and he grew in his understanding of God Almighty

- Did Abraham like God? I find like is too weak a word, I think we can speak of love unashamedly.
- Now, God was certainly interested in Abraham (God is interested in every person!). It's fair to say that the longer Abraham stuck with God the more Abraham was interested in God and God's will for his life.
- That also means that Abraham wanted to spend time with his God. At one occasion in the book of Genesis we read that Abraham hosted God in his tent!
- Did Abraham and God help and protect each other? Here we may find that is certainly one-sided, it is God who helped A, A can't help God. But in a way when Abraham trusted God and obeyed his lead he would become a protector of God's will for all of humanity. Because that's what we read in today's scripture passage: God wanted to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham, and for this God needed Abraham's buy-in, his help, if you will!

This is God and Abraham... You know what's coming next, don't you? The big question I feel is whether this definition of friendship works also for your relationship with God. Is this how you can see your friendship with God?

Do you consider yourself a friend of God? Can your trust in God be broken down in this way?

Go through the list again...

> My wish for you is that you have passion to further your friendship with God in these areas.

...

4)

Many of our kids, youth and young adults went back to school this week. Whether you still go to school, have kids or grandkids that started school, live in a large family, or live by ourselves – we all wonder about the state of friendships we have in our lives.

I look forward to exploring the ins and outs of friendship themes in the Bible this season. They all find their foundation in what we discussed today:

God invented friendship when he first offered it to us upon our creation and he is still offering us friendship now.

Take God's hand, accept his friendship offer and I believe you will see that it will inadvertently also lead to new friendships with people in your life.

God is the source of all true friendship.

May you find this out to be true. Amen.