

Series: "Holy Moses" (Part 3)
"God's Friend"

This is the third of four messages on the life of Moses. Today, let's consider Moses as God's friend – a person who knew God intimately. The Israelites are camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Moses sets up a tent outside the camp as a place where he can meet with God. (Apparently the rest of the people couldn't go to God in the tent because of their sins, but Moses could). Exodus 33:11 says, "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." Notice, "as one speaks to a *friend*".

In later years Moses was remembered as a man who spoke with God and knew Him as a close friend. Deuteronomy 34:10 says, "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord *knew* face to face." In the whole Old Testament very few people are said to "know God". And as far as I can tell, only Abraham is specifically called God's "friend".

But something incredible happens with the coming of Jesus! The New Testament says that through Jesus, *everyone* can know God and be God's friend. In John, chapter 15, Jesus tells His followers this: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you *friends*..." (John 15:15). *We can be friends of Jesus, friends of God!*

If our faith is authentic, it should help us to know and experience God. Henry Blackabee wrote a book called *Experiencing God*, a book that has become a best seller. It's used in many churches as a study book for small groups and new member classes. The title summarizes one of the primary goals of our faith very well: to experience God in our life.

I once inched my way through a profound book on Christian meditation, *The Other Side of Silence*, by Morton Kelsey (an Episcopalian priest and psychotherapist). Kelsey begins the book: "Can people's lives be touched by God? Can we actually find our everyday activity given new vitality by the reality of God's presence and wisdom ...there is always concern about whether God can be reached at all." Most people believe in some kind of God, a Supreme Being. But many don't believe that we can have any personal relationship to this God. Yet the *Christian faith* says we can know and experience God intimately, and even through Christ be *friends* with God!

There are a lot of people *in churches* who believe in God, accept the creeds and doctrines of Christianity, but do not know God, nor experience God, as a reality in their lives. One of the greatest challenges facing the church is to help the many people who believe certain things about God to move beyond that, and to *experience* God in a close, personal relationship!

How can this happen? How can we *experience* God and be *friends* with God? ***The place to start is to realize that in our natural state, we are not close to God; we are not on friendly terms with our Creator.*** Our sins separate us from God. "Sin" is our innate tendency to rebel against God, to put self at the center of life rather than God – to live life *my way*, doing *my thing*. Colossians 1:21-22 puts it well (quoting from the Good News Translation): "At one time you were *far* away from God and were his *enemies* because of the evil things you did and thought.

But now, by means of the physical death of his Son, God has made you his *friends*, in order to bring you, holy, pure, and faultless, into his *presence*.”

God yearns to have a relationship with us and be our Friend. To make that possible, God overcame the distance between Himself and us through the sacrificial death of His Son Jesus. That’s already taken place – 2,000 years ago. *Our part* is to turn away from our sins, and put our trust in Christ as the One who brings us close to God and makes friendship with God possible!

Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship, visited a prison in Brazil operated by Christians and founded on Christian principles. Colson found something truly amazing. He says when he visited this prison, he found the inmates smiling, particularly the murderer who opened the gates and let him in. Wherever he walked, he saw prisoners at peace. He saw clean living areas, people working hard. The walls were decorated with Scripture verses from Psalms and Proverbs. His guide escorted him to the notorious prison cell once used for torture. Presently, the guide said, that area houses only one inmate! As they reached the cell, the guide paused and said to Chuck, “Are you sure you want to go in?” Chuck rather impatiently replied, “Of course. I’ve been in isolation cells all over the world.” When the guide slowly swung open the massive door, Chuck saw the prisoner in that torture cell: *a crucifix* – beautifully carved by the inmates – the prisoner Jesus, hanging on a cross. The guide said softly, “He’s doing time for the rest of us.”

Moses was one of the few who knew God and talked with God as friend to friend, but Jesus gives *all of us* the opportunity of knowing God intimately.

To know God as Friend changes us. This was certainly true of Moses. The more he got to know God, the more his character changed. Remember, earlier in his life he murdered an Egyptian in a fit of rage. We saw in my last message how patient he was with the Israelites in their grumbling and disobedience, and how willing he was to give up his own life on their behalf. Numbers 12:3 says, “For the man Moses was very *meek*, more than all men that were on the face of the earth.” The *murderer* is now *meek*! “Meek” here means humble, “tamed” - like a wild horse that’s been broken and tamed. Moses, who killed a man with his bare hands, now has that strength tamed, and brought under control by God.

When we live close to God and develop a friendship with Him it changes us! I had an aunt who married a career Navy man. Being in the Navy, they moved from time to time. At one point they lived in the South for a while. I didn’t get to see her much. But one time when I visited her, I noticed she had started to talk differently, with a southern drawl! Knowing southerners, develop friendships with them, she was becoming more like them!

When we’re friends of God and friends of Jesus, we’re going to become more like Jesus. 2 Corinthians 3:18 describes this: “All of us are looking with unveiled faces at the glory of the Lord as if we were looking in a mirror. We are being transformed into that same image from one degree of glory to the next degree of glory.” If you say you’re a follower of Jesus, and God is in your life, how is it changing you? I hope you and I can answer that question in a positive way!

Probably one of the most practical questions we can ask when talking about having a friendship with God is this: ***What can we do to make our friendship with God stronger? To deepen our experience of God?*** Maybe we can look at how *human friendships* are strengthened and grow and get some clues.

Friendships grow when friends spend time together and do things together. Friendships easily die when people don't stay in touch. Being a pastor, our family has lived in a number of different places. In each church, we've developed some close friendships. When the time comes to move, there's sadness, and we say to our friends, "We'll have to keep in touch." In a few cases, we've maintained friendships with former parishioners for many years. But, to be honest, in most cases, we've failed to stay in touch. going over years. Oh, maybe for the first few months after we move, we communicate with them. But then they kind of forget about us, and we get involved in life in the new place, and those former friendships just kind of dry up and die. You have to stay in touch, and spend time together, to keep friendships alive.

The 2 primary ways we "spend time" with God are (1) prayer/meditation, and (2) reading His Word (the Bible). In prayer, we can talk to God, our Friend. Talk about the happy things going on, share our worries and concerns with our heavenly Father. Also at times be silent, listen for God to get through to us. And we spend time with our Friend God by reading the Bible, studying it, soaking up His words and teachings, until they become part of how we think and act.

Friendships are also strengthened when people do things together. Whether it's going shopping together, or playing cards, or catching up with one another over lunch, or serving together on a church project or ministry. Try to imagine God going with you through your day's activities. You're in this together. God is your divine Partner in all you do each day.

Then too, friendships grow as people take an interest in each other. I will admit, I've pulled back from some people I once regarded as friends because I realized after a while that this person was just into himself or herself. Everything was about *them*. And so, I lost interest in keeping that relationship going. Healthy friendships stay alive when each person cares about the other and is interested in the other's life.

Take an interest in God. What is His will in certain situations? What does He want for His world? What are the things He's concerned about? After all, God is very interested in each of us. Be interested in God and the things of God, and don't just be wrapped up in yourself and your schedule and your life plans.

Friendships also stay healthy as friends refrain from doing things that irritate one another. Have you ever had a friendship grow cool, or lost a friendship altogether, because your friend just seemed to be inconsiderate of you or your needs? Maybe you plan something, and this person always seems to back out at the last minute. Or they tend to want to jam their opinions and views down your throat. Like Facebook "Friends" who are always posting their political views! This presses my "hot button". Sometimes what these political posting "friends" do almost feels like harassment, like they want to throw their views in your face, and don't respect

your opinions. I've "unfollowed" several of these people! Real friends stay friends by not deliberately doing things that will irritate and alienate the other person.

Our friendship with God stays healthy and deepens as we avoid doing things that annoy God and break His heart - deliberately disobeying God's commands, willful sin, doing things we know break God's heart. These kinds of things can destroy our relationship and friendship with God. When it happens, it's important to repent, and ask God to help us change.

Exodus 33:11 says, "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." While Moses was one of the few people in the Old Testament who had the privilege of being a friend with God, *anyone* now can come to know God and be friends with God through Jesus. It happens when we trust Christ as our Savior and turn our life over to Him. Imagine that!

Thank God if you've already done that and you know God as your friend. If you don't, *you can!* It's all possible through Jesus!

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
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