

Jesus, Best Friend Forever

Which generation do you think is the loneliest?

- The Baby Boomer Generation – born 1946-1964.
- Generation X – born 1965-1980.
- Millennials – born 1981-1996.
- Generation Z – born 1996-2012.
- Gen Alpha – born 2013 – 2025.

Every generation is lonely when there is no deep, life-enriching relational connection.

Recent neurological research has shown that “we are born to connect, and as long as we live we never stop needing connection.”¹

Mother Teresa once was asked what is the worst disease she had ever seen. Was it leprosy or small pox? Was it AIDS or Alzheimer’s? “NO,” she said, “the worst disease I’ve ever seen is *loneliness*.”

¹ Peter Lovenheim, *The Attachment Effect: Exploring the Powerful Ways our Earliest Bond Shapes Our Relationships and Lives*, p. xix. “At birth, we seek out attachment to others who can reliably protect us and respond to our survival needs. In adulthood, we connect with a special few others whom we love and on whom we rely for safety and security ... we always need connection ... and ...

We have a “connection crisis”² in our hands, even though, ironically, we have a global village connected by the World Wide Web; we are shrouded with a nagging sense of relational emptiness in our profoundly disconnected and divisive world - everyday there are literally *millions* yearning to love and be loved, to know and be known.

Irrespective of one’s background, Jesus’ offer of his friendship and unconditional love to every individual is most welcoming in our “**high-tech/low-touch**” world of **relational famine!**

Mark the Evangelist writes:

¹⁵ Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of

only through interdependence do we become our strongest and most authentic selves.” (pp. xix, xxiv.)

² Cf. Todd W. Hall, *The Connected Life: the Art and Science of Relational Spirituality*.

this kind among Jesus' followers.)¹⁶ But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." (Mk. 2:15-17 NLT)

In being friendly and spending time with the "sinners" - "riff-raffs", social outcasts, the people at the fringe, even his critics/"enemies" – Jesus has demonstrated **the power of God's love and His desire to reconnect with anyone looking for unconditional acceptance and personal significance!!**

All is not well in the realms of social-national-international and personal relationships/friendships:

³ Pastor Steve Ayers says, "Never forget that Jesus loved Judas. This is the relational understanding the church needs to move in the twenty-first century.

Relationship is the soul of the universe. And the soul is sick.

Len Sweet

The good news is this:

Jesus' single most decisive and defining act of self-sacrifice becomes the basis for every loving action and reconnects God and humanity together!

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (Jn. 15:13)

When Jesus uttered these words, He was mindful of the presence of His enemy – Judas – as well as the rest of the group who were going to desert him very soon later!³

Jesus puts everything on the line to restore broken or unhealthy relationships!

We must love a culture and a nation that looks more like Judas than the faithful disciples."

Here Jesus' message to all of us:

***"I am your friend;
I am will to go the distance for you so you might
restore your relationship with God;
and I will empower you to repair your
relationships with others, even your enemies.
Would you be my friend?"***

In making room to extend His friendship to all who
accept God's love at the cross,

***Jesus gives His friends a new beginning and freedom to
become the best version of what God originally
intended!***

Looking beyond the labels that alienate and prejudge
individuals because he realizes that there is a painful
journey or a heartbreaking story behind every
unwelcoming and even hostile face.

But

Jesus ***embraces*** the uniqueness of every individual
because ***very person is created to love and be loved, to
know and be known.***

Yale professor and author Miroslav Volf writes in his
award winning book, ***Exclusion & Embrace:***

... the will to give ourselves to others, and "welcome"
them, to readjust our identities to ***make space*** for them,
is ***prior to any judgment about others***, except that of
identifying them in their humanity. ***The will to embrace
precedes any "truth"*** about others and any construction
of their "justice." (***Emphasis ours***)

Jesus knows the hearts of humanity and he's always
***willing to make time and space for everyone who
invites and dines with him!***

In contrast to **the self-righteous, hypocritical and hypercritical religious leaders** of his time who are more concern about **man-made traditions or customs, reputation, rules, and regulations, *Jesus gives not only one chance but many chances to people, even to His enemies!***

Jesus wants to be our friend; he wants to share His heart, His joys, and His sorrows and works together with us to achieve *our* Father's purposes.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (Jn. 15:15 NIV)

At the time of Jesus **friends are call "one soul"**, that is, **to share the same attitudes and values, to see things in the same perspectives.** So a friend is **"another self."**⁴

⁴ Aristotle, one of the most influential philosophers before Christ, said: "What is a friend? A single soul in two bodies."

Essentially Jesus tells his followers that ***their status has now changed from being slaves to becoming his "soul-mates"***:

they are let in to what the Heavenly Father has made known to Jesus;

they are granted the freedom to be treated as equals;

they have the privilege and honor to ask Jesus questions regarding God's business, to have meaningful dialogue with the Almighty;

and they can expect wise guidance and prompting from the Spirit.

Like the disciples of Jesus, **we are no longer enslaved to anything or anyone; neither are we coerced or forced**

Likewise the Roman philosopher, Cicero, said: "A friend is, as it were, a second self."

to do anything or to wear a mask. We don't have to hide from God; God is not hiding from us!

In calling His followers “friends” Jesus is inviting them to join him in ***a journey of discovery.***

We are reminded by our own Beth Nolson, in her just “hot-off-the-press” article,⁵ **there's a life-transforming correlation between friendship and God-in-Jesus hospitality** - human flourishing and Christian discipleship occur in authentic and welcoming connections when individuals are enriched by physical, emotional, spiritual care.

Just as Adam and Eve were created to reflect the image of God, **Christ-followers – friends of Jesus - are called/redeemed to conform to the image of Jesus, to be Christ-like!!**

If this is indeed what Jesus means to be His friends, He also ***challenges his friend to grow toward maturity in all areas of life!***

⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. (Jn. 15:9-10 NIV)

In the immediate circumstances of the Jesus' story before his crucifixion here in Jn. 15, to challenge his followers – his friends – to grow means ...

to taking up the towel and washing others' feet (humble and humiliating service);

to walk alongside those who are discouraged (as Jesus comforts his disciples);

⁵ Nolson, B. G. (2024). From disconnection to connection: the healing potential of household hospitality to the stranger. *Practical Theology*, 17(4), 363–375. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1756073X.2024.2383029>.

to remain obedient to his commands/teaching;

to demonstrate loving acceptance and unity as a community to those living in a fragmented society and a broken world.

Cornerstone's Vision:

Embracing the Jesus who embraces the World

Cornerstone's Mission:

Making space for Jesus to shape people together in God's love.

Today we have four individuals who will be baptized:

Adelyn Chen, Jodi & Gary Hill, Anthony Lam – they have embraced Jesus' friendship and made space for Him to shape their lives.