

## *Quiet & Rest: stewarding the gift*

During our last virtual devotion, we were encouraged that the Lord our God is quiet in His love (Zeph 3:17), signaling His eternal approval and acceptance of us. He is forever holding His peace towards us. We rejoice in the knowledge that Jesus is this peace made manifest. For us who are united to Him by faith, we not only live in His peace, but we also steward this gentle, humble rest to each other. I made mention that I would be sharing with you in this mid-month email devotion what this stewardship might look like as we walk out “one-another” love.

Let me, however, begin by referencing Martin Luther who was committed to distinguishing that Jesus is always a gift before He is an example. So, while we will be looking at one-another love through the model of Jesus, we can never forget that it is because He is God’s gracious and glorious gift to us that we are able to fix our eyes on Him as the author and perfecter of our faith. Meaning that Jesus is first and foremost a gift to us and only then, subsequently, our example. If we look to Christ as example without first knowing Him as gift, we will find ourselves bound to mere performance, rather than life-giving relationship. Because it is He who has silenced God’s judgment and wrath towards us, gratitude now enlivens our affections and motivates our lives as we seek to make Jesus known in active love. With that, I’d like us to think today about what it looks like to be the kind of friend that Jesus has been to us.

***No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.***  
*(John 15:15)*

That Jesus calls us His friends not only changes our relationship with Him, it also changes every aspect of relationship with those around us. Jesus, our BEST friend, uses our friendship with Him to make Himself known to those around us. It is a beautiful adage that says: the unmistakable mark of a Christian is that she begins to treat others the way she has been treated by Christ. And you know, as I look at these qualities that characterize Jesus, I am struck by how profoundly I long for my Christian friends to offer to me those same attributes. Because it is in both giving *and* receiving that we more fully steward the presence of Christ. Here is C.S. Lewis on this idea:

*“Our imitation of God in this life -...must be an imitation of God incarnate: our model is the Jesus, not only of Calvary, but of the workshop, the roads, the crowds, the clamorous demands and surly oppositions, the lack of all peace and privacy, the interruptions. For this...is not only like, but is, the Divine life operating under human conditions.”*

So let’s look at some verses that show us the glory of “the Divine life operating under human conditions,” celebrating that Jesus is first gift...and then our example. As Jesus remakes his

disciples, taking them from servant to friend, there's so much that happens in that divine transition. Here are seven hallmarks of what this includes. It's not meant to be an exhaustive list, but one that begins to paint a vivid picture of who Jesus is *to* us, and who we are *for* Him to the world around us.

## 1. **Jesus calls to us.**

*Matthew 4:21 Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them.*

Jesus called to James and John. And if you name Jesus as your Lord, that same call was issued to you at some point in your life: Christ called you to enter into a divine relationship with Himself. The words, "to call" in this passage, and others like it, mean something very intentional. That phrase means: "*to summons and invite someone to come and follow.*" In other words, it isn't a simple greeting. It means, rather, "You there, come with Me. There's a way I have for you to take. It's this way. Follow Me." It is Jesus calling you FOR Himself, and TOWARD a goal. The FOR Himself part of the calling is so that our lives become an expression of His life, "...*that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (2 Corinthians 5:15).*" We are called to live for Him.

The "toward a goal" part of the calling is to move us into the kingdom of God with all its duties, privileges, and bliss here and hereafter. That call spurs us to "*desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one (Hebrews 11:16).*" God has prepared a city for us. And as Jesus' friends, we are called to be moving in that very intentional direction. In case we're tempted to minimize this first hallmark, bear this in mind: In the Bible, when Jesus **calls** to His people, it's not only to follow Him, to live for Him, and move towards a goal – those are three over-arching aspects – but it's also so that He can meet with them, speak to them, give them authority, give them understanding, instruct them, heal them, give them hearing, give them sight, correct them, give them hope, and raise the dead (Matt 9:9, 10:1, 15:10, 15:32, 20:32; Mark 10:49; Eph 1:18, Luke 8:8, John 11:43). That is the power of His call.

## 2. **Jesus reveals to us our true identity**

*John 15:15a "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends..."*

I think it's good for us to understand two insights from this verse. First, in the Bible, it's not a bad thing to be called a servant or slave of the Lord. I would even feel comfortable saying it's a great thing to be called a servant. Moses, Joshua, David were all called servants of God, and both Paul and James counted it an honor to be a "servant of God" (*Titus 1:1; James 1:1*). So,

since Jesus is clearly indicating something better in giving His followers this new identity of friend, I think it has to mean that this transition from servant to friend is a transition from something great, to something greater.

It is Jesus saying, “I have something greater for you; an elevated position – one of unique intimacy with me, the kind where I tell you heavenly things, things I hear from the Father. Things other people don’t know or understand.” It’s true isn’t it, that its necessary to be part of the kingdom family to truly understand Jesus’ words of life; you have to be His friend. And not only that, but there is new freedom built in to the language of this promotion. We’re not only going to now receive and understand the things of God, but we’re also going to get a new life experience. A slave, which we once were, experiences inherent limitations. He may be ABLE to do more than his service requires, but he may not be *permitted* to exercise those abilities, interests, and desires. His life is a less-than and constrained life.

But relationship with Christ comes with true freedom because we get a whole new identity. No longer are we called slaves, we have a new title and a new life. Of course, we’re delivered from bondage to sin and self; but we’re also delivered to unrestrained, albeit imputed, virtue: this new identity delivers us from a less-than life, to one where we are *more than conquerors (Romans 8:37)* and *can do all things through Christ who strengthens [us] (Phil 4:13)*. Some friendships are more valuable than others; but One Friendship makes *you* more valuable than any other. As New Testament believers, our new identity affords us new virtue because of the power that is at work within us, a power beyond ourselves. *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us (Eph 3:20)*. Jesus call upon your life has set you free to walk in newness of life and be more than you are.

### **3. (A continuation from the last) Jesus disclosed to us what He heard from the Father.**

*John 15:15b "... all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

Jesus is clear here: He discloses to us the Word and will of the Father. On earth, He did this directly, face to face if you will. Seated now in glory, He does this still through the inspired Word of God and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He discloses to us things that we cannot *naturally* know and understand on our own. But rather, through the Scriptures, in prayer, worship, and fellowship – Jesus takes us into His confidence and gives us understanding.

He discloses the nature of God’s kingdom to us. There is a great word picture here – *to make known* literally means: “to unfold divine things.” A remarkable feature of this disclosure is that if you trace the line of communication, from heaven to earth if you will, the whole Trinity is at

work. God the Father tells God the Son, which things are then received by God the Spirit, who discloses it to us. Listen to Paul describe this in:

*1 Corinthians 2:12-14,16 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ... 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ."*

If the new identity Jesus gives us frees us to be more than we are, then in disclosing to us the things of God, we are privileged to divinely know more than we know. I hope you think upon that truth often. It can change how you live your day. I remember one of my professors in seminary who used to reference "the divine plus" in counseling. And this is what he was talking about. He would say, remember, because of the Holy Spirit of Christ at work in and through you and your counselee, there is among you all that has ever been known, and all that will ever be known. "...we have received...the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God." If that's too outlandish a statement for you, then let me say it this way, the Spirit of Christ is the true and only change agent in all sanctification.

#### **4. Jesus gave us His obedience to the Father**

*Matthew 26:39 "And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*

(John 15:13 couches this obedience in the context of sacrifice where we read, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.")

Those words were spoken by Jesus on a Thursday. That's significant because on Friday, He would hang on the cross. The day before He laid down His life for us, Jesus made it clear, there is no greater love than what I am about to do for you. When faced with the choice of saving His own life or obeying the will of God the Father, Jesus chose obedience, and He did so so that we wouldn't have to face the cross of wrath on our own. *Matthew 26:39 says, And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."* This makes it clear that Jesus asked if there was any other possible way for Him to accomplish our redemption. But there wasn't, so Jesus faced the agonizing choice: bear the wrath of God's judgment against *their* sin (those He calls), or they will all go to Hell and You will lose them forever.

Jesus chose the wrath. To say that Jesus gave us His obedience, is to say that you have Friend who went to Hell for you. (Tim Keller “Friendship” sermon). Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. He became for us the wrath-absorbing sacrifice by which our sins were not overlooked, but were judged...in the flesh and blood of Another. Jesus, in our place, was crucified, died, and was buried. The hymn got it right: “What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!” His obedience gave us life.

*Colossians 2:13-14* And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

#### **5. Jesus meets with us presence-to-presence.**

*In Matthew 28:20* the resurrected Jesus tells His disciples: “*And lo I am with you always, to the end of the age.*”

In this hallmark, we need to talk about “with-ness”: the truth of Jesus’ eternal presence with us. *Exodus 33:11* tells us the Lord used to speak to Moses “*face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*” The meaning of this phrase “face to face” could accurately be rendered “*presence to presence*” in that the original word for “face” is a word that’s used over 1,000 times in the Old Testament and it is often translated “presence.” For example, Adam and Eve hid themselves from the *presence* of the Lord God; Cain went out from the *presence* of the Lord; Moses said to God, “if your *presence* does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.” Those are all the same original word. I point that out because, as God met with Moses presence to presence just as a man speaks to his friend, Jesus meets with us presence to presence because we are His friends. He gives to us *here*, His eternal presence... “*And lo I am with you always...*”

The wonder of this is hard to overstate – but it’s where we hang our spiritual hat – on the truth that Christ, Himself, is continually presence to presence with us here and now. It is, in fact, meant to conjure up for us the covenantal faithfulness of Yahweh – the OT covenant name – rooted in “I Am”. Yahweh means the continually present, always existing, ever happening God. Jesus is that for us: the covenant keeping, continually present with-us Son of God. We enjoy this with-ness through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and as we apply ourselves to abiding in Christ – drawing our life and nourishment from Him alone.

#### **6. Jesus appointed us to bear fruit that remains.**

*In John 15:16* Jesus says, “*You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*”

*John 15:8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*

This is great. This particular hallmark finds its beauty in the word “appointed.” When Jesus says, “...I chose you and *appointed* you...” that word means “to place someone in a position for a special service or special purpose.” We’ve been commissioned and destined for greatness. In this case, the greatness is that we bear fruit, and fruit that remains. Jesus Himself has already positioned us in such a way that our lives will be fruitful. I think of it this way: picture a magnificent thoroughbred racehorse that’s been lovingly cared for and perfectly prepared for the big race. It’s outfitted in all the splendor the owner has to offer, no expense spared. It’s brought to the starting gate, soothed by the confidence of its master who whispers in its ear that this is it – hold nothing back, it’s all yours, the prize is *yours* .... There is nothing to stop that perfectly appointed creature from taking every prize. The gate goes up and its master exclaims...Run!

If you’re not offended by the comparison, we are that thoroughbred. No expense has been spared, and we have been prepared for this moment. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah was confronted with the question, “*If completing with men tires you out, how will you run with the horses?*” (*Jer. 12:25*). For us, the answer comes in this hallmark: we can run the race because we have been chosen and appointed to do so by Christ Himself. And not only run, but *win* the race. The eternal value of the fruit we bear rests only on the condition that it is offered unto Jesus Christ for the glory of God. A.W. Tozer puts it this way, “Any temporal possession can be turned in to everlasting wealth. Whatever is given to Christ is immediately touched with immortality.” (Tozer, A. W. 1959. *The Transmutation of Wealth*. In *Born After Midnight*. Chicago, IL: Christian Publications). Which means that if we think of our lives as only impacting today, or tomorrow, we are believing for far too little. Jesus’ friends are much more capable than that. You are called to bear fruit that remains, beyond your days, beyond your reach. Not only does Jesus enable you to be more than you are, and to know more than you know, but He also enables you to live beyond yourself, beyond your lifetime.

## **7. Jesus desires and allows us to behold His glory**

In *Matthew 17:1-2* we read that “*after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.*”

Jesus took His inner circle of Peter, James and John with Him up a high mountain where they were allowed to see the transfiguration, and behold the glory of God the Son. Later, less than 24 hours before He went to the cross, in His high priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for those whom the Father had given to Him to see His glory. He said, “*Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given Me, may be with Me where I am, to see my glory that You have given Me because you loved Me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24)*. Stunningly, it is Christ’s desire that

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we would see His glory. When Jesus prayed in John 17, *“I desire that they also see my glory,”* the “they” in that prayer is US – all believers throughout the ages. We know this because in verse 20 He says so: *“I do not ask for these only (the disciples), but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”* Jesus wants us to be one with Him so that we may see His glory – the eternal glory of God’s love.

I’ll stop short here because in next month’s virtual devotion we’ll take a longer look at John 17.

However, as you consider these seven hallmarks of who Jesus is to us (as gift), also think upon what these attributes might look like in your relationships (as model), loving love one-another as you have been loved.

**Blessings in the King.**