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I really hope all of you were able to spend the time meditating on *John 15:12-13*, *Philippians 2:3-4* and *Galatians 5:13-15* throughout this week and sought God about loving and caring for others with the same level of intuitive intentionality by which He has loved you. You will see that in our text for this week Jesus once again makes it clear that His command for us is that we love one another so I hope that this notion of considering others as more important than yourself did not just fade into the busy events of your week.

However, by saying that, I also do not want any of us to get caught in the spin cycle of religious obligations, duties, or burdens. Remember, this is not a command which we can, in and of ourselves, obey. Loving one another is not something that we can determine to go and “do” (at least not with any eternal impact); it is a fruit that will be produced from our lives only when we abide in Christ (*Galatians 5:22*). In fact, if you go and “try” and “obey” this command you will fail—it’s just a matter of time. You won’t have the supernatural wisdom to know what face of love is needed at the moment and most likely you will not be able to sustain any attempts to love unconditionally because people will just take advantage of you and you will get annoyed and frustrated “trying” to love.

This is an issue of faith. We must believe that Jesus is the only source of Agape love; thus, in reality He is the only one who can obey this command. He just loves to do it through us. That is why: 1) trusting ourselves to Jesus is a prerequisite for abiding; 2) abiding is a prerequisite for His abiding in us; and 3) His life in ours is the prerequisite for God using our bodies to love others.

Trusting ourselves to Jesus, choosing to let Him be the Lord of our lives, is how all Biblical requirements for obedience are fulfilled in us. And because “trust” is our biggest struggle to our walking by faith in the Spirit of God, in our passage

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tonight, Jesus gives us a few more unbelievable reasons why we can confidently trust ourselves to Him: He considers us to be His personal friends and He makes it clear that He is the one who has personally chosen each of us to be vessels through which His Father will be glorified here on earth. He also promises that if we abide in Him the fruit which flows from our life will follow us into eternity.

***John 15:14-17***

"You are My friends if you do what I command you." No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. "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." This I command you, that you love one another.

Now, when I first read this passage I thought it was really cool. God considers me His friend. This is a remarkable privilege and brings to mind some of the benefits that come with having a friend like God. For example, in the New Living Translation and the English Standard Version, *Psalm 25:14* says that God shares the secrets of His covenant with His friends. How cool is that. We get to know things that others simply do not get to know or ever understand. It's like belonging to a totally cool and exclusive club with all these secrets spoken in a language that others cannot even comprehend.

Paul talks about His experience being a friend of God in his letter to the Corinthians. He describes it in such a fantastic way that every time I read it I am

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totally jealous. I know that I have experienced some of what he described, but I also know that I want to experience more and more of the benefits of being friends with God.

*1 Corinthians 2:6-13, 15*

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him."

For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. 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, 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. ... we have the mind of Christ.

Every time I read that passage I am totally floored; it is amazing! But what is even more amazing is that Paul's experience is to be our experience. This is not just some freakish thing that happened to Paul, but this is to be experienced by all

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who have been chosen by God. This level of intimacy is to define our relationship with Jesus. We are to speak with His wisdom combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words as the Spirit reveals to us, if you can imagine, the mind of Christ. The benefits of being a friend of God are nothing short of spectacular as these benefits are described as “things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man.” Based on that description, I think we have just touched the surface of what it means to be friends with God.

Now if this is not your experience, then there is a good chance that you tripped over the “if” and the conditional clause of **John 15:14**, “You are My friends *if* you do what I command you.” At first this “if” kind of threw me for a loop. I thought: what do you mean I might not be a friend of God. I thought His love was unconditional and limitless? Well, His love is unconditional and limitless but what we are dealing here is our ability to remain in fellowship with God. When you look at this statement in light of the entire passage of **John 15** which deals with abiding, it is easy to understand and entirely consistent.

The command which Jesus focuses on as a condition to friendship is the command to Agape love one another; however, the only way we can love one another with God’s agape love is if we first love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and soul. These are essentially the two greatest commandments listed in reverse order. So for Jesus to command the later (to love one another it means He has assumed that we are living the former (that we love the Lord with all our heart, mind, and soul). The latter is simply not possible without the former.

Now it may not be totally obvious to you, but this passage about friendship with God actually highlights the distinction between the *New Creation* and our *Old Sinful Nature* and why if we choose to live from our *Old Sinful Nature* we are not friends with God.

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When a person becomes a Christian God places within them a new nature which we call the *New Creation* (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). It is within our *New Creation* that the Godhead (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) takes up residence (**John 14:23**) and it is from this *New Creation* that we have our fellowship with God.

Now unfortunately, when we accept Jesus into our lives, our *Old Sinful Nature* does not disappear; rather, he is merely displaced to make room for the *New Creation*. The extent to which the *Old Sinful Nature* has place and position in your life is totally dependent upon the extent to which you trust yourself to Jesus; hence, the extent to which you abide and let Jesus be the Lord of your life. If you abide in Christ then the *Old Sinful Nature* will be quenched and have little to no voice of authority over your life. If however you do not abide, then your *Old Sinful Nature* will dominate your being and you will obey its commands and you will not be obedient to the commands of Jesus. During those times, you will not be a friend of God; in fact, just the opposite, you will be an enemy of God.

Sadly, this was the spiritual condition of the believers at Corinth. The continuation of the passage we read earlier in **1 Corinthians 2** deals with this reality. Although these verses are incredibly intense, they emphasize how desperate we are and how important it is for us to fully trust ourselves to Jesus.

### ***1 Corinthians 2:14-3:3***

But a *natural* man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.

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And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of *flesh*, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still *fleshly*. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not *fleshly*, and are you not walking like mere men?

Paul drives home the reality that if, as believers, we do not abide in Christ we are essentially living as unregenerate men of flesh who are driven by our sensual desires. Therefore, we cannot be considered to be friends of God. When we live like this we are almost Frankenstein like freaks. We are men who are born of the Spirit of God unnaturally living as men of flesh—it's a perversion!

The two words I want you to hone in on are the words we have translated as “natural” and “flesh” (or “fleshly”). First, the word for “natural” is the Greek word “*Psuchikós*” which literally describes men in their natural state—men who are driven by their natural sensual desires. This is why this word is also translated as “sensual” in *James 3:15* and *Jude 19*. When we live as mere natural men we cannot accept the things of the Spirit (we literally have no capacity) and we cannot understand the things of the Spirit for they can only be understood by the Spirit.

Ok follow me on this line of thinking. Everything we have received comes from God (*Romans 11:36*) and everything which God gives us comes fresh and new into our lives (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). And God simply does not deal with our *Old Sinful Nature* (*Ephesians 4:24, 2 Corinthians 5:16*)—which is also why He does not deal with us on the basis of sin. Thus, unless we live from the *New Creation*, who is indwelt with the Spirit of God, we do not have true fellowship with God; as a result, we can hardly understand a word He says and His secrets remain secrets.

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We can know the religious words, and we can practice the religious application of those words, but it all means nothing. We miss out on friendship with God and we simply do not understand the truth. We have Bible knowledge without the wisdom of God and we have Christianity without Christ.

Second, the word we have translated “flesh” is the Greek word “*Sarx*” which literally means meat, but Biblically it is a reference to the carnal nature of our body. This word is used 147 times in the New Testament and is most often used to contrast that which is sinful from that which is spiritual.

For example in *Galatians 5:19-21*: Now the deeds of the flesh (“*sarx*”) are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. Or in *Colossians 2:18*: “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly (“*sarkos*”) mind.

And a passage which really makes the point of the distinction between the Spirit and the “*Sarx*” is in Romans 8.

### ***Romans 8:5-8***

For those who are according to the flesh (“*sarx*”) set their minds on the things of the flesh (“*sarx*”), but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh (“*sarx*”) is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh (“*sarx*”) is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh (“*sarx*”) cannot please God.

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All that is “natural” and of the “flesh” should bring clarification to both the big “if” clause in *John 15:14* and, as I reminded you of last week, why there is no middle ground of passivity. You are either being controlled by the *New Creation* and are a friend of God or you are being controlled by the *Old Sinful Nature* and are not a friend. Only “if” we abide, only “if” we trust ourselves to Jesus, only “if” He abides in us, we will be able to experience friendship with God, for only then will our *New Creation* dominate our lives. You see God is friends only with your *New Creation*, but with your flesh, with your “*sarx*,” He always stands in opposition for your flesh is hostile to God and is an enemy of God.

James also makes this clear when He says that if we have a friendship with the world, and if we walk in the ways and wisdom of the world, we are hostile to God and have made ourselves an enemy of God (*James 4:1-5*). Once again, if the Spirit is not leading your life, then your *New Creation* is being quenched and the *Old Sinful Nature* is in charge and He is an enemy of God—always has been and always will be.

This is why I keep saying that we are so desperate for Jesus. You see we must trust ourselves completely to Jesus; there is no other way. If we do not abide then the branches that grow from our life will not bear the fruit of the Spirit and will only be good to be cut off and thrown into the fire.

Do you want to be a friend of God? Do you want to have Him reveal to you His secrets? Do you want to understand His language? Do you want to be able to know and speak from the mind of Christ? Do you want the wisdom that only comes from God? Do you want to know what He is up to and what He is doing? Do you want to produce fruit that will follow you throughout all eternity? Then you must love one another which means you must abide in Christ which means you must be thoroughly convinced that without Him you can do nothing and



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therefore you must trust yourself completely to Him. It is a full package deal but it all starts with trust.

In *verse 15*, Jesus said that He no longer calls us slaves. Now, as far as I can remember, Jesus never directly called us or His disciples His slaves. What I think Jesus is alluding to is the fact that prior to their having been made clean and washed in the word (*John 15:3* "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you"), they were slaves held in bondage to sin and they were subject to the whimsical desires of their master. In fact, as slaves they had no choice but to obey their master's evil and selfish desires; they did not even understand why, they just did.

#### ***John 8:34***

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

Since all of us have sinned, by nature and by choice, this was the same position that we all were in before Jesus broke our chains of bondage and adopted us as His sons. It is so funny how we used to walk around so arrogantly thinking that we were the masters of our own life and all the while we were slaves doing everything that our *Old Sinful Nature* required of us. We were not in control and never were in control. We were in bondage to a master that hated God.

But for those of us who are now in a relationship with Jesus Christ and have been cleansed by His Word, all of that has changed. We have been set free. Our *Old Sinful Nature* no longer has any authority over our lives and can no longer

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force us to obey its will. The only power it has is the power we freely give to it by not trusting ourselves to Jesus (*Romans 6:12-14*).

I love the fact that Jesus did not say that we became slaves of God. This is very important to understand. Slaves have to do what they are told and are bound by law and the threat of death for disobedience is always hanging over their heads. This was our relationship to the perfect Law of God before Jesus came and died for our sins (*Galatians 3:10-14*). We were condemned to death for our disobedience.

But unlike a slave, a friend is never forced or coerced by fear or threat of harm. A friend gets to choose to be in relationship: it is volitional and not compulsive—that is what makes it a friendship. Therefore, since we have been freed from our *Old Sinful Nature*, we get to choose to live in obedience to Jesus commands. We get to choose to trust ourselves to Him. We get to choose to abide. We get to choose to Agape Him. We get to choose to live in His love. We get to choose to know about Him and receive all that He has for us.

With that said, we also get to choose to serve ourselves. And, although this is the downside of being in these bodies of flesh, the fact that we even have this choice in so many ways defines the beauty, the freedom, and the magnitude of God's Agape love—we have choice! We have literally been freed from ourselves (our *Old Sinful Nature*), freed from the condemnation of the Law, and freed from our death sentence. So now we are free to daily choose, out of friendship, to respond to the love of Jesus and choose to be in an active and abiding relationship with Him.

### ***John 15:15***

...but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Jesus says that He calls us friends because He has disclosed to us all that the Father gave Him to reveal. He left nothing out. It is all there to be discovered! Now I believe Jesus is not just talking about what we have recorded in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) but I think this is a reference to His complete revelation through the entirety of the Word of God.

The Word of God is a perfect revelation of Jesus and all that the Father wants us to know and understand about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit inspired the written Word according to all that He heard from Jesus (*John 16:12-15*). Thus, it is through the Word of God that we actually can learn how to enhance and deepen our friendship with the Lord. In fact, the Word contains those “secrets” that are for “*our eyes only*.” This is one of the reasons why it is so important to study and feed on the Word of God.

This is an issue of faith! The Bible is not just religious literature that religious people read. We must believe that God wants us to discover all His secrets and the depth of His disclosure to us. You see it is all there for us to find if only we are willing to do the work and seek to know Him. If we seek then the Holy Spirit will reveal to us Jesus and teach us all things (*John 14:21 and 26*).

***Proverbs 8:17***

"I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me.

***Jeremiah 29:13-14***

'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

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It is all ours for the finding. But notice that it is all about seeking Him and being in relationship with Him. It is not about Biblical knowledge or mastering the historical languages or facts. It is all about knowing Jesus and enjoying your friendship with the Lord. If this is your aim, you will be fulfilling the first and greatest commandment: love the Lord God with all your heart, mind and soul; and, as a result, you will also fulfill the second greatest commandment and you will Agape love one another. I love the way it all ties together.

### ***John 15:16***

"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.

This is a powerful reality: Jesus chose you to be connected to the vine; in fact, He placed you there (or appointed you) so that you would bear the kind of fruit that will follow you as a reward throughout all eternity.

He chose you to know Him. He chose you to be in relationship with Him. He chose you for salvation. He chose you to be set apart unto Him. He chose you as a priest of God. He chose you to be adopted into His family as a child of God. He chose you to find your life in Him. He chose you to know His secrets. He chose you as His friend.

He chose you to work out His will in heaven here on earth. He chose you to know His will for your life so that whatever you ask in Jesus' name the Father will give you as your requests naturally line up perfectly with God's purposes for your life. He chose you to live in this will and experience a supernatural life where your

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now is about your eternity for to you they are one in the same because you have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. You have been made into an eternal being and have been chosen to experience the presence of the Almighty God here and now. You have been chosen to know His voice (as all His true sheep know His voice).

He chose you to have victory over your *Old Sinful Nature*, over the enemy, and over everything that tries to come between you and God. He chose you to one day join Him in heaven with the Father. He chose you to return with Him to this earth and rule and reign with Him for 1,000 years before the final destruction of the earth.

And guess what? He chose you before the world was even formed. You have been precious and special in the eyes of God and a key part of His plan before anything in the natural realm had an existence. This is nothing short of mind blowing amazing.

### ***Ephesians 1:3-6***

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Wow, being chosen by God is quite a mouthful and I think all of us should get on our knees and fall on our face before God and thank Him that we were chosen. I

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want all of you to focus on this reality: you have been hand-picked by God! You are precious to God. You are special to Him and there is no one like you!

Honestly I don't understand His reasons at all. Why me and not someone else? Why you? We surely did not deserve it? There are plenty of people who deserved it more than we did. What about all those billions of people who have died throughout the ages having no relationship with Jesus? What about the Billions that were born in countries where the name of Jesus is vilified? But we have been chosen—you and I—and we know Him. We have been given the greatest prize and treasure that can be found anywhere. This should stir up and inspire in you a spirit of awe as well as a spirit of humility and thanksgiving.

Do you now understand why He is so worthy of our trust and why the things of this world that we put such a big emphasis on are really worth nothing? Do you understand why you must abide and stop trusting in yourself and placing such a value on things that are essentially worthless. Yes we all have our problems; but nothing that happens to His chosen ones is outside of His rule, authority, and total command. We are His and it is time that we not only realize it but believe it and start living every moment clinging to this truth and thereby start enjoying our friendship with the Lord. Yes, Jesus wants us to enjoy Him—that's what friends are for. He wants us to grow in this friendship and learn how to be with Him and how to talk to Him and how to depend upon Him. He is that friend who is closer than a brother (*Proverbs 18:24*) and our life should be about exploring Him and learning to live moment by moment with the best friend we could ever have.

Let's Pray