

# "When I'm Gone... Remain in My Love"

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] John 15. If you could keep your Bibles open, that would be a big help. If you've got a church Bible to hand, it's page 1083, if that's fallen closed, and it would be a great help to me if you could keep that open. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you'd find that helpful, as we look at this portion of Scripture together. But let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. We praise you, gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, for your living word and for all Jesus taught his disciples to prepare them and us through them for life when he's gone. Thank you for his promise of another advocate, your Holy Spirit. And we ask now, Holy Spirit, that you will be with us, that by your word you will speak living words to us today, not as history, but as a present word to us. And by your work in us, would you move us to respond rightly to what we hear? For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, what does it mean to be a friend of Jesus? We might think of the song, You've Got a Friend in Me, from Toy Story, Randy Newman's song, about the constancy of a friend. When the road looks rough ahead, and you're miles and miles from your nice warm bed, you just remember what your old pal said, Boy, You've Got a Friend in Me.

So if Jesus is our friend, does that make him a bit like Woody in Toy Story? Someone that we might grow out of, but they'll always be there for us if we come back. We might forget about them, but they'll always be there. Or what about another great film song about friendship?

You've Never Had a Friend Like Me, in Aladdin. It's the genie who sings that, because of his passion to give you whatever your heart wishes for. Life is your restaurant, and I'm your maitre d'e. Come on, whisper. What is it you want? You ain't ever had a friend like me.

So is Jesus more like Aladdin's genie in our friend? An all-powerful being, on standby, waiting to hear the deepest wishes of my heart, and he'll make them come true.

What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus? Jesus calls his disciples friends. What does he mean about our relationship with him? Well, we're in a teaching series looking at Jesus teaching his disciples the night before he died, and his words are full of assurance. Their hearts were troubled that he said he was going. He says that by his going, he'll make room for them in his father's house, and that though he goes, he will come to be with them again by his spirit. God with them to teach them. God in them to help them. And then he gives us this picture we started looking at last week, beginning of John 15, of the organic connection that Jesus will have with his followers, followers. And through him, the connection his people will have with his heavenly father.

[ 3 : 2 7 ] So concerning his heavenly father, Jesus said, John 15 verse 1, I'm the true vine, and my father is the gardener. And then concerning the relationship with his people, he said, I'm the vine, you are the branches.

Now we looked last week at how through that picture, Jesus is showing us that he is absolutely at the center of God's purposes for the world and his plans for human history. He is divine. That means he is the true Israel, the one through whom God will make the world a fruitful garden. And Jesus is also showing us through that picture that he provides for his followers, not just at the start of our Christian lives, but all through our lives in everything God calls us to do. So as a Christian, we might think, I know Jesus died for me to give me a fresh start with God and wipe the slate clean, but the rest is up to me to live a different life now on my own steam. And Jesus corrects that. He says, apart from me, you can do nothing. It's only by remaining in him, depending on him, trusting him, and letting his words abide in us, abide in us, fill our lives, that we will be fruitful, like a branch of a vine bearing fruit, drawing on the vine. Now Jesus helps us understand what it means to be a fruitful branch in Jesus, the true vine. And the picture he uses of the relationship between him and his disciples is friendship. And the first thing we see is that to be Jesus' friend is to experience his love.

To be Jesus' friend is to experience his love. Have a look with me again at verse 9. Jesus says, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

And then verse 13, greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. In other words, in verse 9, Jesus says the closest analogy for his love for his disciples is the love God the Father has for God the Son. And folks, I don't know what you think about that, but I think that is amazing. In eternity, there has always been one God who is an eternal Father, always loving his eternal Son. And in the unity of the Holy Spirit, the three persons of God love each other and they delight in each other. And that joy and love overflowed like a fountain of love into their creation of the cosmos and of humanity. And the Son, Jesus, says, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. And I was asking this week, in what sense could that be true?

Well, human love is often about what we get in return. Something in the object of our love moves us to love them. We love someone because they please us or because we love, we get so much out of knowing them. We admire them. And that being filled with admiration for them gives us this sense of love for them. So something in the focus of our love generates love in us.

[ 7 : 02 ]      God the Father's love for God the Son is completely self-giving from himself. It's not so much about the person who is loved being lovable, though the Son certainly is lovable. He is perfect and magnificent and he's worthy of the Father's love. But the Father loves the Son because of the Father's own character.

That God the Father is love and his nature is to set his love on his Son. Just as the Son in his nature is love and he sets his love on his Father. So love flows from them and into one another and out into his creation.

And Jesus loves us, everyone who believes in him, with that same love. It's an unconditional love because he sets his love on us, not because we were inherently lovable, but because he is inherently loving.

It's a genuinely other-person-centered love, giving of himself in love to us. So when you hear that Jesus loves you, you're not to think that Jesus was saying, you are just so great, heaven wouldn't be heaven without you. No, he set his love on us while we had made ourselves his enemies. We were not lovable.

He redeemed us while we were still sinners, running from God, turned from him. Our hearts bent on loving ourselves instead of him. And that's humbling to hear that God didn't love me because of who I am.

[ 8 : 39 ] He loved me because of who he is. That's humbling. But it's really good to know that God loves us like that because it means that his love for you doesn't depend on a quality that you have that he saw in you that generated his love. Because if that's what his love was like, then you might lose that quality and you lose his love. He loves you because he loves you. Because he's love. And that love moved him to action. So in verse 13, Jesus defines love for us after his own example. Verse 13, greater love has no one than this, one than this, one than this, one than this, one than this, one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. And Jesus fulfilled that verse in a way none of us ever could. If you imagine a situation where we could say, I laid down my life for a friend. Say I had a friend who was about to get knocked down on Kelvin Bridge by traffic and I ran out into the road and I pushed them onto the pavement and I take the full force of the traffic and I die and they live. What did I achieve for them?

Did I save them from death? Well, I didn't really. What I did was delay their death. It could be by two years. It could be by 70 years. But I have stepped in to delay their death, to give them a bit more time alive before they die. And what did it cost me to do that?

Did I die instead of them? Well, not really. All I've done is actually bring forward my own death. But death was going to happen to me anyway. Death is a sentence over all of us. And the Bible reveals to us that the reason we'll all die is because we all sin. Death is an executioner. Romans 6.23 says, the wages of sin is death. So everyone dies because everyone sins. So if I lay down my life for my friend on Kelvin Bridge, what I'm doing is bringing forward my inevitable death to delay their death.

And Jesus is the one man who would never have died. He took flesh and became a man and he lived righteously his whole life, delighting his heavenly father every day. So death couldn't claim him. Death had no hold over him. And yet he went to the cross because he laid down his life. And he can truly say, this is love. Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for his friends. And his death doesn't just delay my death and give me more time. It means that in one sense, you and I, if we trust him, we'll never die. We're given life now as we get true life, life in its fullness, life with Jesus as he comes to be with us by his spirit. And we get assurance of life forever, that he's made a room for us in his father's house. So to be a friend of Jesus is to experience his love. In one children's

Bible, it has the refrain that he loves me with a never stopping, never giving up, always and forever love. It's a love that draws us today into the mutual other person-centered love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God draws us into that. He says in chapter 14 of when the Spirit comes, on that day you will realize that I'm in my Father and you are in me and I'm in you.

[ 12 : 21 ] He draws us in. To be Jesus' friend is to experience his love. Then what does it look like to respond to that love? Well, we must remember as we think about our response that we cannot respond to that love without Jesus' help. He's the vine and we draw on the branches. Apart from him, we can do nothing.

But the response is our second point. To be Jesus' friend is to keep his commands. So have a look with me again from verse 9. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. When we love someone, we want to please them. Jesus loves his heavenly Father, so he lives to please him. And he calls us to abide in his love through obedience, living to please him.

through his words abiding in us with authority. That I would know his words. I carry them round with me day by day in my life, continually. And I know they have authority in my life. He can contradict me.

I can't contradict him. He reiterates it in verse 14. Verse 14, you are my friends if you do what I command.

[ 13 : 53 ] So it's friendship, but it's not symmetrical friendship. Do we see that? It's not friendship on an even keel. One TV program about friendship is Gone Fishing. Bob Mortimer, Paul Whitehouse, I don't know if you've seen it. Some people watch it for the scenery. Some people watch it for the fishing. Maybe one or two people. Really, it's a program about friendship. Bob from Middlesbrough and Paul, they're friends. They're friends and they just spend time together on the TV. Each episode, one of them plans the trip. The other one gets to be surprised. Then they swap round next time.

Just imagine if you were watching Gone Fishing about this friendship between Bob and Paul, and you notice that one of them always tells the other one what to do. That that's how their relationship works. That in their friendship, one of them's always telling the other one what to do, and the other one just submits and just tries to keep the other one happy. Well, if that happened, it wouldn't last long, would it, before Paul said to Bob, well, who put you in charge?

And imagine if Bob said, well, you did when we became friends. You're my friend now, so you do what I command. That's how friendship with me works. Well, we all know that's not how friendship on an even keel works, with one person calling the shots. We know that in our own lives.

So Jesus' friendship with his disciples is different to that, to normal friendship. From our perspective, friendship with Jesus is awestruck friendship. It's reverent friendship, where we have trembling gratitude towards the one who calls us his friends. You think of John the Baptist. After me comes one whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie. In our relationship with Jesus, we don't see him as our friend and then bring him down to our level and make it cozy. We're still in awe of his greatness, his holiness, his glory. We're astounded, astounded that he would use the language of friendship towards us. And he calls us into friendship with him, not the other way around.

So I think you could even say that Jesus is not my friend. We're his friends. I don't know what you think about that. But in a sense, we don't call him into friendship with us. He calls us into friendship with him. And think of who calls us his friends.

[ 16 : 46 ] In the words of one contemporary song that come from Hebrews, really, we sing, see the radiance of God's risen son. All the angels rejoice at his name. All creation is sustained by the power of his word, and his throne will endure forever and ever. It's that one who says to us, you are my friends. And so it's appropriate that we respond to that experience of his love, of his call, by living to please him. And living obediently to him is not constraining for us. It is constraining, but not in a way that is oppressive, because keeping his commands will not make us less fulfilled.

So look at verse 11 as he brings that out. He calls us to obedience. And verse 11, he says, I have told you this so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

If we want to be joyful, our joy is on the other side of the closeness with Jesus we find as we keep his commands. And as Jesus makes that promise, that assurance, there's an assumption there, isn't an implication that we can't find true joy from the things he's made in the world, material things.

Where does the world tell us that we can find joy? Where do we think we'll find joy? There's a song by Bell and Sebastian where it talks about going on holiday, asleep on a sunbeam it's called. And in the song, Bell and Sebastian sing about dreaming of going on holiday, and they use the language of, my joy will be complete. So they sing, all I need is somewhere I can feel the grass beneath my feet, a walk on sand, a fire I can warm my hands, my joy will be complete. That's how we might think, especially in February. It's dark, isn't it? Summer holiday, my joy will be complete. Or we might think, if only I had more time, then I would have joy. If only I had more sex, then I would have joy.

If only I had a bigger flat, then I'd have more joy. Jesus implies with his promise here that nothing in this world can give us fullness of joy. He says, you're my friends if you do what I command, and then my joy will be in you, and your joy will be complete. He calls it my joy, the joy he experienced day by day, spending his life walking with God as his heavenly father, and knowing the pleasure that God the Father had for him. Have you experienced joy in the Christian life?

[ 19 : 48 ] Jesus assures us we can when we live obediently. When you turn from your sin day by day, when you guard your heart and let his words abide in you, he says, your joy may be complete.

So we've heard that to be Jesus' friend is to experience his love, and to be Jesus' friend is to obey his commands as we're drawn into the love of God. But how will the world be drawn into that love? Well, our third point is to be Jesus' friend is to join the family business. So let's pick things up again in verse 14. He says, you are my friends if you do what I command. 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.

There are still jobs today where it's not for you to ask why, you just do what you're told. We might think of the military. There was a poem that we had to learn at school when I was at school, the charge of the light brigade, about soldiers sent to charge in the Crimean War, and it had the lines as they were told to charge, there's not to make reply, there's not to reason why, there's but to do and die into the valley of death, roared the 600. Well, when Jesus calls his followers to serve him, he reveals to them what's going on, what the plan is. He lets us see the master plan.

That's what we've been overhearing in this series since John chapter 13. This is Jesus revealing the Father's plan. Jesus has come with words and with works so that anyone who believes in him can have eternal life. He's assured us of that again and again in John's gospel, and then in chapter 20, John says he's written this so that we might believe and have life.

Jesus' business is faith-building mission, moving people to look at Jesus, and because they look at him, to believe in him, because he says, whoever believes in me has crossed over from death to life.

[ 22 : 11 ] But what Jesus has also revealed to us is that when he's gone, the master's plan is that that work will continue through his followers. Jesus says, I'm the true vine, you are the branches. By his spirit at work in us, Christ will be at work through us to draw others in to the love of the Father.

That's the goal that others believe in Jesus. It's the goal of our lives, helping each other believe in Jesus. Jesus returns to that picture of the fruitful vine in verse 16. Have a look. He says, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and so that whatever you ask in my name, the Father will give you.

Significant, I think, that he says you might go, verse 16. He's sending them out to the world that they might help others believe in Jesus. And we thought last week about what that fruit is.

It's the fruit of joyful obedience in our lives. But there's a special focus in that obedience in this teaching on one particular command, isn't there? The command to love each other as God's people.

In verse 12, he gives himself as the model. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. And in verse 17, he sums it up. This is my command, love each other. So it's a sacrificial love, because Jesus' love for us is sacrificial. And it's a focused love. Jesus expressed his love and directed it towards our redemption, that we might have eternal life, be drawn into no God.

[ 24 : 08 ] The particular focus of Jesus' sacrificial love was to bring people to know the Father by believing in the Son. And so that is to be our focus, if we're to love like Jesus loved, that we would love sacrificially. Jesus calls us to be partners in our master's business, because his fruit now grows on our branches, helping others grow in Jesus.

It might still mean that our love for each other is very practical. At times, it needs to be, as we see one another's practical needs, and we look to meet them and care for each other.

At the same time, it's purposeful that our longing for each other is that we will keep believing in Jesus, that we'll keep looking to the Son and trusting him. As you walk with a Christian friend through pain and suffering in their life, loving them, praying for them, helping them, and all the while encouraging them to keep looking to Jesus, then the fruit of God's love grows on you as a branch in the vine.

It's not an insular vision that the people who follow Jesus would kind of disappear from the world and be taken out of the world. The fruit Christians bear is the overflow of the Father's love into the world. It invites the world to see the love of God, and it draws the world to experience the Father's love for themselves. Just as for lots of us, we would say that a key part of our own story in coming to know Jesus was that we saw the transformed lives of his people. We saw Christian community somewhere. Maybe it was a scripture union group in school or going on a Christian camp in the summer, or it was just being in a church where we saw and were attracted by the love of God's people for each other. But the love Jesus calls his friends to is first and foremost a love for one another.

That's the fruit he's concerned to see in our lives, as we abide in him and his words abide in us. He encourages us to pray for that fruit. We've had that emphasis on prayer, the end of verse 16.

[ 26 : 35 ] And as we close, let's just think of how wonderful it would be if here in our own church family, we grew in this vision of what Jesus calls us to for our life together. What might it look like to be a community of friends of Jesus? Well, picture a church where we don't see going to church or going to our small group fellowship as a meeting we have to attend so much as a group of people that we've committed to in love. God has given us people to love, and out of commitment to them, we show up.

Picture a church where if the people, if someone doesn't feel that they're being loved by others, they don't move on and flit around to find a church that they're happier in.

Rather, we turn back to experience a fresh Jesus love for us because we know that it's by drawing on his love that we can have the strength to love others and be the lover in a church family that we long for others to be.

A church like this would unconditionally welcome everybody. Everyone would be unconditionally welcomed because Jesus says, whoever believes in me has eternal life and will not be condemned.

And whoever is a great word. I can fit in whoever. Even you can fit in whoever. And that means Jesus is not a snob about who becomes a branch in the vine.

[ 28 : 20 ] So in a church that reflects the Father's love for him and his love for us, we can't be snobs either. And it's when Jesus puts into our lives the people who are very unlike us, the people we find it hard to love, that we really do have to draw on his strength.

And our love for each other really does look distinctive to the world's love. Supernatural love for those we find it hard to love. And a church like this would be a place where we are willing to let other people into our lives.

We're willing to share our sadnesses, our needs, our joys with specific other people. It doesn't have to be with everyone, but with specific other people so that they can love us and walk with us.

And the fruit of God's love can grow on them as they have the opportunity to love us because we've opened up to them. We've let them in. And it would be a church where we're willing to be there for other people and to help them Christianly as they go through their life.

We love them sacrificially. We talk to God about them. We talk to them about God. Here are some of the marks of a church full of Jesus' friends.

[ 29 : 45 ] Friends who've responded to their experience of His love in joyful obedience so that they've joined the family business. What a glorious picture.

Let's pray together. Just a moment of quiet to reflect on Jesus' words to us.

as the father has loved me so have I loved you now remain in my love Lord Jesus we praise you for your love for us we are astounded that you would call us your friends we thank you that you have revealed to us our master's business may you be at work deeply in us by your spirit that our experience of your love will abound and fuel our obedience and our obedience will complete our joy we ask that our lives will be lined up behind your business in the world today of helping others believe in you and trust you and we ask that our life together as a church would be marked by the distinctive ways that we as your people love each other we ask for your namesake

Amen we're going to take some time now to respond to the people we ask for your namesake