

## Day 1

### He Called Us Friends

*“Abraham believed God,  
and it was credited to him as righteousness,”  
and he was called God’s friend.*

--James 2:23

She waited by the bedside of her lover of thirty-four years.

Tenderly massaging his puffy hands, she studied his face, every line and wrinkle, as the tubes pumped life into her beloved. She watched the slow rise and fall of his chest and glanced periodically at the beeping, zigzag readings of the monitors above his bed. A smile glowed on her face even as a tear trickled down her cheek.

Priscilla loved her husband. Together they were the epitome of an intimate friendship. The two demonstrated what a devoted marriage could and should be like.

But intimacy always costs something: time, selflessness, thoughtfulness, generosity, trust—absolute trust. And very often, suffering. Those who are intimately close feel the hurts and joys of the ones they love more than anyone else.

As I watched Priscilla, I knew the blessing of this couple’s intimacy was about to include something more: the ultimate suffering and sacrifice. As Thurman slipped away into the arms of his most intimate Friend, the Lord

Jesus Christ, he left behind a legacy and example of true intimacy with his beloved wife.

Intimacy brings many pictures to mind. A man named Job thought intimacy was something God demonstrated only by pouring out tangible blessings: good health, wealth, family, and friends. God often does that. In the middle of his suffering, Job said,

*Oh, for the day when I was in my prime,  
when God's intimate friendship blessed my house,  
when the Almighty was still with me  
and my children were around me,  
when my path was drenched with cream  
and the rock poured out for me streams of olive oil.*

*(Job 29:4–6)*

But intimate friendship includes more than warm blessings of love and prosperity. One of the ways God demonstrated its meaning was by choosing Abraham, a lone wanderer, to become his close friend.

We are not told how much Abraham (then known as Abram) knew about God when God first called him. Abraham grew up in the land of Ur, a city known as a center of pagan idolatry.<sup>1</sup> But God knew Abraham's heart when God said, "Leave your country . . . and go to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). Intimacy with God meant Abraham had to abandon any preconceived ideas of success and follow this God he hardly knew to an unknown destination. Yet Abraham followed.

So God made a covenant with Abraham and promised the following things: to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, to make Abraham's

name great, to make Abraham a blessing, to bless those who blessed Abraham, to curse those who cursed Abraham, and to bless all people on the earth through Abraham's son (Gen. 12:2–3, 21:12).

Fantastic promises! But what Abraham discovered was that the blessing of intimacy—the privilege of being God's friend—would cost something more. Abraham's journey took him through several tests of friendship, which Abraham failed a few times. Still, he hung with God, and God kept loving and leading him.

Years later, Abraham was a childless old man at ninety-nine. God was ready to make good on his promises. Still, more tests lay ahead. Did Abraham believe God would truly give him a son? In other words, did Abraham's friendship stand the test of faith? It did, and because Abraham believed, God “credited it to him as righteousness.”

But the ultimate test of their intimate friendship came after the birth of Abraham's son, Isaac. This time, God required more than just belief. He asked for a demonstration of action—and ultimate surrender. What God asked Abraham to do—sacrifice his own son—God demanded from no one else in Scripture . . . but himself. Yet Abraham followed God, even when it looked as if it would cost his son—the answer to all of God's promises to Abraham.

What went through Abraham's mind early that morning as he cut the wood and saddled his donkey, preparing to travel to Moriah to make the sacrifice? How would God make Abraham a great nation if he killed his own son? How could God ask Abraham to slaughter his own flesh and blood—the miracle, the promised child he had finally borne? What did his two servants think as they set out along the dusty road to Mount Moriah? Did Abraham ever question, “What are you thinking, God?”

And what about Isaac? Did he get a little nervous when Abraham tied his hands and laid him on the altar with the wood? When Abraham raised a knife to plunge into Isaac's chest, did he cry out, "Father, what are you thinking?" (Gen. 22:1–10).

The question is not what God or anyone else was *thinking*, but what Abraham *believed*. Looking back, the New Testament clues us in to Abraham's thinking *and* beliefs:

*By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (Hebrews 11:17–19)*

Abraham obeyed and passed the test proving his faith, friendship, and trust in God. Just before Abraham was about to plunge the knife into Isaac's body, God stopped him and provided a substitute lamb for a burnt offering.

In the provision of that lamb, we see a foreshadowing of God's own Son, laid on the sacrificial altar of a cross, crucified for you and me. Why? Because God wanted a love relationship with us. Because intimacy costs something: it cost God his own Son. Yet when Jesus died, God proved his intention to make us all his intimate friends. Jesus said to his disciples before he died, "I have called you friends" (John 15:15). His words included us as well.

What does true intimacy cost us? A lifelong commitment to the one who pursues us and loves us and calls us his own. True intimacy comes from

an obedient trust: “I believe.” The result is a deep oneness with God. God counted Abraham’s faith as the basis for his intimate friendship, and it’s where the blessing of intimacy with God always begins.

Like Abraham, may it be said of us: “That one is a friend of God?”

### Personal Truth

*True intimacy means a death to our own selfish desires.*

### Personal Prayer

*Lord, thank you for making me your intimate friend through your death on the cross. When tests come my way, help me to follow you no matter what happens. May the joy of our friendship radiate to others so that they, too, want to become your friends.*

### Personal Question

*How has God’s intimate friendship blessed you?*