

Dear all, here I have copied and pasted my sermon notes and a sheet of challenges in growing a friendship with Jesus which I distributed at the service. I have also attached them separately. God bless, David
Growing a Friendship with Jesus. Sermon John 15 v 9-17

Some of you here will have friends from your college days, your secondary school, even your primary school and I take my hat off to you as it is hard to sustain friendship over the course of many years. It most definitely takes two to tango! Friendship is one of the great gifts of life. Real friendship — the kind that grows over time, that can survive disappointment, that knows us as we are and stays with us anyway — is precious. And at the heart of the Christian faith is a remarkable invitation: not simply to believe *about* Jesus, or to follow his teaching, but to grow a *friendship* with him. This has many great qualities but two are that it is for a lifetime after we have first met Jesus and secondly that He is always faithful, always prepared to spend time with us, never off key or unfocused. One of the courses I have enjoyed was the listening course run over a few Monday evenings at Congresbury parish church. One of the highlights for me was the opportunity to talk about myself to someone who listened intently and reflected only on what I said. It made me feel important, listened to and loved.

And yet Jesus is not simply a companion; he is Lord, Son of God, Saviour of the world. How do these things belong together? And how does friendship with Jesus actually grow? I want to look at eight things this morning in answer to that question:

1. Jesus knows what is in us

Early in John's Gospel we read: "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person." (*John 2 v 24-25*)

Many people believed in Jesus because of the signs he performed. They were impressed, enthusiastic, perhaps excited. Yet John tells us that Jesus did not entrust himself to them. This is not because Jesus is suspicious or distant. It is because Jesus knows human hearts. He knows how quickly excitement can fade. He knows how shallow faith can be when it has not yet been tested. He knows our contradictions — our generosity and our self-protection, our longing for God and our desire to stay in control. Jesus knows what is in us. And this is crucial: friendship with Jesus does not begin with him discovering our goodness. It begins with him already knowing our weakness — and loving us anyway.

2. Friendship with God is not a new idea, begun by Jesus

This invitation to relationship runs deep in Scripture. In the Old Testament, God is not distant or abstract. He walks with people. Abraham is described as “God’s friend.” Moses speaks with the Lord “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exodus 33 v 11). These were not perfect people. Abraham doubted and deceived. Moses argued and lost his temper. Yet friendship grew through honesty, obedience, and shared journey. The Psalms speak the language of friendship — hearts poured out without polish or pretence: “Trust in him at all times... pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.” (*Psalms 62 v 8*)

Friendship with God was never about impressing God. It was about walking with God.

3. Jesus brings friendship closer still

When we come to the New Testament, Jesus takes this pattern and deepens it. In the passage we have just heard read from Anna: On the night before his death, he says to his disciples: “I no longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (*John 15 v 15*)

This is astonishing. Servants obey without knowing the heart of their master. Friends are let in. Friends are trusted with understanding. Friends share life. And yet Jesus knows what is in people. He knows these same disciples will misunderstand him, abandon him, deny him. Friendship with Jesus is not built on their reliability, but on his faithfulness.

4. A friendship tested: Peter

Nowhere is this clearer than in Peter. Peter loves Jesus fiercely. He promises loyalty to the end. Yet when fear closes in, Peter denies even knowing him. And Jesus knew this would happen.

At the Last Supper, Jesus says: “Simon, Simon... I have prayed for you. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” (*Luke 22v 31–32*)

Jesus does not withdraw friendship in advance. He prays. He waits. He plans restoration.

After the resurrection, Jesus meets Peter on the shore and asks him three times, “Do you love me?” Not to humiliate him, but to heal him. Friendship is rebuilt through grace. This is how friendship with Jesus grows — not by never failing, but by always returning.

5. Friendship takes time and presence

Friendship does not grow instantly. It grows through time, presence, and repeated turning towards one another. Of Enoch we read simply: "Enoch walked faithfully with God." (*Genesis 5 v 24*)

No great speeches. Just a life lived in companionship. Jesus invites us into that same rhythm: "Remain in me, as I also remain in you." (*John 15 v 4*)

Remaining is not rushing. It is staying. It is making space — in prayer, in Scripture, in daily awareness — for Jesus to be present with us. Friendship with Jesus is shaped less by intensity and more by attentiveness. *Mother Teresa was once asked in an interview, "What do you say when you pray?" She replied, "Nothing, I just listen." So then the reporter asked, "Well then, what does God say to you?" Her answer: "Nothing much, He just listens."*

6. When friendship feels distant

There are seasons when friendship with Jesus feels close — and seasons when it feels distant. Scripture is honest about this. The psalmist cries: "Why, Lord, do you stand far off?" (*Psalms 10 v 1*) Even Jesus himself cries out on the cross, echoing Psalm 22. Friendship with God does not mean constant emotional warmth. Silence does not mean absence. Isaiah says: "Truly you are a God who has been hiding himself." (*Isaiah 45 v 15*) Yet the same God promises: "I will not forget you." (*Isaiah 49 v 15*). Friendship deepens when we stay faithful even when feelings fade.

7. Friendship that changes us

Every deep friendship changes us. We begin to reflect those we spend time with.

Scripture says: "Walk with the wise and become wise." (*Proverbs 13 v 20*)

Paul echoes this: "We... are being transformed into his image." (*2 Corinthians 3 v 18*)

Friendship with Jesus slowly reshapes us — our patience, our compassion, our priorities. Not by pressure, but by presence.

8. A friendship that lasts

Finally, the friendship Jesus offers does not end. "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (*Matthew 28 v 20*)

Paul declares in a passage I used at dear Lenny's funeral: "Nothing... will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 8 v 38–39)

Jesus knows what is in us. And still he calls us friends. Not because we are dependable — but because he is.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ,
you know us fully — our faith and our fear,
our devotion and our doubt.
You see what is in us, and still you draw near.

Teach us how to walk with you,
not hiding, not pretending,
but honestly and patiently, day by day.

When we are strong, keep us humble.
When we fail, bring us back.
When you feel distant, help us to remain.

Grow in us a deep and lasting friendship with you,
that shapes who we are,
and carries us through this life and into eternity. Amen.

Challenges: Growing Friendship with Jesus

"Friendship grows when it is given space. Here are a few gentle challenges for the days ahead."

1. Choose regular presence over impressive effort

Challenge yourself not to do *more* for Jesus, but to be *with* him more regularly.

Even five or ten minutes a day — unhurried, unperformed — is often more formative than occasional bursts of intensity. "Remain in me." *(John 15 v 4)*

Ask: Where could I build a small, faithful rhythm of presence?

2. Be honest, not polished

Friendship deepens through honesty. Bring your real thoughts to Jesus — confusion, disappointment, gratitude, boredom, hope. The Psalms give us permission to speak plainly. "Pour out your hearts to him." *(Psalm 62 v 8)*

Challenge yourself this week to pray without editing.

3. Return quickly after failure

When we fail, our instinct is often to withdraw. Jesus invites us to return.

Peter did not lose Jesus' friendship through denial — he rediscovered it through repentance.

Ask yourself: *What would it look like to come back sooner rather than later?*

4. Let friendship shape behaviour

Every friendship influences how we live.

Challenge yourself to ask, in one daily situation:

What would reflect the character of the friend I walk with?

"Walk with the wise and become wise." (Proverbs 13 v 20)

5. Trust the friendship even when it feels quiet

Not all friendships are talkative all the time. Silence does not mean absence.

If this is a dry season, the challenge is not to force feeling, but to remain faithful.

"I am with you always." (Matthew 28 v 20)

6. Name one place where you will 'sit with Jesus'

Choose a place — a chair, a walk, a moment in the day — where you regularly place yourself in Christ's presence. Ask: *Where will I sit, again and again, with Jesus?*