

“Jesus: The Ultimate Soul Friend”

John 15:12-16

I still remember the first time I experienced guided imagery prayer where I was a part of a small prayer group. The leader guided us to our favorite spot in our imagination, and there, while we were experiencing utter peace, Jesus came along us as a friend to accompany us and to gaze into our eyes with love and compassion. It was such a radical moment for me—connecting with God in a way that brought deep joy and peace. **Jesus as a soul friend!** What a powerful experience of love!

I had known about Jesus all of my life. I had spent many years saying verbal prayers, going through rituals, and seeking to commit my life to God’s ways of love. But this experience of prayer was different. It brought something amazing to my life. For the first time, I felt deeply embraced and loved by Jesus without any effort on my part. My efforts to be good or live a moral life did not enter into the equation. There was just pure love. I share this today because it is often difficult for us to feel that level of intimacy and love with God. We often carry distorted images of God. We think of God as a distant, powerful judge or a demanding boss, and the popular culture around us often reinforces this rigid view. You can see this tension explored well in this video from Ignatian Spirituality: <https://youtu.be/LE52LFSTyTI>.

Jesus offered his disciples a dramatically different image of God. Jesus’ death on the cross became a stumbling block to many people of his time because it challenged the popular image of God as a powerful, conquering king. If God is so mighty, how could the Son of God end up on a cross? In the ancient world, the most powerful god was seen as the one who would conquer and win.

But Jesus gave us a powerful example of friendship in his relationship with his disciples. As a teacher in the Jewish faith, it would have been normal for him to have followers who would learn from him. He would have been seen as their superior, imparting knowledge to those beneath him. But Jesus gave his disciples something more. Instead of putting himself above them, he shared life and knowledge with them as equals. He saw their worth not just as people who would spread his message, but as ones he was so deeply connected to. **Friendship was the foundation of Jesus’ ministry and mission.**

The setting for our Bible reading is the Last Supper. Jesus was about to leave his disciples. He knew that after his crucifixion, their faith may waiver because their image of God as a powerful king was going to be shaken. Instead of that image of the king-God in the sky, Jesus reminded his disciples of the power of love. The strongest force in

life is that of love. Jesus gave his disciples the most important commandment that he could think of because he knew that it was the only thing that was going to sustain them without his physical presence. It was the commandment to love one another as he had loved them.

Let's listen to the powerful words of John 15:12-16:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.”

A key piece in this amazing gift that Jesus gave was that of their relationship to him as a **friend**. To see God as a friend who loves and cares unconditionally without trying to get something in return changed their whole worldview and the trajectory of their lives.

Sometimes it is hard to connect with God and Jesus because we put them up on pedestals. Even when we don't think of them as mighty kings, we struggle because we think that God is superior to us and that our moral failings separate us from God. Sometimes the barrier between this world and the eternal and spiritual realms seem to be so impenetrable that we lose our connection to them.

The invitation is to embrace this friendship with Jesus and to trust that Jesus' path of letting go of power is at the heart of who God is and who we are created to be. Our ultimate soul friend is the one who reflects to us the core of who we are and the truth about life and love. We are here to love, and every part of creation in its essence is brought to life through love.

As we prepare for our Thanksgiving celebrations this week, feasting with family and friends, let us remember that Jesus is at the table, inviting you to the joy of his friendship and unconditional love.

A Guided Imagery Prayer: Jesus, Our Soul Friend

I invite you now to enter a time of prayer and quiet reflection. If you are comfortable, close your eyes or lower your gaze. Take a deep, slow breath, in through your nose, and out through your mouth. As you breathe out, release any tensions you might be

holding onto—tensions in your shoulders, your jaw, or your hands. **Breathe in peace; breathe out worry.**

I want you to imagine yourself walking down a familiar path—it could be a garden path, a favorite street in your town, or a beach. This is a place where you feel completely safe, relaxed, and truly yourself. Notice the colors, the sounds, the temperature, and the textures beneath your feet. You are at perfect ease here.

As you walk, you notice someone is approaching you from the distance. They are walking at your pace, and there is a calm, familiar light about them. As this figure draws closer, you recognize him. It is **Jesus, your Soul Friend.**

He is not coming to judge your actions or review your moral progress. He is coming simply because he chose you and he loves you. He smiles—a warm, genuine smile that reaches his eyes.

He walks alongside you, listening to the rhythm of your steps. You don't need to talk; you don't need to confess your failings; you don't need to ask for anything. You are simply in the presence of the one who said, **“I have called you friends.”**

Look into his eyes. See the unconditional love there—love that sees your entire history, your deepest struggles, and your future potential, yet accepts you fully, without reservation. He is your companion, your equal, your ultimate friend.

Hear his voice, perhaps just a whisper in your heart, repeating the core truth of your being: **“You are my friend. There is no greater love than this.”**

Rest in that friendship. Receive that love. Let it fill the spaces that feel empty or judged.

As you prepare to leave this place of peace, know that this friendship does not end here. Jesus remains with you. He is at your table this Thanksgiving, he is in your family gatherings, and he is walking with you on your path.

Take another deep breath, carrying the joy and peace of this encounter with you. When you are ready, gently open your eyes. Amen.