



Deeper Friendships

By Scott Brooks

www.DeeperFriendships.com

Practical insights toward wonderful friendships with God and each other

ISBN 9781623094621

Copyright ©2012 TXu 1-820-549

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Book Cover Photo Permissions

Date: 9 July 2006, 15:15

Source: Crater Lake National Park Oregon

Author: Jeffrey Johnson from Bergen County, New Jersey, USA

Permission: This image, which was originally posted to Flickr.com, was uploaded to Commons using Flickr upload bot on 03:32, 30 September 2008 by Tiptoety (talk). On that date it was licensed as follows:

This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.

You are free:

to share - to copy, distribute and transmit the work

to remix - to adapt the work

Under the following conditions:

attribution - You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

share alike - If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.

Please note: If you have not yet read *Would you like to see an Amazing Miracle?*, you may want to first do so before reading *Deeper Friendships*, since *Deeper Friendships* builds upon it. You can read *Would you like to see an Amazing Miracle?* for free at: www.SeeMiracle.com

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 7
Chapter 1 – Life at Jesus’ Table	Page 10
Chapter 2 – A High-Level Overview	Page 16
Chapter 3 – Our Original Design	Page 18
Chapter 4 – Steps Away from Our Original Design	Page 27
Chapter 5 – A Big Step toward Our Original Design	Page 32
Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Next Steps	Page 42

Dedication

I dedicate this book to Jesus, who is the Author of Friendship!

I secondly dedicate this book to three really close friends of mine: My wife, Bonna, and my two children, Ann and David!

Introduction

As I walked down the sidewalk on that dark, damp night, the wet coldness cut through my clothes, giving me a chill to the bone.

An occasional person hurried past me without even a glance.

The street lights were few and far between, mostly lighting up the sidewalk and revealing the silhouettes of those seemingly lifeless buildings that only showed an occasional dim light from their inner recesses.

After walking a few blocks, I approached a building that looked much different from the others because of the amount of light that it poured forth onto the sidewalk and street in front of it.

When I got to the building, I peered through a window and saw quite a number of people. A few of them were walking from one place to another, but most of them were sitting at tables.

At first glance, the people seemed friendly – many with warm smiles on their faces.

At the back of the room, there was a large hearth with a splendid fire. By now, I was quite chilled, and also a bit hungry. I knew the hearth would do well in warming my body, and I thought maybe I could even get a bite to eat. So, I decided to venture inside.

As I pulled open the door, I noticed many coats hung up in a fair sized room in front of me, and to my right was the large room that I had seen from the sidewalk.

I was surprised that there was not a registration desk or a sign that said, “Please Seat Yourself.”

I was not sure if I could trust the people, so instead of hanging up my coat, I only unzipped it to allow the warm air in. I then started walking slowly toward the large hearth, knowing that the air would be even warmer there.

In front of the hearth was a large table where most of the people had gathered. It looked as if people had taken empty chairs from adjacent tables in order to be part of this larger group.

Before I could make my way around the table to get closer to the hearth, I saw a man stand up from the far side of the table. He looked at me, and then proceeded to walk around the table toward me. I stopped to see if he was going to say something to me. I was hoping he was not going to ask me to leave. To my relief, he warmly greeted me, identified himself as Jesus, and asked if I would

like to join him and the others at the table – indicating that the empty chair in front of me was mine to use if I so desired.

What struck me about Jesus' invitation was that I felt completely free to accept or reject his offer. As I later reflected upon his invitation, it eventually dawned on me that part of the freedom I felt was the lack of pressure, manipulation, or control that often had accompanied invitations that others had given me in the past. And I did not feel in any way that Jesus was subtly trying to make me feel bad about myself if I had decided to decline his offer.

***** This story is continued in the next chapter. *****

Wow! What a tremendous privilege! Can you imagine being invited by Jesus to join Him at His table? How would you feel about such an offer?

I would count it a privilege to be invited to join the table of a president or head of a nation. But how much greater a privilege to be invited by Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God and the Creator of the universe! The One to whom I owe my very existence! The One whose greatness no one can fathom! The One who is so great that He has to stoop down to just look upon the earth, let alone interact with those on the earth... and yet He does so in His perfect love for us! (See John 1:1-3, Psalm 145:3,113:4-6.)

Just to sit at His table would be amazing, let alone be a fellow participant with Him and those with Him!

Similar to this metaphorical story, in real life Jesus literally invites you and me to join Him in a wonderful friendship, where Jesus will help us to grow toward deeper friendships with Him and others as well!

I realize that only God can truly grow us toward these deeper friendships. I therefore encourage you before reading on, to first ask God to teach you and cause things to stand out to your heart, so that He can uniquely tailor this book to you as part of His very best for your life.

I want to be a true friend to you as I write this book. So, I do not want to impose upon you, or teach at you. Instead, I plan to just share my heart with you as if we were sitting in the same room together. And I welcome you to take those things that seem to touch your heart and resonate with the core of your being. I have already "road tested" many of the concepts in this book by sharing them verbally with a number of people. It has been very exciting seeing how God has worked through this material to help those people toward deeper friendships with Him and others!

This book starts the journey toward deeper friendships which is then continued in a book I wrote at an earlier date titled, ***At His Feet***.

At His Feet has many practical insights in how to learn from God and grow in deeper friendship with God. Both of these are keys to our being able to grow in friendship with each other.

One of the points I share in ***At His Feet*** in a section titled, “How to grow in friendship with God,” is how I have found it helpful in my friendship with God to focus on Jesus, since He is God and my personal point of contact with an infinite God. So in this book, I will refer to God mostly by the term Jesus – especially when I am speaking in regard to friendship topics. In saying this, I am not speaking against someone who finds it easier to relate to God as “God” or as the “Father” or even as the “Holy Spirit”, since I am happy for them if their life with God works well with any of these focuses. I am only saying that focusing on Jesus works better for me, and therefore it will be easier for me to share from this perspective.

My desire is that Jesus will work through the words of this book to help each of us to grow toward deeper friendships with Him and each other. I hope you are encouraged and find some freeing thoughts that are helpful to you in your journey with Him.

* Note: In the story that starts this introduction and continues in the next chapter, I used lower case “h” when referring to Jesus as **him**, **his**, **he**, etc. But, in the rest of the book I will use an upper case “H”, since **He** is God and I like to denote this distinction in this way. In the story, the narrator does not yet know who Jesus truly is, so the narrator would naturally write about Jesus with the lower case “h”.

Chapter 1 – Life at Jesus’ Table

I decided to accept Jesus’ invitation, pulled up the chair he had offered me, and joined him and the others at the table.

The next few hours flew by as I became increasingly fascinated at the things that were happening at the table. Every once in a while I looked at the clock on the wall next to the fireplace, and was surprised at how much time had slipped by without me realizing it.

When I had first joined the table, I was happy that the people welcomed me. I was also glad that they invited me to freely partake of the food at the center of the table, since the aroma had stirred my hunger all the more. I found it to be quite tasty and satisfying.

As my hunger subsided, I began to observe a number of very fascinating things. For starters, I was quite impressed at how the people treated each other. I was surprised that there were no arguments, and they did not seem to be competing or trying to outdo each other. Instead, they genuinely seemed to care for each other, demonstrating this in many ways, such as how they were respectful and patient with each other. One person had a stutter and other people did not seem impatient or try to pressure the person to speak more quickly. And instead of superficial conversations, most of the people seemed to share deeply from their hearts, and also listened intently to the others. I could tell they were listening well by the clarifying questions they asked to those speaking, and also by the way the conversation rolled along so nicely. I was especially amazed to see someone stop speaking in mid-thought to allow someone else to share, because that other person seemed to have something more pressing on their heart to share than they did. And this did not happen just once, but a number of times throughout the evening.

Sometimes there was one large conversation. Other times discussion split into multiple smaller conversations. I thought it was especially interesting at the times when Jesus spoke. When there was only one conversation, people seemed to hang on every one of his words. When there were multiple conversations, people seemed to bend an ear toward Jesus from those other conversations. This sometimes resulted in those other conversations joining the conversation that Jesus was part of.

More chairs were positioned near Jesus than by anyone else at the table. I assumed most of these chairs were those that had been borrowed from the adjacent tables. At first I thought it was a bit odd that people were leaning toward Jesus, and occasionally even nudging their chairs closer to him. But, as the night went on, I began to realize that the people seemed attracted to the warmth and care Jesus showed to each of them. His example also seemed to set the tone for how they were treating each other. Overall, I was really struck by how

everyone seemed to feel valued and have a strong sense of well-being, and how they seemed to enjoy just being with Jesus and each other. It was as if there was an “otherness” to the whole atmosphere. This was a great contrast to the tensions I had seen in so many relationships – including my own.

I eventually became quite curious to know if my observations were close to the mark, and to also know what things I had overlooked. So, I turned to the older gentleman on my right – who seemed to have shared a few insightful things during the evening – and I said, “I think it is pretty amazing, some of the interactions I am seeing at this table.” I proceeded to share some of my observations, and then asked him what his thoughts were. He then said...

“Whenever Jesus comes to town, I love to go to wherever he is. There is not anyone whom I would rather be with than Jesus! He avoids the ugliness that appears in cliques or when people compete with each other to the point where they become nasty, and instead he shows great love and value to people. It is great to see how others enjoy being loved and valued by him, and I am glad to be a recipient of his love as well. The amazing thing is that, without even a word, others feel the love Jesus has for them. You can see the twinkle in his eyes, but it is more than that – it is as if his whole being has love flowing through it! I have noticed small kids and animals are especially drawn to his love for them. But some older people respond well too, such as those at this table. And when Jesus does speak, he speaks to the heart of the individual. So, the thing I love most about being here at this table is just being with Jesus and watching him interact with others.

“It is also fun being with the other people who have gathered with Jesus – such as those at this table. We love to hear what each person shares from their heart. As they share, we listen intently and pay special attention to what stirs in our own hearts. It often pertains to our own lives or the lives of people we know, and by listening this way, it often provides the clue as to what is on our hearts to add to the conversation. As we share with each other in such a way, we enjoy the richness of the conversation, plus we all wind up being encouraged. And when people have shared burdens and things that have been troubling them, it is nice to listen to them and pray for them. I also appreciate seeing how others have followed the lead of Jesus and the seasoned table veterans, to not talk down to or lecture those people in struggle. Instead, they mostly share those things they have found to be of practical value in their own lives in those same or similar areas.

“Through all of this I have marveled at how our friendships have grown. I highly value these people and count it a privilege to have such deep and precious friendships with them. It brings a quality to our lives that we would not have without our friendships with Jesus and each other.

“You would think that over the years I would begin to take some of this for granted. But especially in light of all of the bad relationships I have seen, I am still amazed at how Jesus has helped to free each of us up toward further places of friendship with him and each other.

“Oh, and one last thing... I think it is fun to observe newcomers, such as you, who join the table and try to piece together and understand how these deep friendships really work. I think it is great when these newcomers are inspired to go deeper toward quality friendships in their own lives.”

I enjoyed the insights this man shared with me and realized there was a quality of life these people had found that I myself was lacking, and it definitely whet my appetite to grow in these good ways myself.

As I listened to this man and to the conversations that evening, it started to dawn on me where I had failed in my own relationships. I tentatively concluded that the discussion at this table tonight and on future nights could really help me to become a better husband and parent, and also help me in my work relationships. In fact, I could see it being helpful for all the relationships of my life!

At the end of the evening, I was very thankful Jesus had extended an invitation to me, and that I had the opportunity to be part of such an experience. I just could not get over how these people had such a sparkle in their eyes and seemed to appreciate and value each other in such a great way. It definitely was beautiful to see such interactions, and it whet my appetite for more. So, in the future, when Jesus comes to town, I definitely want to find the table where he is at and hang out there as much as possible!

******* End of Story *******

I just love this story! It paints a picture of a wonderful place for us all to grow toward – a place of deep, quality friendships with Jesus and each other, where there is a wonderful “otherness” of life that we will experience together.

Jesus Himself says that where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there with them. (See Matthew 18:20.) So although we can experience God’s presence in our lives as individuals, God has designed things in such a way, that only together with others who are also in relationship with Him, will we experience His presence in a greater way. And what greater joy than being with Jesus! The following verses describe the joy we can experience together at this place.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life,

which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make **our joy complete**. (1 John 1:1-4, emphasis mine)

The Apostle John describes how he and others have experienced Jesus in person – they saw, heard, and touched Jesus! And in verse three, we can see that John invites his readers to join the deep, quality friendships (i.e. fellowship) that he and those other people have with Jesus.

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, **so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.** (1 John 1:3, emphasis mine)

I find it quite interesting why John says he is writing to his readers.

We write this to make **our joy complete**. (1 John 1:4, emphasis mine)

If John was being selfish, he may have said, “**my** joy complete.” But, instead he says, “**our** joy complete.” Since John hung out with Jesus, it is no surprise that Jesus helped John to love others. And as John had God’s love for the people he was writing to, he wanted them to experience the joy found when all together, they could experience deep friendships with Jesus and each other. It is a small taste of heaven, for in heaven there will be a wonderful sense of well-being and joy as we will finally know and experience Jesus completely! And together with Jesus we will experience being completely loved, have complete intimacy of heart, and know each other completely. On top of all this, we will get to marvel at how awesome and wonderful God truly is all the time, as we see Jesus face to face!

This is a lot nicer than what happens in many relationships where people try to win at the expense of others losing. Instead, as we grow toward deeper friendships with Jesus and each other, it will be good and pleasant, and we will all win together!

How **good and pleasant** it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. (Psalm 133, emphasis mine)

But if we fail to grow toward deeper friendships, we will miss out on so much! On the surface, our lives may look like we are doing good things, but in reality we will be lacking the relational qualities described in the story that began this chapter. The following verses give a strong example of this.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, '**Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?**' Then I will tell them plainly, '**I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!**' (Matthew 7:21-23, emphasis mine)

At the Day of Judgment, when Jesus evaluates a person from His perfect perspective, it will become very clear if they truly knew Him or not. And “knowing” is an indication of deeper friendship. So if we never grow toward deeper friendships, we can do many seemingly good things, and yet never experience the joy of being with Jesus and each other.

But if someone is growing toward deeper friendships with Jesus and others, they will most likely want to continue to grow in such excellent ways. For example, if a teenager in their rebellious years is growing toward these deeper friendships, then when they get older, they will most likely stay walking with God and continue to be attracted to healthy and deep friendships – even if they eventually leave their parents’ household to go on to other things such as to college or a job at a different location. But, if they are unable to grow toward these deeper friendships, then they may externally conform to their parents’ expectations, but still feel relationally isolated. And since they were not better connected in their hearts, then as they grow older, they will be more likely to walk away from any connection they felt toward God and move toward unhealthy and hurtful relationships.

So, the big question is, “Can we actually grow toward this wonderful place of deeper friendships with Jesus and each other?”

Fortunately, the answer to this question is, “Yes, with Jesus’ help”... **but**, with the qualification that there will be many challenges in growing in this excellent direction. We can see this in the following verses.

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10:29-31, emphasis mine)

If a person allows Jesus to help them on toward deeper friendships, then they will receive much more relationally in terms of “brothers, sisters, mothers, children” ... but also persecutions (i.e. challenges).

Summary

In this chapter we concluded the story about the friendships at Jesus' table, with a more detailed look at the quality of the friendships being experienced there. We also looked at some of the pros and cons of growing or not growing toward such friendships, and overall seeing that it is of great value to grow in such ways – and yet, it will have its challenges.

Chapter 2 – A High-Level Overview

A new homeowner found an old garden hose in the back yard under the bushes. As he reached to pull the garden hose out, the idea crossed his mind that it would be nice to use the hose to water the garden, since he was a new homeowner and had not purchased a hose yet. As he pulled the hose out, he realized it was pretty beat up and in need of repair – most noticeable were the gashes that would surely leak. He realized he could just buy a new hose, but for some reason he took a liking to this particular hose and decided to repair it instead. He proceeded to replace the washer so that it could seal well to the outdoor faucet, and he also repaired the gashes so that they would not leak. He then hooked it up to the faucet, turned the valve counterclockwise, and began to spray water onto the garden. Over time a wonderful crop of fruits and vegetables came forth from the garden – fresh tomatoes, green beans, strawberries, and all kinds of good things to eat.

Contained within this metaphor are many insights about deeper friendships with Jesus and each other. We will explore the details of these insights in the chapters that follow this one, but for now let us take a high-level overview of this metaphor's basic components.

- The garden hose represents a person, whether you, or me, or someone else.
- The water that flows through the hose is God – in the reservoir as God the Father, and through the hose as God the Holy Spirit.
- The homeowner, who does the gardening, is also God but in the person of Jesus.
- The hose getting repaired and hooked up to the house represents a person coming into a relationship with God.
- The fruits and vegetables in the garden represent the good results that grow in the person's relationships with Jesus and others.

Most metaphors break down at a certain point since they do not perfectly describe reality. So is the case for this garden hose metaphor. For one thing, we are much more than a hose in that we have a brain, heart, soul, spirit, and unique personalities. Secondly, growth toward deeper friendships is much more complex and challenging than the restoration steps needed for the garden hose. Also, the garden hose does not have the free will that we do. We can choose whether or not we will allow the Gardener to repair us, hook us up to the faucet, and enable us to become useful over time in producing a garden harvest of deep friendships. Lastly, we have the thinking ability to evaluate the restoration process itself, but depending on how we perceive it, we may think it is better to move toward or keep away from such a restoration. So, if we do not understand why Jesus would want us to grow toward deeper friendships (which we will explore in the next chapter), and conclude it is better to just do our "own thing", then we can use our free will to choose the tragic results found in a dream that a friend of mine had.

Matt Scott's Dream

I was walking through the woods and came to a clearing at the edge of a very large and beautiful lake with glistening dark water. I was excited because I love to fish and was hoping the lake would prove to be excellent for fishing.

Jesus met me at the edge of the lake and took my hand. He then guided me to the water's edge. I started to wonder if we were going to walk on the water, since I knew Jesus had done so before. But instead, we began to walk into the water that initially was only up to our ankles. We walked further into the lake, but the water did not get deeper like I thought it would, instead it remained only ankle deep. We walked and walked and walked, but as far as we went, the water still remained only ankle deep. I was surprised that the lake was not any deeper and concluded the fishing would not be good since it was so shallow.

Jesus then began to weep. I was surprised by His sadness. Jesus then turned to me and said that the lake represents His body, the church. He loves His church, but is deeply saddened by the lack of depth.

When Matt shared his dream with me, it dawned on me that the lake looks beautiful on the surface because of Jesus' perfect love for those who have entered into relationship with Him. But, the tragedy is the shallowness of the water that represents a lack of relational depth. Jesus' heart longs for people to be freed up toward these deeper waters of friendship, and He is saddened for them that they are not getting any deeper than the shallow waters. So, if we do not get repaired, hooked up well to the faucet, and over time increase in the amount of water flowing through us, then we will never be able to participate in these deeper waters of friendship with Jesus – nor with anyone else. We may even be surrounded by many people, and yet feel like an isolated island – never truly connecting with others at deeper levels. We may long for better relationships, but find that whatever we try, we wind up just never getting there.

Summary

In this chapter we looked at an overview of the garden hose metaphor. We will look at the details of this metaphor in the following chapters in order to help us grow past the shallow ankle deep relational waters described in Matt Scott's dream, and instead on toward the deeper waters of friendship with Jesus and each other.

Chapter 3 – Our Original Design

When the Gardener found the garden hose under the bushes, he realized it would not work well in its current condition, since without a good washer it would not seal well to the faucet and water would also escape through the gashes. In such a condition, the hose would work poorly and be of little use in watering the garden. Fortunately, the Gardener had knowledge of how a new hose would work and was able to apply that knowledge to the restoration of the hose. If the Gardener had lacked this knowledge, then the restoration process would have been much more difficult and the hose may have never been able to function again according to its original design.

The Gardener's knowledge of the hose's original design was very helpful to his restoration of the hose. In a similar way, Jesus understands our original design, since He is the one who designed us! Fortunately, Jesus also knows all that is needed for us to grow toward functioning according to our original design! How we got to the state of being under the bushes in the first place is another matter that we will explore in the next chapter. But for this chapter, we will take a look at our original design, since if we can increase in an understanding of our original design, it will be one of the keys to our growing toward the deeper waters of friendship with Jesus and each other.

Interestingly, if the garden hose had intelligence like we do, but only knew what life was like under the bushes, then when the Gardener worked at restoring the hose to its original design, it may have wondered why the Gardener was doing such a thing – especially since the hose would begin to experience things that looked different from life under the bushes.

This raises the question of, "What is normal?" If the garden hose only knew life under the bushes, it would think such a life was normal. So if it left the shade of the bushes, was stretched out instead of being coiled, went through the repair process, was hooked up to the faucet, and had the water running through it, then it might conclude that this all seemed quite abnormal to its normal existence.

In a similar way, if we do not understand how we were originally designed to function and also why Jesus would want to restore us to that design, then it might seem abnormal to us. We might even conclude that God is trying to impose something upon us that is foreign to whom we really are, and therefore decide that we want nothing to do with it at all. So, for the rest of this chapter, we will explore two main concepts – the first concept being how we are designed to function, followed by the second concept of why Jesus would want to restore us to that design. Hopefully, with this groundwork in place, the subsequent chapters will then make a lot more sense and help us all grow toward the deeper waters of friendship with Jesus and each other.

How we are Designed

As we look at how God originally designed us to function, there are two extremes that if either is embraced will make it difficult to grow toward the deeper waters of friendship.

The one extreme is that we would function independently from God, just like the garden hose being under the bushes and away from the Gardener.

The other extreme is where we are taken over by God and cease to exist as an individual – much like a drop of water joining an ocean.

Between these two extremes is where our true design rests – at a partnership of deep friendship with Jesus.

A helpful question at this point is, “What do we bring to our partnership of friendship with Jesus, and what does Jesus bring?”

On our side of the partnership, we bring our spiritual hearts, souls, minds, and unique personalities that make us very much more unique than the unique fingerprints on our hands. We also have the ability to think, reason, interact, and more. All of these things are gifts from God, since if He did not exist and decide to create us, then we would not exist. So, our very existence is a gift from God to us, and we bring this unique existence to our partnership with Him.

If we enter into a friendship with Jesus – which we will look at the details of how to do in two chapters from now – then on Jesus’ side of the partnership, He brings many things out of His great love for us. For starters, Jesus brings His Holy Spirit to flow through us like the water flowing through the garden hose. Over time, this in turn produces what is known as the “fruit of the Spirit” which is listed in Galatians 5:22-23 as: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” In addition to this, the Holy Spirit within us will also enhance our common sense and thinking by giving us insights into the various information coming into our senses – even insights needed to help us recognize what would be good to embrace or avoid if we are going to allow Him to help us to grow toward deeper friendships with Him and others.

Side note: Chapter three in ***At His Feet*** gives greater detail into how God can enhance our senses and teach us through this process.

It is a tremendous privilege to partner with Jesus in a deep, mutually respectful friendship. Not only do we get to participate in that friendship out of our free will, but we also get the amazing gift of partnering with Jesus in those things that are dear to His heart. To begin with, He has more love for others than we do and He allows us to join Him in having that love also. So, when His love begins to flow through us, we then grow in our love for Him, ourselves, and others. This love in

turn gives us a tremendous basis for valuing Him, ourselves, and others. And the more we operate this way, the more it resonates with who we really are, since we are designed to live a life of love. (See Ephesians 5:1-2.) This goes right along with the two greatest commandments which are to love God, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. (See Mark 12:28-31.) In the context of partnership, it shows that these two commandments are not imposed upon us as abnormal to whom we are, but instead are a great freedom for us to participate with God's love as normal to our true design. And our design is to live a life of love and to partner with Jesus in doing the good things that we are uniquely designed for. As it says in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." This is a gift from Jesus to us, in that He will grow us into who we truly are as we learn to walk with His love flowing through us and as we partner with Him in doing the "good works" that are places where we can express that love, and where our friendships with Jesus and others can blossom.

And this partnership is a two-way street. Not only do we get to participate with Jesus according to our true design, but Jesus also participates with us in such things as what may be troubling us in our lives. For example, the following two scriptures show that in our friendship with Jesus, He is willing to give us both help and peace with our concerns.

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-8)

Three more Metaphors

Similar to the garden hose metaphor, there are three additional metaphors that I find helpful in understanding how we are designed for such a partnership with Jesus.

The first metaphor is from John 15, where Jesus says He is like a Vine and we are like the branches coming off the Vine. Jesus further says that if we remain in Him and He remains in us, then we will produce much fruit, but apart from Him we can do nothing – just as the branch apart from the Vine cannot produce fruit by itself.

The second metaphor is that of us being like a radio and God being like the radio signal. If the radio has a broken antenna, then it will not be able to pick up the signal and will only produce white noise at best. But if the antenna is repaired, then it can receive the signal well and play beautiful music. We are designed to play beautiful music from the signal of God's Spirit through us.

The third metaphor is that of us being like a lamp on a table and God being like the electricity. The lamp might look nice with its design, color, and shape, and yet, if the electricity does not flow through the lamp, it will never function well as it is designed to function. Someone might enjoy it as a decoration, but will not find it very useful for reading at night.

All three of these metaphors show that only when both parts are partnered together does the final result function as it was designed.

What is Love?

Before leaving this section on **how** we are designed, and moving on to the section about **why** Jesus would want these things for us, I would like to pause here and emphasize and explore a key point in all of this, and that is, “What is love?” This question is not only at the heart of this chapter, but at the heart of this entire book as well. So, let us explore this question of, “What is love?”

Some people say that love is an action and if you do something that looks loving, therefore it must be loving. But according to the scripture, love is listed as the first fruit of God’s Holy Spirit and is also the very essence of God’s character – as it says in 1 John 4:16, “God is love.” In the hose metaphor we can see this in action as love comes from God and can flow through us back to God, to ourselves, and to others – hence watering the garden. So, the hose metaphor therefore gives us a picture of how we are designed to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves, using God’s love as the source.

Earlier we looked at John 15 where Jesus says that we can do nothing if we, as the branches, are apart from Him, as the Vine. Is this really true? Since Jesus never lies, we know it is therefore true. (See John 14:6.) But how does it practically apply to life?

Since Jesus has designed us, a person will still show forth hints of how he or she is designed, even if that person is apart from the Vine. For example, a parent apart from the Vine may still have extra care toward his or her child. Or apart from the Vine, a girlfriend and boyfriend may still taste of love toward each other. But, to truly have God’s love flow through us is impossible without us being hooked up well to the source of that love. When someone says to another person, “Well, you do all kinds of things for me, but I just do not feel loved,” it is most likely an indication that the person saying such a thing is not experiencing God’s love flowing through that other person toward them. And since we are all designed to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, that person realizes deep down that something is not right when others do not have God’s love for them. When I was an atheist teenager, I wondered why the other kids did not love me more. Somehow I knew they were supposed to love me, even though I did not know anything about Jesus or my original design. I realize now that I had

the blueprint of my original design deep inside of me in the very fabric of my being, and according to that blueprint, I knew it would have been right for those people to love me. Interestingly, I was less aware that it would have been right for me to love them, too – an indication that I was still not hooked up to the Vine, and therefore my selfish focus was much more upon myself than on others. This in turn made it harder for me to realize the lack of love that I had toward them.

I think our understanding of love in this context is very important, otherwise we could be surrounded by a hundred people who have God's love flowing through them and are at deeper levels of friendship, and yet find ourselves unable to participate. Without God's love flowing through us, we will not be able to give or receive His love well, and we as garden hoses will not bear much in terms of beautiful fruits and vegetables. Instead, the garden dirt will be dry, hard, and cracked and we will wonder why it is that way, since deep down we know there should be so much more.

Why Jesus would want this for us

Even if we have a good idea of **how** Jesus designed us to function, it does not mean we know **why** He designed us this way. If we misunderstand **why**, then we can easily draw many incorrect conclusions about so much else, which in turn will most likely keep us from growing toward deeper friendships. So, in this section we will explore the important question of, "Why would Jesus want us to function according to our original design?"

The short answer is that Jesus so completely loves us that He would like to give us the very best He can, which is deeper friendships of love where we would love God, and love our neighbors as ourselves. He loves us so amazingly, that out of that love He is willing to take tremendously great efforts to restore us to function this way. Jesus has no desire to take away our free will, demand that we be a certain way, or impose upon us or box us into something that is foreign to whom we really are. Instead He desires, for our benefit, to free us up and enable us to function more and more according to our original excellent design. This is a more amazing gift than we will ever be able to comprehend during our life on earth.

To explore the longer answer, it would be helpful to start with a look at who God is in terms of His desires and characteristics. We can then build upon this toward a fuller answer.

The following section is from ***At His Feet***, where I summarized some of God's main desires and characteristics and said they were "derived from many Bible verses" and that "I have also found them to be consistent with my own personal experience with God and what I have experienced of reality." I included verses for the reader as a place to start if they were interested in learning more.

Some of God's desires

- He desires our best (Jeremiah 29:11).
- He desires a close relationship with us (John 15:15; Matthew 23:37).
- He desires for us to value ourselves, others, and God (Matthew 22:34-40).
- He desires that we would know that we are significant, both at the present time and throughout eternity (John 13:1-5; Isaiah 49:15-16; Revelation 2:17; 3:12).
- He desires that we would be set free into His very best for our lives (John 8:36; 10:10).

Some of God's characteristics

It is easy to attribute human motives and characteristics to God. But there will always be an "Other-ness" to God—aspects of His character that no human could ever attain. Here is a list of such characteristics:

- He always wants our best (Romans 8:28).
- He is always perfect in His motives (Isaiah 55:8-9).
- He infinitely values us (1 Peter 1:18-19; Romans 5:6-11).
- He is never partial (Romans 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17).
- He never commits injustice (2 Chronicles 19:7).
- He never lies (Numbers 23:19; John 14:6).
- He always has selfless love toward us (1 John 4:8; Jeremiah 31:3; Psalm 36:5-7).
- He is infinitely knowledgeable and wise (Romans 11:33-36; Isaiah 40:28).
- He knows us completely (Matthew 10:30; Psalm 139:1-18).
- He never makes a mistake (2 Samuel 22:31; Deuteronomy 32:4).
- His character and desires have always been and will always be consistent throughout eternity (Hebrews 13:8).

These lists point to the amazing qualities of God. We are so used to human frailties and how people treat each other in not the nicest ways, that it is hard to believe Jesus has zero bad motives, but instead He is always 100% perfect in motives – which is clearly stated in the following verse:

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5b)

It is amazing to me that God loves us completely all the time and always wants our very best! This is quite a contrast to a very selfish person who does not care at all about the feelings of others and is mostly concerned with whether or not they are happy – such as how I was as a teenager. But, the more loving a person is, the more their eyes focus outside of themselves, which in turn increases how much they care for others. But with God, His love is so perfect that His eyes focus completely outside of Himself! In this context, Jesus' heart is first for our good and then secondly for what would be good for Him. If we think Jesus is first concerned for Himself, then we might easily conclude that He does

not really want our best, but instead is like a parent trying to vicariously live through their child because they are first concerned with how that child reflects upon them and not first for the child's best. But with Jesus being perfect in love, His heart's desire is to give us the very best, no matter the cost to Himself. And the very best He can give us is to free us up toward deeper friendships with Him and each other. And if we use our free will to go along with His very best to free us up toward functioning according to our original design, then it gives Him pleasure. This is similar to the Gardener enjoying watching the garden grow. Jesus with perfect motives enjoys watching us grow spiritually and produce good fruit – and in this He is very glad for our sake!

This is similar to a person caring for someone else and getting them a very nice birthday gift. They buy it, put it in a box, wrap it up, and wait for the other person to open the present. If the other person receives the gift and is happy with it, then it gives pleasure to the giver of the gift. If the other person rejects the gift or hates it, then it would most likely sadden the gift giver since they would be sad that the other person did not enjoy the gift.

It is also like a parent whose child goes to jail for committing a certain crime. The parent might have hoped for all kinds of good things for the child, and yet had to bear the weight of the sadness of seeing the child's life having taken such bad turns. So if the parent really cared for the child, they would have pleasure in seeing the child freed out of jail and restored toward functioning in good ways – especially in the child's relationships.

In the following story from the book of Luke, we get a glimpse into this wonderful heart of love that God has toward each of us:

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " (Luke 15:11-32)

In this story we can see how God is like the father who had a heart of love for both of his sons, and in his love for them, he wanted their best. I am sure his heart was saddened when the younger son left. But, we can see the father's selfless love in how he not only gave his son the freedom to leave, but also the finances to do so! And when the younger son returned to be able to function in ways that he was more designed to function, the father ran to him and rejoiced and celebrated out of great excitement for his son! The father also had love for the older son. He did not reject him because of his attitude, but kindly tried to help his son to get freed up to appreciate and participate in the wonderful thing that had just taken place with his brother.

There is one final point that I find helpful in realizing Jesus definitely wants our best first for us, not first for Him – and that is that Jesus does not need our friendship in any way. Before He created our world or any humans, He was totally complete in His own love and friendship with the Father and the Holy

Spirit. So He had no need for us, but in His love, creativity, and infinite wisdom, He decided to give us our existence. So if someone thinks they are doing Jesus a big favor by moving toward a relationship with Him, then they most likely do not yet realize the perfect character and desires of Jesus and the tremendous privilege they are being invited to partake of. As it says in scripture:

And he is not served by human hands, **as if he needed anything**, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.
(Acts 17:25, Emphasis mine)

Therefore, it is an amazing gift that Jesus in His perfect love for us would offer to help us grow toward our original design for deeper friendships with Him and each other.

Summary

In this chapter we looked at our original design for a partnership of deep friendship with Jesus. We also explored the reasons why Jesus would like to restore us toward functioning according to that design. For Jesus to be willing to do this for us is an amazing gift for sure! A gift that comes from His magnificent and perfect love for us! In the next chapter we will explore how we wound up moving away from our original design in the first place.

Chapter 4 – Steps Away from Our Original Design

When the homeowner had found the garden hose under the bushes, he realized the hose was not in the same condition as when it was originally manufactured. Instead of being flexible, it was stiff. Instead of being whole, it had gashes that would leak. Without an explanation from the prior homeowners, the new homeowner may have wondered how the hose wound up being under the bushes in the first place.

When we looked at this metaphor in the last chapter, we explored how we are like the garden hose and how we were originally designed to function. But we deferred to this chapter the question of how the hose got under the bushes in the first place. So, in this chapter we will explore this question. We will also look at common ways people try to resolve the conflict of feeling like there should be more to life than they experience in their “normal” existence.

How the hose got under the bushes

To find the answer to the question of how the hose got under the bushes in the first place, we need to go way back in history to the beginning of mankind and look at the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. A person may not believe this story was an actual historical event like I do, and yet if they look at it, they will find it gives an excellent description of the root problems of humanity and explains how the hose got under the bushes.

At a most basic level, Adam and Eve enjoyed a wonderful, deep friendship with God and each other. This was their normal existence.

When they were tempted to eat the fruit that God had told them not to eat, they began to distrust that God was perfect in motives, perfectly loved them, and only wanted their **very** best. Instead, they pulled back their hearts from God and in turn caused a tremendous and terrible break in their friendship with Him. In this, they moved away from a beautiful partnership of friendship with God – where they did meaningful things together in this friendship, such as tending the Garden of Eden – to instead moving toward being independent from God. In terms of the hose metaphor, they went from being hooked up to the faucet with the water of God flowing through them, to being removed and placed out into the yard under the bushes.

When Adam and Eve broke their friendship with God, they became spiritually diseased. And this spiritual disease not only affected them, but became a spiritual hereditary disease that has infected all humans down through the ages to our present time. (The only exception to this was Jesus, since He is the only human to also be fully God.) Because people are so used to this spiritual disease and the effects that it has, many think it is normal – even though it is abnormal to their original design.

There are a number of symptoms that people experience in this separated condition. First of all, they no longer have God's love flowing through them back to God, themselves, and others. And without that love, the basis for valuing God, others, and themselves is greatly decreased. This in turn works toward a downhill slide that can even result in their hating and being mean toward God, others, and even themselves.

Another symptom is that deep down, many people want better friendships, and yet find they cannot quite get there. They feel lonely not only when they are by themselves, but even if they are with many other people, since even among many others, they can still feel relationally isolated. Their loneliness is often more acute when they are not with anyone else, and this in turn can drive them toward being with others. And yet, when they are with others, the relational strains tend to drive them away from relationships back toward being alone. These two forces tend to balance out at a point, and yet in any given season a person may try "just one more time" to make relationships work. Others just decide that being a loner is the less hurtful way to go.

Overall, many people feel lonely, but do not know how to solve that loneliness by growing in deeper friendships with Jesus and others. And yet the blueprint of who they were originally designed to be is still in the fabric of their being. So, deep down they know there is something more to get to – yet they cannot quite seem to get there. It is like they have an itch on their body somewhere that they cannot quite locate. I have noticed four stages that people often go through in trying to find the itch.

Four Stages

The first stage is the totally selfish stage where a person is only concerned with themselves and their own needs. They try to buy things, experience things such as tastier food or thrills such as skydiving, try to be number one at something, try another romantic relationship, and much more. And yet, no matter what they purchase, accomplish, or experience, they only find temporary satisfaction. They often think the very next thing will bring the satisfaction they so strongly desire. And yet after they finally get the next thing and experience it for a while, it disappoints them since it did not provide the satisfaction they thought it would bring. A person in this stage can go from thing to thing to thing, and stay permanently stuck in this stage without ever being able to locate the itch.

Some people make it into the second stage when they discover a certain satisfaction in helping others. They might help to tutor a school student, help a person to move to a new residence, or just provide a listening ear to a troubled person. As the person helps others, they find that somehow they begin to feel a little better about themselves. As they focus on the needs of others, it helps them to get a little further away from the self-centeredness of the first stage. And

yet, as much as they do things for others, they still deep down do not feel totally appreciated or valued. They can even get discouraged that their efforts are not appreciated more. And once again, as much as they try to help others, they still cannot find the itch.

Some people make it to the third stage when they realize there is a spiritual dimension of who they are, and begin to seek spiritual understanding and apply spiritual principles to their life. As the focus of their life moves toward spiritual things, they find that it resonates to a certain degree with something deep within them that their second stage efforts of helping others did not get to. And if they begin to look to a higher power, it can help them move further away from the self-centeredness of the first stage, since they begin to see the higher power at the center of the universe instead of themselves. And yet, this stage also has limits. As much as they try to grow in spiritual ways, they still find they are unable to reach what is deep in their hearts to get to. The itch is still not found.

The person makes it to the fourth stage when they, like the garden hose, get repaired and hooked up to the faucet. As the faucet opens, they begin to have the water of God's love flow through them, and over time God's love becomes a wonderful basis for them to love and value God, others, and even themselves. They begin to grow in their partnership of friendship with Jesus and find purposefulness in their deepening friendships with Him and others – as the garden begins to produce good fruits and vegetables. This all finally begins to resonate with the core of their being, since they begin to function according to their true normal design.

In the next chapter we will look at the details of how a person can get hooked up to the faucet and in turn make it into the fourth stage. But before moving on to that chapter, let us first take a look at one more issue, mainly the topic of, "What really is sin anyway?" For if we have a narrow view of what sin is, then it can hinder us from being freed up by Jesus into His very best for our lives. If instead, we can get a wider view of what sin is, it can greatly help us to want to avoid it, since we will see more clearly how it can really hinder us from growing toward those deeper waters of friendship with Jesus and each other.

What really is sin anyway?

When Jesus was once teaching about prayer, He said that it is good for us to ask God to forgive us of our sins in light of our forgiving others who have sinned against us. He then added:

For if you forgive other people when **they sin against you**, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:14-15, emphasis mine)

It is interesting that these verses show sin in the context of relationships. When Jesus says, “they sin against you”, He is talking about sin in terms of what I call “relational violation”. In other words, seeing sin in light of the negative impact it has upon friendships.

To see this further, if we look over the entire Bible at the topic of sin, it shows that the essence of sin is all the relational violations that humans do that work against them being able to love God, others, and themselves. This makes sense since the greatest two commandments are to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves, and anything that would work against this would classify as sin. This even includes things that are not easily seen as working against someone being able to love God, others, and themselves, but in reality are things that actually do so and in turn can contribute to the forming of relational barriers that can greatly hinder deeper friendships.

A person might say that Adam and Eve sinned against God, and therefore God removed them from the Garden of Eden. At a very basic level, this is a true statement. But if we only look at this basic level, we can miss the bigger picture of what is going on.

If we instead focus upon sin in terms of relational violation, we can see that Adam and Eve did a great relational violation against loving God and each other. As their hearts pulled back from God, it greatly hindered their ability to have God’s love flow through them as much as it had before, and over time it had a terrible impact upon their friendships with God and each other. Not only this, as they began to doubt the perfect character of God, they no longer fully accepted God as God and instead made a great substitution where they themselves began to move toward that central position best occupied by God. In this they became “too big for their britches” and gave birth to pride and arrogance, which have had terrible impact upon friendships ever since. In just one generation after Adam and Eve, we can already see a striking example of this decline in friendships when their one son intentionally killed their other son!

If we look at sin from this perspective, we can see why God would not like it, since in His perfect love for us, He wants our very best. And in light of this, it saddens him that sin hinders us from growing toward our original design for deep friendships. This is similar to the story in the last chapter about the parent whose child went to jail. The parent was very saddened by seeing the child’s life detoured from all the good things that they desired for the child.

Instead of seeing sin in terms of relational violation, some people view it more from what I call a checklist mentality. They think that God has a list of things that He does not like, such as playing cards, dancing, or drinking caffeinated beverages. So they diligently live by the checklist, and yet often do things that harm their friendships without realizing it – such as looking down on, and even rejecting those who do not follow the same checklist. They can even hinder

others from moving toward friendship with Jesus, since those being hindered might conclude that if God just wants them to follow a bunch of rules and is really not interested in their very best, then they do not want anything to do with God at all.

But if instead of a checklist mentality, we begin to see sin from its true relational context, then it can be of great help to us. So, if we realize that Jesus only wants our very best, we get hooked up to the faucet, and God's love begins to flow through us, then over time, Jesus will help to open our eyes so that we see with greater clarity the correlation between what we do and the positive or negative long-term effects that it has upon our friendships with Him and others. The following verses show this correlation.

Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. (1 John 2:9-11)

It is a great benefit for us to see this correlation more clearly, since as we better understand what sin truly is, we will grow in a desire to avoid it and the negative effects that it has upon our friendships with Jesus and each other. It is a great kindness of Jesus to help us to see this correlation better, since without such sight, we could do damage to our relationships without even knowing how we damaged them – just as the 1 John 2:9-11 verses show how it is hard to see clearly in the dark. The more we see this correlation, the more we will want to avoid sin – not because it is on a checklist – but because we do not want to be unloving toward Jesus and others. As we grow this way, it will resonate deep inside of us as being very right and good, since it will be in harmony with our true design.

Summary

In this chapter we looked at how the garden hose went from its normal existence to its abnormal existence under the bushes due to a terrible break in the relationship between humans and God. In this we saw that the true essence of "sin" is relational violation, instead of the commonly held view of a checklist mentality that causes further relational violations. We also looked at the symptoms people experience in the condition of being under the bushes, such as loneliness and relational strains, and how they often go through four common stages to try to remedy these symptoms. In the next chapter we will look at the details of the fourth stage that shows how the hose can be restored, hooked up to the faucet, and begin to function according to its original design.

Chapter 5 – A Big Step toward Our Original Design

The Gardener pulled the garden hose out from under the bushes, fixed it up, and hooked it up to the faucet. He then turned the valve counterclockwise, and the water began to flow. At first the water did not look clear since dust, dirt, and cobwebs were being washed out. But then the crystal clear water came forth as the garden began to be watered. Over time, a beautiful crop of fruits and vegetables came forth.

In this chapter we will look at how each of us can get hooked up to God, just like the garden hose got hooked up to the outdoor faucet. You may already be hooked up, and if you are, I hope this chapter proves to be a reminder of how fortunate you are to already be so connected and possibly give you additional insights into this amazing privilege. If you are not already hooked up, may this chapter give you the needed explanation for how you, too, can get hooked up, which is a key step toward your being able to grow toward your original design for deeper friendships with Jesus and others.

A Disclaimer on the Context of this Chapter

As we will see later in this chapter, there is a decision that Jesus gives each of us as to whether we would like to get hooked up or not. He will not demand us or manipulate us to do so, even though out of His love for us, His heart's desire is to give us this amazing gift. In light of this, even though I will share with you concepts and steps that you can take to get hooked up, in no way do I want to do a relational violation of the 1 Corinthians 13 definition of love that says, "It does not demand its own way." (1 Corinthians 13:5 NLT) Instead, I desire to be respectful of you as I treat you as a good friend without pressuring, manipulating, or coercing you to also get hooked up. I am personally glad that years ago, I made the decision to get hooked up, and I think it is great that my friendships with Jesus and others are growing in such good ways. And even though I think this is the best decision others can make as well, I foremost want to give you the freedom to choose whether or not you would like to get hooked up. With this disclaimer in place, I now feel the freedom to continue with this chapter.

Hookup Basics Overview

In order for the garden hose to be restored and hooked up to the faucet, it required certain actions on the part of the Gardener and it also required willingness on the part of the hose. Now granted, a hose is an inanimate object that does not have a choice, but in our case, there is action needed both by Jesus as the Gardener as well as us as the garden hose. So, in the following section we will look at the actions needed by Jesus, followed by a section about the actions needed by us. We will then be able to build upon both of these sections to look at the actual hookup steps.

Understanding what is needed on God's part

God did an absolutely amazing thing for you and me in order to provide a way for us to get restored and hooked up. I do not fully grasp how amazing it truly is, but from what I currently understand, I will share with you.

Many people know the following Bible verse that summarizes what Jesus did for us:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son (Jesus), that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

In light of the concepts in this book about seeing sin as relational violation, here is my own fuller version of John 3:16 that expands upon this tremendous thing God has done for each of us:

For God so greatly loved each and every individual person that He gave Himself in the person of Jesus and went to the cross on our behalf, where He experienced and paid for each and every hurtful relational violation that every individual person has ever and will ever experience by what others have done or will do to them. God took all of this upon Himself so that we could experience healing of all of the relational violations that others have inflicted upon us, and also forgiveness for the relational violations we have inflicted upon others. God is not a distant God who does not know our pain. Instead, He is an amazing God who loves each of us so fully that on the cross He personally experienced the pain of every relational violation that we have had or will experience in the future. And through this amazing payment, God provides the means of forgiveness needed for each person to enter into a deep friendship with Him both now and for eternity. This gives us a wonderful example of the kind of love that God has for each and every one of us. So, Jesus is not a distant God, but One who has intimate firsthand knowledge of all of the relational violation pain we have suffered.

I can only imagine how much it physically hurt Jesus to be executed by crucifixion, but on top of this can you imagine experiencing the pain of every hurtful relational violation that every single person has or will experience? Jesus, out of tremendous love for each of us, took all of this pain upon Himself so that you and I could receive healing for our wounded hearts, and forgiveness for all the relational violations we have made against others. If you think of the times you have been hurt by others, can you imagine multiplying that pain by what all people in past, present, and future generations have had and will experience? I cannot begin to fathom the kind of love that Jesus perfectly maintained in providing such a payment for each of us. Jesus freely laid down His very life as a blood sacrifice for each and every one of us so that He could offer you and me

the free gift of forgiveness and healing. In the garden hose metaphor, forgiveness and healing are part of the hose restoration process.

In looking at what Jesus did for each of us, the following question comes to my mind, “How could a person of normal human size take all the relational violations of every single person upon Himself?” If Jesus was only a person, then this could not be humanly possible, but the following verses give us a clue as to how this was truly accomplished:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus), and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

It was this larger-than-we-can-imagine God of the universe that through Jesus, was taking all of these relational violations upon Himself. If we think about the distance from here to the moon, it gives us a place to start in thinking about the size of God’s heart – which is even much larger yet. This huge heart was literally experiencing all of the pain caused by the relational violations done by every human in the past, present, and future. A square mile of size might be needed for a single person who has caused a lot of relational violation over the course of their life. If we now multiply this by every human that ever lived, lives now, or will live in the future, we see that God made an amazing payment for everyone by taking all of this pain upon Himself. The heart of God was truly filled with pain as Jesus hung there on the cross, and this gives us a small glimpse into the kind of love that God has for each of us. If you think of a person living near you, can you imagine taking upon yourself all of their pain that they experienced through the relational violations that others have inflicted upon them, so that they could be healed of that pain? Would you be willing to carry around their pain so that they no longer had to carry it? It would definitely be their pain at your expense. Could you now imagine doing this for every person of all generations? And yet, this is exactly what God did on the cross!

In chapter three I said, “But, with Jesus being perfect in love, His heart’s desire is to give us the very best, **no matter the cost to Himself.**” What Jesus did on the cross demonstrates the last part of this quote. He paid a cost that is off the charts in terms of sacrificial love. On the cross Jesus had you and me held in His heart even though we were not yet alive at that time, but He looked through time and embraced each of us. John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” And this is truly what Jesus did for you and me!

Jesus’ payment on the cross is even greater than what I have described so far! Not only did Jesus pay for the human to human relational violations, but Jesus also paid for every relational violation that people have done against themselves and have also done against God. For example, a person may have the relational

violation of hatred in their heart toward others, themselves, and God. So, God's payment on the cross is for people of all times. And it accounts for every past, present, and future relational violation. This includes both the obvious and less obvious things that people do that work against the greatest two commandments of them loving God, others, and themselves. All of this adds up to an absolutely awesome thing that God has done on the cross on our behalf and is more amazing than my mind can even begin to comprehend!

Understanding what is needed on our part

In the prior section we saw that God in the person of Jesus did a tremendous amount on our behalf to make it possible for us to get restored and hooked up. But what about us, what do we need to do in order to be able to partake of all that Jesus did for us on the cross and to join Him in a partnership of friendship?

If you or I wanted to become an accomplished musician, and an expert music teacher graciously offered to give us an instrument, music books, lessons, and coaching all for free, would the teacher be glad for us if we took the instrument and music books but never practiced, never showed up for lessons, and never paid attention to their coaching? Would it be surprising that we did not progress well toward our original desire to become an accomplished musician?

In a similar way, Jesus perfectly loves us, and in this love He graciously and freely offers to forgive us for all the relational violations we have ever done (according to His payment for us on the cross), to fill us with His Holy Spirit, and to enable us, teach us, and grow us toward our original design of a partnership of friendship with Him as is stated in chapter 3:

And our design is to live a life of love and to partner with Jesus in doing the good things that we are uniquely designed for. As it says in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." This is a gift from Jesus to us, in that He will grow us into who we truly are as we learn to walk with His love flowing through us and as we partner with Him in doing the "good works" that are places where we can express that love, and where our friendships with Jesus and others can blossom.

If we only desire to be forgiven, but do not truly want to be freed up and grow toward our original design, would Jesus be glad for us? Would it truly be for our best? Would it be surprising if we did not progress well?

Since Jesus perfectly loves us, He desires for our sake that we would succeed in growing well toward our original design. In light of this, He made a pretty blunt statement for our benefit:

If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it. (Matthew 10:37-39 NLT)

So, in order for us to be able to partake of His forgiveness, we first need to be willing to agree to His conditions that are needed for us to succeed.

Interestingly, this Matthew 10:37-39 passage gives us a wonderful example of how Jesus is infinitely wise and is the best coach. If we did not know that Jesus is perfect in motives and only wants our best, we might incorrectly conclude that He is being selfish in wanting us to not love others more than Him. But, this passage gives us one of the keys to growing toward deeper friendships with Jesus and others. It shows us that we are designed to give our hearts first to Jesus, not to humans. And as our hearts are open and close to Jesus (i.e. a key part of the faucet hookup), the flow of His love will increase through us. This in turn will enable us to have His love for Him, others, and ourselves. This will result in us having much more love for others, including our father and mother, son and daughter, spouse, and many others. Not only this, but we will also avoid a lot of relational hurt that can occur if we give our heart to another person, and then get hurt by that person since the person is not loving all the time like Jesus is.

If you have opened your heart to others and have been really hurt by them, the thought of opening and giving your heart to Jesus may seem scary to you. You may wonder if by doing so, you will get hurt by Jesus or others. Because Jesus perfectly loves you, He will **never** do the relational violation of emotionally “knifing” you. So, you do not have to worry about getting your heart hurt by Jesus. But you might think, “What about other people? If I open my heart to Jesus, will that mean that others will be able to hurt my heart more?” Fortunately, there is an authority that Jesus gives with His love that can help protect our hearts from others, and yet allow them to stay open to Jesus and still have His love for other people. As we grow in our friendship with Jesus and learn from Him, He can teach us how to protect our hearts by not giving our hearts to others and also by not receiving hurtful things from them. Since this is a learning process, some hurtful things may still get through. Fortunately, Jesus is also able to heal the wounds of our hearts if we ask Him to do so.

Even if all of this makes sense to you, you may still be hesitant to make such a large commitment with your life, since you may not know all the details that are involved. So, you might ask me, “Well, you have been growing in your partnership with Jesus for a few decades, what is all involved?” The honest answer I could give you is that growth at times is quite challenging, and yet incredibly worthwhile! Jesus is an expert coach who does not compromise the

training requirements needed for us to grow and be freed into our original design. And fortunately, Jesus knows exactly what He is doing and does so only for our very best!

One example of the challenging aspect of growth is found in what Jesus stated about forgiveness. Jesus said that if we do not forgive others, then God will not forgive us. (See Matthew 6:15.) I have at times found it challenging to forgive others who have been mean to me. And yet, I now see that it is a great freedom for me to be able to forgive others even when they do not ask me to forgive them. This way I am not controlled by having grudges toward other people. I also now see that if I hold a grudge toward one person, it will hinder me from loving Jesus and others – since such a grudge puts a kink in the garden hose, which in turn hinders the water of God’s love from flowing through me. So, depending on what relational violations others have done to you, this may be a **very** challenging thing for you. Fortunately, if we are willing, Jesus can empower us to be able to do such amazing things as forgiving others.

A second example is one which may not be obvious at first, but is very real none the less. It is the demonic forces that will hate and tempt you all the more because of their hating God’s Holy Spirit within you as well as hating you loving and being a good friend to God. Fortunately, Jesus will protect you and limit how much these demons can do to you. The measure of what Jesus allows you to bear will be at times like a refiner’s fire for removing dross from a precious metal. But fortunately, Jesus limits the refining and trials to the minimal amount needed for the maximum benefit! Even though I have found this to be very challenging at times, I also smile at the realization that this process is very worthwhile in how Jesus uses it to help me grow in character and to function all the more according to my original design for deeper friendships. And not only does it have benefit for life on earth, but for eternity in heaven as well!

Since you may want to know more about what I’m talking about in terms of these demonic forces, I thought it would be nice and possibly helpful if I gave you a fuller explanation before continuing on...

Many years ago, there were many angels who became arrogant, rejected Jesus, broke their friendship with Jesus, and turned toward all kinds of evil. God eventually gave them the absolutely perfect sentence of justice that their actions deserved, including removing them from heaven. These fallen angels are also known as demons, and because they lost their positions in heaven and because of the evil they have embraced, they are now motivated first and foremost by their totally unjustified, extremely intense hatred toward God. Due to this, demons now have intense hatred at the very core of their being where they not only have extreme hatred for God, but they also have an incredible amount of hatred toward all humans as well!

The demons' hatred of humans is further fueled by their desire to be mean to God, where they indirectly attempt to be mean to God by trying to hinder humans from growing toward friendship with the God who has created them and loves them. Instead of wanting people to function according to the original design to love God, others, and themselves, these demons try to get people to do many relational violations that will result in the people hating God, others, and even themselves.

So if you enter into a close friendship with Jesus, including receiving God's Holy Spirit to dwell within you, then the demons will hate you all the more – both out of their extreme hatred toward the God who now dwells within you, and also because they especially hate anyone actually loving and being a good friend to God. In this, they will be mean and tempt you like they do to all humans – but in an even greater way.

These demons are very smart and often won't use a direct, obvious attack against you that you would easily recognize as working against deeper friendships. Instead, they will subtly tempt you in your thoughts, emotions, feelings, and desires to do things that may seem appealing to you, but the temptation is built by them in such a way that if you are lured away by the temptation, you will first need to do the relational violation of pulling your heart away from God, closing your heart toward God, and even hardening your heart toward God – all of which will kink the garden hose and stop the flow of God's Holy Spirit so that you will not be able to love God, others, and yourself.

The demons will also tempt others to do relational violations against you, and will then tempt you to react in a way that causes you to do relational violations in return. For example, the demons might tempt someone to gloat over you, judge you, reject you, and/or be mean to you in some way. And if instead of turning the other cheek, you follow the temptation to judge, get mad at, and reject that person, it will cause a relational violation kink in the hose that will prevent you from continuing to have God's love for not only that person, but for God, others, and yourself as well.

Like I said earlier, the demons intensely hate all people and tempt all people. So, you will be tempted whether or not you enter into a friendship with Jesus. But, if you do enter into a friendship with Jesus, He will limit how much you are tempted and He will help you to overcome temptations as is stated in the following verse:

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Fortunately, having God's Holy Spirit on the inside of oneself is fantastic, including that the Holy Spirit is infinitely more powerful than all the demons put

together! And learning to rely on God's Holy Spirit is one of the keys to overcoming temptation – where not only will God help us to realize when and how we are being tempted, but He will also show us how to overcome temptation through His power and enabling. This is one of the keys for us growing toward deeper friendships.

With all of these details about demonic forces and temptation explained, I'll now continue...

Now that we looked at some of the challenges and benefits of what is needed on our part, there is still a catch-22 in looking at joining a friendship partnership with Jesus. And that is even if you read many additional details as to what is involved, you still would not fully know what it is like unless you actually partner with Jesus for a while. It would be like if you were single and I was trying to explain to you what married life is like. You have a free choice to say "I do" or not to the marriage relationship. But the catch-22 is that you still will not know all that is required, unless you have experiential firsthand knowledge of being married. After twenty years of marriage, you probably would have a much better idea of what is required to have a growing marriage. But you cannot have twenty years of married experience without saying, "I do," at the start. Also, the unique circumstances of your life are most likely not exactly the same as mine. But, fortunately there are some things that can help you with this decision that have more to do with who Jesus is as your partner than with the particular details of how such a partnership would be for you.

The first thing is the character and desires of God that we looked at in chapter three. I will restate them here:

Some of God's desires

- He desires our best (Jeremiah 29:11).
- He desires a close relationship with us (John 15:15; Matthew 23:37).
- He desires for us to value ourselves, others, and God (Matthew 22:34-40).
- He desires that we would know that we are significant, both at the present time and throughout eternity (John 13:1-5; Isaiah 49:15-16; Revelation 2:17; 3:12).
- He desires that we would be set free into His very best for our lives (John 8:36; 10:10).

Some of God's characteristics

It is easy to attribute human motives and characteristics to God. But there will always be an "Other-ness" to God—aspects of His character that no human could ever attain. Here is a list of such characteristics:

- He always wants our best (Romans 8:28).
- He is always perfect in His motives (Isaiah 55:8-9).
- He infinitely values us (1 Peter 1:18-19; Romans 5:6-11).

- He is never partial (Romans 2:11; 1 Peter 1:17).
- He never commits injustice (2 Chronicles 19:7).
- He never lies (Numbers 23:19; John 14:6).
- He always has selfless love toward us (1 John 4:8; Jeremiah 31:3; Psalm 36:5-7).
- He is infinitely knowledgeable and wise (Romans 11:33-36; Isaiah 40:28).
- He knows us completely (Matthew 10:30; Psalm 139:1-18).
- He never makes a mistake (2 Samuel 22:31; Deuteronomy 32:4).
- His character and desires have always been and will always be consistent throughout eternity (Hebrews 13:8).

It is encouraging to know that Jesus is infinitely wise and knows exactly what is needed for us to be freed up and grow into our true design. This is much better than being coached by someone who does not really know what they are doing. It is also nice to know that Jesus is perfect in love and motives toward us. In this, Jesus will never cause a relational violation toward us, but will instead consistently help us each step of the way.

Secondly, if we come into relationship with Jesus, He is the one who provides the water that is needed to water the garden. In other words, Jesus is the one who provides His Holy Spirit that we can receive so that His Holy Spirit within us will then give us what is needed for the fruit of the Holy Spirit to come forth in our lives. It is as if we have a car that does not have an engine, and we try to push that car down the road. The car works much better when it has an engine, is turned on, put in gear, and is driven down the road. Receiving God's Holy Spirit within us is like getting the engine put in the car and having the engine started. Growth is being able to learn both how to put the car in gear and to drive well – which sure beats trying to push the car!

Lastly, I find it helpful to realize that Jesus does not need us in any way. Instead, it is only out of His kindness and perfect love for us that He offers us to join Him in a partnership of friendship. It is first for our sake and then secondly for Him. It is definitely an amazing privilege for us! As Genesis 15:1 says that He truly is our very great reward!

So, if you would like to join a partnership of friendship with Jesus, including agreeing to the conditions needed to succeed that were outlined in this section, then the following section will give you the actual steps you can take to get repaired and hooked up.

The Actual Steps

Someone might describe the following steps a little differently than I do, and these steps may work a little differently for you than they did for me, but from experience I can assure you that they are steps that actually work.

If you are proceeding with these steps, you have already taken the first step of being willing to agree to God's conditions that were outlined in the last section.

The second step is to open wide your heart to Jesus. So, instead of being at arms length and holding yourself away from Jesus, it is to open up to Him and say to Him something like, "Ok, I open and give my heart to You."

The final step is for you to say something like this out loud to Jesus, "Jesus, I give my life to you for you to coach and grow me toward deeper friendships and all that You have for me. According to what You have done for me on the cross, I ask that You would forgive me for all the relational violations I have done toward You, others, and myself. I also ask You to heal my heart of all the relational violations that others have done to me. And I invite You to come inside of me in a great measure of Your Holy Spirit and have the water of Your Holy Spirit begin to flow through me. And please teach me and help me to grow well all the days of my life in all that You have for me, as You restore me to the original design of who I truly am."

If you have taken these steps, then I congratulate you and welcome you to an incredible journey that will be challenging and yet rewarding. A journey that you will find over time resonates with the very core of your being as being both good and right, and you will know deep down that it is an excellent path for you to be on. You will be especially glad as you see the good fruits and vegetables emerging in the garden of your friendships, which in turn will help you to realize it is truly the best path you could have possibly chosen.

Summary

In this chapter we looked at how the garden hose could be restored to the outdoor faucet, and how this is a simple metaphor that barely describes the beyond-our-comprehension amazing thing that God did for us on the cross to provide the means for us to be healed, forgiven, and restored to a partnership of friendship with Him. God's action was definitely off the charts in terms of His sacrificial love for us! We also looked at what is needed on our part to partake of this wonderful offer. If you have taken these steps now or at some point in the past, I congratulate you and am glad for you, since these steps are needed for each of us to grow toward deeper friendships with Jesus and each other.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Next Steps

As a woman reflected upon her life, she realized she had spent many years in what seemed like an extremely large maze. As much as she had tried to diligently find her way out, she only found an endless labyrinth of passageways and dead ends. Each time she reached a dead end, she would feel a little more discouraged that she was still stuck in the maze. But her strong desire to eventually find a way out continued to motivate her to turn around and continue her diligent search. After many years of searching and finding only dead ends, she began to wonder if she would ever find her way out. But she knew such thoughts would only slow her down in her quest. So she determined that no matter how many discouraging thoughts would cross her mind, she would still try to continue onward.

One day as the woman was trying once again to find her way out, she walked down a sequence of hallways, and instead of hitting the usual dead end, she found a door. She became very excited, since it was the first door she had ever seen in the maze. Next to the door were many keys hung upon the wall. As she looked at the keys for a while, she took a rough estimate and guessed there were at least three or four thousand keys. Even though there were so many keys, she became very excited at the thought that hopefully one of them would enable her to get out of the maze! So, she quickly began to take each key, place it in the door lock, turn it as far as it would go, and then push on the door to see if it would open. But each time, the door would not budge.

After hundreds and hundreds of keys, the woman began to get quite discouraged. She began to wonder if any of the keys would even work, and even if one did work, would it really be a way out or only lead to another sequence of passageways and dead ends? As she thought about turning around and looking for another way out of the maze, she realized that if she did so, she might never find her way back to this door which could possibly be her only way out. So she decided that no matter how long it might take, she would try every one of the keys.

After many hours and many more keys, the woman found a key that turned further in the lock than the others had. As she continued to turn the key she heard a click. She then pushed on the door, and it began to open! Her excitement level skyrocketed! As she opened the door she saw sunshine for the first time and before her was a beautiful meadow!

The woman was so thankful she had found the key that had worked, that she took the key out of the door lock and took it with her as she walked out into the sunlit meadow. With the light being better outside than in the maze, she could now see that there were letters engraved on the key. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she looked closer at the letters and saw that it said, "Friendship with Jesus is the key to life."

Years later, as the woman reflected back on these events that had occurred in her life, she realized that friendship with Jesus had indeed unlocked what she had always been looking for in that it had opened the way toward wonderful friendships with Jesus and others. A big smile broke across her face as she became so very thankful that she not only finally knew why she existed, but that she had found the greatest treasure of knowing Jesus as her best friend!

***** **End of Story** *****

Like the woman in this story, I too am very thankful and feel very fortunate to have found that the key to life is friendship with Jesus. I hope this conclusion is easily seen from what I shared in the prior chapters. I also hope this book has been an inspiration for you to grow in your friendship with Jesus and others as well.

If you asked me to recommend other things that would be helpful to you in growing toward deeper friendships, I would give you the following three suggestions.

The first thing I would suggest is a prayer, in which you would ask Jesus to grow you over time to become a wonderful friend of His. This suggestion is based on the realization that only Jesus can truly grow us toward deeper friendships with Him and others, and therefore it is helpful for us to look to Him to do so.

My second suggestion is that you would get a copy of ***At His Feet*** (which you can purchase at www.OrderAtHisFeet.com). ***At His Feet*** is a book I wrote especially for a person new to their relationship with God, but it has also proved to be helpful to those who have been in relationship with Jesus for longer periods of time. The reason I suggest ***At His Feet*** is because it has many practical suggestions for how to grow in one's friendship with Jesus. And growing in our friendship with Jesus is the biggest key to our growing in our friendships with each other. ***At His Feet*** also has an appendix that gives some practical ways to read the Bible, since the Bible is a fantastic resource that Jesus can use to help us to grow in deeper friendships.

My third suggestion is for the future. I hope someday to write additional books that are very practical and helpful for one's life with Jesus. So, if and when these books become available, I hope they turn out to be quite valuable both to you and to others as well.

Thank you for allowing me to share my heart with you through this book. I hope the things I shared have already been helpful to you, and in the future will continue to be helpful to you in your journey toward deeper friendships.