

# *What a Friend!*

FOCUSING OUR RELATIONSHIPS ON  
**CHRIST'S CHARACTER**



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WHAT A FRIEND! FOCUSING OUR RELATIONSHIPS ON  
CHRIST'S CHARACTER

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# INTRODUCTION

We all need a true friend—someone we can turn to in troubled times and can talk with about anything, one who will not abandon us when we're at our worst and who'll bring out the best in us.

But let's be real. At times we might get the impression that true friends can be found only in fiction, especially if our own friends have disappointed us. Yes, genuine friends can be hard to find, and even the best have flaws.

That's true until we discover the very best Friend, Jesus Christ. He loves us unconditionally and is entirely trustworthy. He understands us like only our Creator can. This study invites us to discover the joy of a close relationship with Jesus Christ and then, following His example, to become a true friend to others.



## LESSON 1

# SHOWING CHRIST'S LOVE

Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–11

AT SOME POINT IN OUR LIVES, it's likely we have been able to relate to Beverly. As a little girl she had lots of lollipops but no friends. She lived in a neighborhood with many older children who didn't want her tagging along.

One day Beverly ran into her house and exclaimed to her mother, "Lollipop, Mommy!" Her mother gave Beverly a lollipop from the pantry, but Beverly urgently asked for more. "No, Mommy. *Lots* of lollipops!"

That's when her mother knew something was up. After handing her daughter a handful of lollipops, she looked out the window to see what her little girl would do.

Beverly ran to the fence between her yard and the meadow next door, where the neighborhood boys and girls were playing. She held out her hand through the fence and offered the children her lollipops. They didn't see her at first and kept on playing. Finally, one of them noticed her and the lollipops.

Now all the children ran over, grabbed a lollipop, and then ran back to their game without even saying thanks. With her gifts all gone, Beverly still had no friends.

Beverly's mother blinked back tears as her daughter stood dejectedly outside, watching the other children play. How badly her daughter wanted friends!<sup>1</sup>

1. Have you ever felt this way—unwanted and without friends?
2. What have you done to gain acceptance and friendship?

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<sup>1</sup> James Dobson, *Life on the Edge: The Next Generation's Guide to a Meaningful Future* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995), loc. 408–33, Kindle.

## God wants a close relationship with you.

Even more than you desire acceptance, companionship, friendship, and love, God desires the same from you. In fact, He loves you so much that He has reached out to you, seeking a close relationship with you.

3. What does 1 John 4:19 reveal about God's love for you?

4. How is this different from what Beverly experienced?

We know that in any close relationship with God, He is the initiator, the One Who cared enough to reach out first. This fact is especially amazing because of what Romans 3:11 says about our natural, human position toward God.

5. What surprising thing does Romans 3:11 say about us?

6. Knowing this, how would you expect God to respond to us?

God is not like humans in this way. He cares about us so deeply that He pursues a close relationship with us even though we are sinners (Romans 3:23) and ignore and reject Him. God stops at nothing to express His love for us, no matter how badly we behave toward Him.

7. How do you treat people who have zero interest in you?

8. How do you treat people who treat you badly?



## God went to extreme measures to show His love toward you.

God's demonstration of love to us sinners, to seek a close relationship with us, is not casual or half-hearted. That's what the primary Scripture passages of this lesson reveal to us.

9. In Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–11, what amazing thing did God do that shows how greatly He loves us?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What details further emphasize how serious God was in bringing about His plan?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What does *Emmanuel* mean, and what does its meaning tell us about Who Jesus is? (See Matthew 1:23.)

From Matthew 1:18–25 and Luke 2:1–11, we see that God the Son became a human being to form a close relationship with us. In other words, though He remained God, He also became like us (Hebrews 2:17) to have a close relationship with us.

God did not require us to become like Him; *the Son* became like *us*. Becoming a man required tremendous adjustment and inconvenience on His part. Jesus Christ lived among us and subjected Himself to the same challenges, limitations, and weaknesses that we all experience.

What human difficulties did Jesus Christ experience?

12. Matthew 4:2
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. John 4:6
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. John 19:28

God the Son not only became a man, but He also spent considerable time with mankind. His close and regular association with people showed His genuine love for humanity.

15. What short word in Mark 3:14 and Acts 4:13b underlines Jesus' close relationship with people? Hint: The word begins with *w*.

Altogether, Jesus spent about thirty-three years on earth. After spending so much time with humans like you and me, He did something extraordinary that further underscores how greatly He loves us sinners and pursues a relationship with us.

### **God paid the ultimate price to show His love toward you.**

Some gifts we give to those we love are more expensive and costly than others. A candy bar, for instance, is less costly than a luxury car, and a bouquet of flowers is less costly than a rare and beautiful diamond ring. To show His love for us, God gave something far more precious and costly than any gift we can imagine.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)*

16. What did God the Father give to us to show His love?

John says, “God so loved the world,” then he tells us the way and the extent God loves us. The way: He demonstrated His love by *giving* “his only begotten Son.” This is the greatest expression of love possible. God gave His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—Whom He loves more dearly than anyone else—for us. The extent: the Father gave His Son *as a sacrifice* for our sins.

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

Throughout history, people have attempted to explain what Jesus' death actually accomplished. Some have taught that Jesus died to be a moral influence. According to this explanation, Jesus Christ died to inspire and persuade us humans to love God back in return. Others have taught that Jesus Christ died to provide humanity with an example to follow. According to this explanation, Jesus Christ died to provide us with an example of willingly sacrificing ourselves for others.

17. Are these explanations correct? (See 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15 and 1 Peter 2:21.)

The potential problem with these explanations is that they don't go far enough in explaining the full and ultimate purpose for Jesus' death. Though they are true, Jesus' death was not merely something nice God the Son did *for* us, but was what He did *in our place*. He suffered *in my place* and died the death I deserved. He suffered *in our place* and died the death *we* deserve to die. What love! By dying in our place, He died to rescue us from our rejection of and bad behavior toward God.

18. According to John 3:16, how should you respond to this greatest act of God's love if you have not already?

19. Also according to John 3:16, what does God promise to those who respond with belief?

## **God wants you to show His love to the people in your life.**

After someone has fully trusted in Jesus Christ's death and believed on Him completely as Savior from the penalty and power of sin, something new becomes possible.

20. Read John 13:34 and 35. How does God want Christians (i.e., believers, His children, Christ followers) to treat other people?

So, once we sinners have responded to God's love by believing on Jesus Christ as our Savior, God calls and enables us to love others as He loves us. In short, we can love people around us with Christlike love.

Read 2 Corinthians 12:15, then answer the following questions.

21. What does it mean to "spend"?

22. What does it mean to "be spent"?

23. When should we love people this way?

Remember Beverly? She offered lollipops to other children in hopes they would become her friends. When we believe on Jesus Christ, we no longer have to earn or win others' love and friendship, because we know we have God's unconditional, never-ending, and immeasurable love.

Rather than seek to get other people to love us, we can seek to introduce them to *God's* great love for them. Jesus Christ came into the world to show His love so we could be saved and to enable us to show and share His love with others.

24. Who are some people to whom you can show God's love?

25. How can you show God's love for them?

**Memorize:** John 3:16

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me even though I did not love You. Thank you for sending Your Son to live a human life. He showed Your love by identifying with me. Thank you also that He died in my place so my sin could be forgiven and I can have a close, never-ending relationship with You. Please help me share Your love with others through my resources and to show Your love through my life. May others understand Your love for them and trust in You completely. I love You. Amen.