

# Friendship and Intimacy

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IN SOME WAYS, OUR CULTURE DOESN'T TEACH US VERY MUCH about intimacy. It teaches us about sex as if it were intimacy. Similarly, it doesn't teach us very much about friendship. It teaches us about cooperation and competition among individuals, about "doing things together" and about being socially "well-adjusted" with "good people skills." But it does not recognize, let alone celebrate, the joyful and permanent bonding of intimate friendships which is, in my opinion, one of the most rewarding and durable of human relationships. As Mormons, many of us tend to have our needs for friendship filled by spouse, children, and extended family, enjoy colleagues at work and people in our wards, regret briefly how we've "lost touch" with so-and-so, but replace them with others.

I believe that the needs of both married and single people for friendship are profound. I treasure good friends and tend to keep them whenever possible for as long as possible. I have one friend whom I have known since high school where we shared a mutual interest in classes, dating, dancing, and playing. We only see each other about every three or four years, but we exchange Christmas cards and an occasional phone call that keeps us current with personal and family events; even more importantly it also keeps us in touch. She lives near one of my sisters and although that makes it easier to stay in touch, I love her and want to make the effort. One of my satisfactions with this friend is that we communicate as if we saw each other regularly.

A particularly good friend dates from my mission. She was a local member from Britain who was called on a mission and was my first "companion." We are about the same age, and the strong bonding that the gospel provided made a firm foundation for a friendship. She immigrated to the United States; and although we see each other rarely, mutual caring has lasted over many years and many changes in each of our lives.

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Out of the hundreds of fellow students I met at college and in my graduate programs, several moved from fellow learners to companions on my life's journey — we meet at professional conferences, move in and out of each other's home during vacations, and exchange ideas and love. Out of literally hundreds of clients, I have maintained a friendly interest in most of them; and a few of them have become close and enduring friendships. For instance, one couple that I spent hundreds of therapy hours with are friends that are dependable and kind. They know me as well as I know them and we value and trust our relationship. I am also fortunate in being in a field where having healthy, functional relationships among colleagues and as individuals is a premium. My colleagues at BYU have been an important part of my friendship network, and several of them have become intimate friends.

I also have the good fortune to have an nearly ideal living situation. When I began teaching at Brigham Young University in 1970, three other women faculty members that I had friendships with for years decided to buy a home together. We jointly designed a home that combined the maximum of friendly living space and privacy (there are four "master" bedrooms, for instance, and a carport for four). More importantly, our home provides the context for support and growth as friends and as individuals. In addition I have developed friendships with neighbors, with people I met through professional and Church assignments, and committees, and with friends of friends.

As I contemplate the question of friendship, then, I feel nourished and sustained in a network of good friendships, intimate friendships. Perhaps it is the very richness of my experience that has made me feel, with a certain amount of sorrow, the comparative poverty of intimate friendship that many people feel.

In discussing the situation with others, I frequently encounter a problem of definition. Many people have defined or experienced intimacy only in sexual contexts. We are sexual beings. Our sexuality is part of our personalities and thus part of our relationships, but it need not be *expressed* as sexual intimacy in all of our relationships. In fact, a rather important Mormon belief requires the expression of sexual intimacy fully in only one relationship — marriage. We have a number of nonsexual relationships in our families, at work, in our neighborhoods, on committees, in politics, and with our friends. Sexual expression may or may not become an issue in these relationships. Any nonsexual relationship could change to a sexual one, healthy or unhealthy. Sometimes we are not at all clear about our own sexuality and express it inappropriately. As a therapist, a teacher, a family member, and as a friend I have noticed that people struggle to differentiate between intimacy without sexual expression and sexual intimacy — in marital relationships, in dating relationships, and in friendships. Our society does not teach us to distinguish between our warm loving responses and our sexual responses toward others. I notice that many of us struggle with this dilemma to the point that we fail to have intimate friendships. To address this issue, my discussion focuses on friendships that do not embrace sexual intimacies.

Through the centuries friendship has been written about in fictional accounts, in the Bible, in song, in poetry, in plays, in biographies, autobiographies, in diaries, in movies, and in letters. Out of this wealth of information, romantic notions and myths have developed. As Latter-day Saints we have complemented this information with our own myths and beliefs, such as the one about how a temple wedding guarantees a wonderful marriage every day of our lives. We have also added the ingredient of righteousness. This righteousness may be some combination of a desire to act in tune with the will of the Lord and a need to be right about what we think and do. In our interaction with people, in seeking and developing friendships, we often act on these notions and myths. Our own references for friendships, both painful and rewarding, add to our beliefs and our behavior in forming and acting in friendships. These two sources, myths and experience, can cause confusion in trying to understand friendship.

In my view, friendship first requires the interaction of two people, each having a keen interest in the subjective and personal side of each other. Second, participants in friendships have a desire and a capacity for intimacy. Third, friendship is "extra-kin" in nature. Yes, friendship is and should be part of family relationships, but those friendships do have a different history and significance. A close friend of mine once gave me a framed calligraphy: "My sisters were born into my family; you were born in my heart." This sentiment represents the element of choice or the non-kinship quality in friendships. Fourth, friendship is voluntary in nature and socially recognized by others. Joel Block (1980), a psychologist, designated friendship as an untapped natural resource and considered it as training for living in a social world. He also viewed nonsexual friendships as a vital means of eradicating loneliness from our lives and a way of participating in healthy relationships. Fifth, friendship carries rights and obligations. Some are explicit and some are implicit, but the exchanges of activity and gifts of service and emotion determine the balance of these rights and obligations. Sixth, the quality and quantity of men's and women's friendships have been affected by myths about their capacity for friendships.

Andrew Greely, an educator, points out that one enters friendship by invitation. Within this context, friendship is a gift: "In order that we might persuade the other to accept our invitation, we offer him, or her, an inducement, that is to say we offer ourself" (1971, 29). In an essay entitled, "To Give Oneself," Donna Turley illustrates this point slightly differently:

Unlike other gifts, the true gift—of oneself—not [one's] writing, nor [one's] creation, nor a representation of [one] in some possession . . . can only be given in a special way.

When giving the self, the giving hand can never release the gift. What is given? Two lives touch each other. A person is allowed to come near, to realize and see from my viewpoint. I am allowed to see when [your] eyes look outward, or upward, or downward: I feel [your] presence, [your] nearness, [your] pulse and breathing, [your] turning, [your] struggle, [your] cold shudder . . . and we are no longer alone, distant, unwanted, unworthy. For this gift cannot be given permanently. This gift is extended, received, enjoyed, but can best only be remembered unless there continues to be the

giving. Surely there may be left a lasting, sweet remembrance, but there cannot be handed from one to another a gift of self to be retained by the receiver (1968, 29).

Block's (1980) research during the 1970s surveyed through questionnaires the feelings and beliefs about friendships and probed patterns of friendships. His findings shattered many myths about nonsexual relationships and found that the two sexes travel clearly different friendship paths.

One myth is about the friendship of women. This myth is that women cannot be counted upon for loyalty or for friendship. History does not celebrate female friendship. Rather women are depicted as competing against each other for men, from whom they derive their identity, and their relationship is that of ruthless rivalry. Instead, Block found that most women have long-term women friends who are supportive, accepting, and cooperative.

The myth about male friendship is depicted in songs, movies, books, and plays, as the ultimate in commitment and acceptance. From boyhood to manhood, male friendship is ritualized as strong — an unbreakable bond. Glowing terms such as devotion, honesty, trust, selflessness, and a loyalty held above life are used to depict male friendship. Block found that this myth coexisted with the reality of competition, of winning at all costs.

Block also, interestingly, found that friendships could be categorized in five groups. Think about these categories in relationship to your own friends.

1. Convenience friends. In such friendships, you are limited to exchanges of goods or services. You borrow a lawn-mower from your neighbor. You go to a movie with your roommate. You work with colleagues.

2. Doing-things friends. These relationships are limited to activity. You go fishing twice a year with Harry. You go bowling every other Wednesday with Ruth. You play tennis with Jon. You go walking each morning with June. The activity defines the relationship.

3. Milestone friends. These relationships are mostly based on memory with periodic contacts. You go to high school reunions, call a missionary companion when you're in town for general conference, or get together with Fred and Ann after the homecoming game.

4. Mentor friends. One person, usually older, has exceptional ability, knowledge, and/or talent which he or she is willing to teach. Once you begin to approach equality, the friendship changes. College and job settings produce this type of relationship.

5. Close friends. In such relationships, you share fairly equally with intimacy as part of the relationship. You go to lunch once a week and talk about new books, getting older, and your fears about nuclear war. He calls you when his son gets his mission call. You call him when a publisher accepts your book. Both of you love Woody Allen movies.

Friendships go through developmental stages, but they're different for men and women. In Block's research, a woman respondent typically remembered in preadolescence identifying a girlfriend who resembled her, someone like herself, who needed a faithful confidante. Seventy-nine percent reported having a special friend, and 98 percent of the time it was another girl. Those who did not have a close friend described themselves as shy.

During adolescence when boys entered the picture, friendship loyalties with girls were divided by romantic conflicts. A close girlfriend was still very much a part of life (81 percent) but independent-dependent struggles, identity crises, competition and rivalry changed the relationship. The unspoken rule was that a date with a boy took precedence over any previous plans with the close girlfriend and she would “understand” because she would do the same in a similar situation.

In the next stage, early marriage, women described the most important relationship as their close romantic tie to their husbands. Friendships with women were “supplemental.” Seventy-five percent of married women and 50 percent of unmarried women agree that this time was the most difficult to balance a close friendship. Stranded friends were supposed to understand.

During the later years of marriage, friendships with women — sisterhood and closeness — revived and became very important. The number of close adult friendships developed and held steady until women were typically in their fifties. Some of this new importance may be due to the women’s movement which has encouraged women to develop and cherish female values rather than depending on a husband or lover for identity and social contact.

The stages of male friendships show a pattern of increasing isolation. Before adolescence, most men remember they had one close friend or even several — a “gang.” Competition was already an element of their relationships, however, and this period was the last time that many men remembered having a close male friend.

During adolescence, guardedness increased. Physical development and prowess, interest in girls, identity crises, rivalry, and competition placed most same-sex relationships in the “doing” category — sports, cars, or jobs — and 80 percent of the men in Block’s study dared not reveal themselves to another man. Eighty percent saw themselves as friendless. Both these conditions, said the respondents, had lasted right up to the present. They had “friends,” sure — but they fell in the categories of convenience, doing, and mentoring, whether they are on the giving or receiving end. They depended on their wives for intimacy, and perhaps the lack of ability to form intimate friendships puts too much weight on marriage. Some American men today are consciously working toward closer male friends although caution, dominance/control, and success/status are all issues that prove barriers to friendship.

Not unexpectedly, Block found that guardedness is a minor issue with women but major with men. Women share personal information in friendships, where men relate primarily through work and play activities. Men reported viewing openness, compassion, and loyalty as important, but women rated them much higher. Men and women saw mental stimulation and competition as equally important, while men view similarity of interests and responsiveness to crises as more important than women. Men want to be able to count on their friends in a crisis; women assume they can. Men have great fear of being perceived as “unmanly.” Most women simply did not know what being “unwomanly” might be.

In short, when we look at myths about friendship, most of them are false in light of Block's survey. Adult women over age twenty are nearly twice as likely as men to have a close friend. Men do not have richer, more loyal friendships than women. Although women as a group have fewer mentor relationships than men, women are less frustrated and more in tune with their friendship goals than are men, single or married.

A group of men in Minneapolis wrote an anonymous article, "Why Men Don't Have Friends and Why Women Should Care," pinpointing some of the stress points for them in relationships:

Surely the "average" Joe has buddies, beer-drinking or poker-playing, fishing pals. But to whom does he talk about himself — discuss problems, admit fears, share concerns, reveal failures? Whom does he ask for help and where does he let down his defenses? Probably nowhere and with no one. In our society, except to shake hands, men are not allowed to touch each other. It's a bad rule, one that hurts men and puts an unfair burden on their relationships.

In contrast to the male "buddy" system, women have friends. Women, in fact, are trained to be friends, sharing trusts, confidences, and feelings with each other since childhood. As a young Atlanta saleswoman defined friendship, "It means vulnerability. Having someone know the worst about you and still be your friend." A San Francisco homemaker added, "A friend is someone I can be my total self with, someone I don't have to wear my masks with."

With most men, unfortunately, these definitions of friendship rarely apply. Hardly ever are men allowed the luxury of such openness in relationships with each other. And even more rarely do they recognize the gaping voids in their emotional lives. In short, they don't know what they are missing.

It has been my experience and observation that Mormons follow this national pattern without too much deviation. Men working together in bishoprics, elders quorum presidencies, and stake presidencies can develop close, intimate relationships in settings where it is not only allowed but even accepted that they will express love for each other. However, once men move to a different ward or receive a different calling, they seldom maintain these past relationships. Instead these relationships move into "milestone" friendships they remember fondly, even wistfully, as a period of intense involvement and emotional closeness, but they rarely try to maintain these relationships by suggesting other activities. Mormon women generally are considered to be in charge of a couple's social life. If she and her husband do something, she is usually the one who has to clear the calendar, arrange the babysitter, and buy the tickets. Thus, for Mormon men to do something together socially outside working hours without wives is unusual unless it is something also Church-sponsored like a ward basketball team or Scouting activities.

I also see no evidence that Mormon men suffer less from the lack of intimate friendships than American men in general, with the exception that their marriages may be a little less fragile than American marriages, that home life may be more satisfying, and that Church usually provides a second place where guardedness and competitiveness are not necessary, even though intimacy is not encouraged.

For Mormon women, Church service not only provides an opportunity to come in contact with a wide range of other women but also supplies the subject matter for beginning friendships which can thereafter develop into intimate friendships. It is not unusual for Mormon women, transferred from state to state with their husbands, to maintain a string of friendships behind them, sustained by letters, Christmas cards, phone calls, and visits when they return. Although the pressure Mormon women can put on each other to fit into certain traditional molds can be tremendous, it has been my observation that more often women are understanding of and supportive to each other, even in non-traditional roles. I certainly feel, however, that although the Church and its numerous activities and system of providing mutual services can provide opportunities for intimate friendships, it does not guarantee them. In fact, the constant round of activities may actually work against intimacy by keeping both men and women task-focused instead of relationship-focused.

How about the dimension of intimacy in friendships? *Intimacy* comes from a Latin root meaning "within." It suggests a relationship where intimates allow each other freedom to cross normal borders, to enter the space where we are most vulnerable and most ourselves. Intimacy implies accessibility and trust; it suggests emotional and psychological support. But special privileges of intimacy do not mean that we own each other, as if we had a right to possess every single part of that person. Some friendships do not endure because of confusion about possession and freedom.

Freedom is essential to the health of intimate relationships and imperative for individual growth for the participants. Donna Turley notes:

I can never need anyone enough to persist with him when the relationship begins to remove my feeling of freedom.

I can never trust another with myself once I have seen that he would rather I follow a course desired for me than the one desired by me.

When I realize that a suggestion is not a suggestion at all, but rather a recommendation and a question of my self-found direction, I take freedom, and let relationships fall away, as shackles from my soul and spirit. . . .

Couldn't you understand that if I must come to you, I have lost the desire; if you insist upon assisting me, I cannot use your help at all; if I am not free to leave you, to forget you, to be without you, then I cannot truly want you?

Freedom must be first reserved, first given, first recognized, and when its position is strong, then only can I relate, and need, and come to you, and share (1968, 24-25).

Yet freedom must be balanced by commitment. Without that commitment, there is also no intimacy. People demonstrate commitment by being there when needed, by keeping their word, by being steady and dependable in their behavior. For example, a friend and I had a major disagreement. We were each upset and angry, partly with each other and partly with circumstances that we could not control. Several days later we resolved our differences because we were committed to our relationship. Without the commitment we would not have approached the subject again and the intimacy in our friendship would have been traded for distance born of conflict.

Although we associate intimacy with warm feelings and happy times, it often requires us to share pain, keep a reassuring vigil, or provide a little dis-

tance so your friend may have space alone. It may require us to go away to allow for more intimate relationships. The combination of the number of children with ball games, Church activities, family gatherings, and professional demands on the part of some of my married friends have, through the years, forced a gradual erosion of time available for our friendship. This evolution has not changed my feelings for them, but I have had to accept it as part of my life.

To be intimate, we must know and accept ourselves. We cannot share what we do not know. Intimacy requires us to share from our deepest self, but it does not imply that we must reveal everything about ourselves. Each person chooses what to reveal and when. Intimacy is invitational. It does not guarantee permanency, imply possession, nor require total knowledge of the other.

For some people, intimacy is problematical because they do not know their own boundaries — those implicit and explicit rules that determine what and who we listen to, who can come close to us, and how close. You have to know your boundaries to issue an invitation for someone to enter your private space.

If your boundaries are blurred or if you are indecisive about them, someone may come uninvited into your space, interpreting ambivalence or failure to give “stop” signals as an invitation. An obvious example is in physical contacts. Someone may not want to be touched or hugged but never indicate what the limits are.

On the other hand, you may not recognize a need on your part to issue an invitation and you may wonder why someone seems so distant when you’d like to be closer. To be intimate, you need to send clear messages of accessibility. If you do not, you may appear not interested, cool, and aloof to the potential friend.

If you have rigid boundaries, you may overprotect them to the point that there is little opportunity for intimacy or allow only the exchange of superficial knowledge. Both conditions will guarantee isolation.

Often, though, even people who want intimacy feel blocked by fear of losing their identity, fear of exposure, fear that the other person will reject them if they know them too well, fear of being attacked, and fear of abandonment. Some people have treated friends irresponsibly in earlier years and are afraid that they lack the capacity for close friendship. Sometimes memories of verbal, physical, or sexual abuse can affect their ability to be intimate. These fears are real, but it is possible to overcome them, though sometimes professional help is required.

At birth, we are able to experience total intimacy at all levels — emotional, physical, and intellectual. As experience conditions us, we may lose the capacity to experience higher levels of intimacy and also learn that we can manage only a certain number of highly intimate relationships. If we are not severely damaged psychologically, we learn to manage appropriate levels of intimacy and to go in and out of intimate relationships.

Family scientist Alan M. Dahm (1974), describes a hierarchy of intimacy that develops from intellectual to physical to emotional. In intellectual inti-



macy, we exchange ideas, verbal instructions, roles, games, and defenses. We "sell" our social selves. Such exchanges can protect and isolate an individual, provide surface relationship interaction, or be the preliminary steps to greater intimacy.

Physical intimacy involves touching, hugging, and caressing, either in a sexual or nonsexual way. As a therapist, and as a person, I know that nonsexual physical contact is an important aspect of human life and agree with Dahm that it is an area laden with taboos, "oughts," "shoulds," and guilt. Too often children and adolescents are starved for touch because their parents and other significant adults have been conditioned not to touch. Fears of being misunderstood or of damaging their sons or daughters block a natural expression of love and affection. Also, many adults today have experienced brutal childhood experience through physical and sexual abuse that make any kind of contact anxiety-ridden. These incidents happen in Mormon families as well as in others. Yet physical intimacy is necessary for normal human development (Jourard 1971; Montague 1971). Our cultural myth about this need for physical contact is that everybody needs sex. As a result many people have a limited range of experience in physical intimacy. Being physically intimate without sexual overtones is difficult for many people, men and women, because they associate any kind of touch with sex (Hoopes 1974).

Certainly our LDS culture is not immune from this curious limitation and the strange "protections" that result. A friend in Salt Lake City last year and another friend in Provo several years ago reported attending stake priesthood meetings where the stake president in one case and the regional representative in the other discussed the problems caused by "sex-starved" divorced and widowed women, actually demonstrating how to shake hands while simultaneously using the arm as a bar so that she could not get close enough to touch him in any way. The clear implication was that men and women cannot regulate their own sexual responses to one another — that physical contact will inevitably lead to seduction and intercourse. I find it discouraging that such a counsel is being repeated in different areas after nearly a decade. Admittedly, some hugs *are* sexual. The person giving or getting the hug may not know that sexual contact is his or her motive. But to suggest that the best protection is a fearful avoidance of all human contact is folly! I thoroughly enjoy the warm arm around my shoulders and handshake from a male married friend who conveys in touch and words that our relationship is genuine and important to him — as it is also to me. I have watched him greet others, men and women, in the same way. I see the same intimacy, the same loving giving and receiving.

But when physical intimacy can be so problematic, then emotional intimacy, the highest level of intimacy, is particularly problematic. Dahm (1974) indicates four characteristics at this level. The first is mutual accessibility, regulated by the *right* of either party to *negotiate* for new content or behavior, respect for the other person's boundaries, authenticity, and honesty. Healthy personalities are comfortable both in offering and accepting accessibility.

The second characteristic is acceptance. Emotionally intimate friends accept each other as they are, they do not role play, they have genuine un-

conditional regard for each other, and they offer a great deal of warmth and liking. Although an intimate's behavior may not always be condoned, he or she is accepted.

A third characteristic is nonpossessiveness. Dahm indicates that emotional intimacy cannot exist between "inferior" and "superior" beings. Children and adults cannot be emotional intimates, in his view, as long as the difference in age bears connotations of superiority. When we view life as an unfolding process, one in which we have temporary blocks followed by growth spurts, it is easier to be nonpossessive and free from evaluations of inferiority and/or superiority. To share and not possess may be difficult for many of us because of family conditioning; nevertheless, if we wish to be truly emotionally intimate that is what we must do.

A fourth characteristic is process. Intimacy at any level is not a static condition. We cycle in and out at different levels. Hopefully they will be appropriate to the needs and conditions of each person. Emotional intimacy requires constant attention to be maintained and enhanced by total consciousness. If two people want to maintain this level or any level of intimacy, they must invest time and energy to maintain and/or enhance it. They must, in short, pay attention to the process.

"Coming together is a beginning: keeping together is a progress, working together is success," Henry Ford reportedly said. The real work in establishing, maintaining, and enhancing intimacy comes in working through "shoulds," "oughts," taboos, inexperience, and fears left over from past experiences.

Granted, this is a great deal of work. Some people feel they can invest such effort in only one person or one person at a time. If things don't work out, then they define themselves as friendless or incapable of intimate friendship. I call this the "best friend myth." All too often, I have seen the two who are involved in a "best friend" relationship also involved in issues of possessiveness and trust. They are limited in the number of close friends they have because freedom, naturalness, and accessibility in other relationships are restricted by loyalty to the "best friend." I suppose technically the label can apply to only one person at a time, but I prefer to define *best* as a quality of relationship, not as a number. I recall teacher/psychologist George Kelly telling us that "scattering" one's independencies is a sign of a healthy personality. The inference is that one person cannot be all things to another or meet all that person's needs. I believe an antidote to the "best friend" myth is to cultivate close friendships by being totally *in* the relationship when you are spending time together, whichever friend it might.

Remember that the amount of time spent with a friend does not determine the kind of friendship. The amount of love you may feel for your friend does not determine the kind of friendship. A close friendship contains all three of the elements of intimacy — accessibility, freedom, and commitment — regardless of the amount of time available.

As I try to understand my own friendships, I think of my most important friend, Christ, and how the different levels of intimacy and categories of friendship could describe the variability in my relationship to him. To have intel-

lectual intimacy with him, I study the scriptures and discuss them with others. I listen to others talk about their experiences with Christ in formal and informal settings. I interact with him through prayer and refer often to him mentally as I pursue my daily activities.

To move to a higher level of intimacy, physical intimacy, I allow myself to be touched by his spirit. I am ready to reach out, ready to receive. We have metaphors which remind us of this kind of intimacy — to be carried in his arms, borne up in his hands, sheltered in his bosom. Openness, accessibility, and honesty with him move me to emotional intimacy. A willingness to examine my relationship with him and to be prompted by his direction helps me stay close to him. Thinking about my relationship to Christ in this way informs me that when I lose my sense of intimacy *with* Christ it is because I have chosen to be non-intimate.

I find that lack of emotional intimacy with others is frequently paralleled by lack of spiritual intimacy as well. For some, including me at times, Christ becomes a convenience friend — someone to check in with when we need something he can give. He is sometimes someone to whom we limit self-disclosure. He can also be a “doing” friend where our relationship is defined by such activities as taking the sacrament, going to the temple, asking for protection, or praying when we are in a tight spot. For some, Christ is a milestone friend — at Christmas, Easter, or funerals we touch bases and move on.

Some people find it appropriate to see him as a mentor friend. Certainly, he has superior abilities and qualities, can teach us, and be an example for us; but unequals cannot have close friendships. A mentor relationship is a dependent one. Christ can accept, respect, and expect some dependency from us, but I feel that he also expects an interdependency with us — when we act using our talents, stewardship, abilities, and agency. Thus, although we are not equal with Christ, interdependency moves us toward intimacy with him.

I want to be a close friend with him. At times when I have felt such friendship, I felt his presence in my life and allowed him to promote change in me. At the same time, Christ is my Savior, a role not accounted for in any of the categories used in this essay. The quality of our love and relationships is, therefore, different. Thinking about friendship in terms of Christ and my relationship with him has been a useful exercise from time to time. It has also been useful for another reason. I think it is true that one good relationship blesses and improves all of the other relationships in our lives. There have been times when the love and trust of a close friend has enabled me to steer a steady course during times of spiritual crisis. There have been other times when the firm relationship I have with the Savior has enabled me to weather tough times with a friend and end up with increased love and appreciation for all concerned. Surely for all of us, it is a goal to be accounted, as was Abraham, a “friend to God” but equally certainly, it is an act of gratitude and thanksgiving to God to establish intimate supportive friendships with the preexistent brothers and sisters on earth with whom we may hope to have eternal relationships.

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