

God and Adam...Perfect Friends

Genesis 1-3

Even the very best of friends are never perfect friends. Perfect friendship requires perfect people and neither we nor our friends can ever qualify as perfect. But once upon a time there actually were two perfect persons who shared a perfect friendship exactly as friendship was meant to be. Much has been made of what went wrong with that once perfect friendship, and rightly so. But for now we will look more at what went right.

Those two perfect persons were God and Adam. The familiar story of that perfect friendship is found in the book of Genesis. It is the story of how God and Adam shared friendship as it was meant to be. We begin in Genesis 2:4-20:

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens—and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not yet sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground—the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man that he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was sepa-

rated into four headwaters. The name the first is Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

The Lord God said, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all of the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the

man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

Four words can be used to describe this perfect friendship between God and Adam. The first word is intimacy.

But to understand the intimacy of the friendship that God and Adam shared we need to back up and take another view of creation.

God previously created everything from nothing. In an astonishing display of power and genius he had spoken a word and the stars illumined the universe like the lights turned on all

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over a Christmas tree. With a word he shaped the earth with land and sea, mountains and valleys. With a word he formed the delicate cellular structure of the smallest petals on a delicate flower in a mountain valley. And with a word he shaped the craters of a million massive moons.

With a word he made all of creation. And with a word he could have created Adam. But Adam was different. Unlike stars or planets, plants or animals, Adam was to be God's friend. God could have created Adam with a single word but he chose to do it differently. God stepped down from the glories of heaven to the earth he had created. He took a pile of ordinary dirt and shaped it into his most magnificent masterpiece, the pinnacle of God's creation. He made a man in his own likeness—a man who could be God's friend in a way no plant or animal ever could—a man who would think as God thinks, who would feel as God feels, who would choose as God chooses. And then, in one of history's greatest moments, God stooped to the form he had created and breathed his life into Adam . . . and Adam lived!

The word "intimate" means "close, private, very personal." We use the word to refer to sexual relations between a man and a woman because that's the closest of physical bonds. We refer to "intimate apparel" to describe the underwear that is closest to our bodies and unseen by others. And, we use "intimate" when speaking of our most personal secrets.

God and Adam shared an intimate friendship—closer than a mother with her newborn, closer than a husband with a wife and closer than brothers or sisters in a family. The God who brilliantly created the universe made Adam a perfect match to himself. God could share with Adam; Adam could share with God. Adam could think as God thinks, feel as God feels and choose as God chooses. They were so much alike, in the same image. It was beautiful to see!

Do you remember the beginning of your best friendship? The bond was instant. You liked the same things, laughed at each others jokes, understood how the other one felt. It seemed as if

you had known each other forever. That's the way it was with God and Adam! Instantly they were intimate friends.

Amazingly, though, that intimacy did not preclude individuality. God was God and Adam was Adam. They each had their own individual personalities and differences.

Individuality is essential to a healthy friendship. When I lose my identity to a friend the relationship has become unhealthy. Perfect friendships are not controlling or manipulating. They respect the differences between persons and welcome them as strength not weakness.

God gave Adam a garden. It was a supernatural gift filled with breathtaking beauty and satisfying food. It was truly a Paradise from the God who knew how to give the very best. It met all the needs of God's good friend. And God gave Adam the freedom to do with the garden as he chose. "*You are free*" were God's words in verse 16 . . . free to enjoy and free to destroy.

It takes an exceptional relationship to give so generously and freely. Most of us give with strings. We give our child a new bike and tell him not to ride it in the rain. We send our friend a check and tell her how to spend it.

God was sensitive to Adam's needs and not jealous. God created Adam for himself but he recognized that Adam needed a human helper, a human friend. Sometimes we are reluctant to let our fiends have friends, but not God. He respected the individual need of Adam and acted to meet the need.

God allowed Adam to express himself in naming the animals. If God winced at names like aardvark, porcupine and bumble bee he never let Adam know. God was the kind of friend who let Adam express himself in his own terms and personality. God let him be his own person.

God has not changed. Those who are his friends today know that he still has an infinite capacity for intimacy without infringing on our individuality. We can be indescribably close but still be absolutely ourselves. When we are friends with God he helps to make us better, but he does not eliminate our individuality.

Perhaps most amazing about the perfect friendship of God and Adam was their mutual satisfaction. We know God was satisfied because in describing the creation in Genesis 1:31 he concludes by saying that *“it was very good”* . . . and it is hinted at throughout the whole story.

God was delighted with Adam. He would come from heaven to talk and walk with his human friend. What do you suppose they discussed? It must have been interesting for God to hear Adam tell about things he had found in the garden, but God had made the garden and all that was in it. God is omniscient, he knows everything even before it happens, yet he did not seem to lose interest. He took it in as if it all was fresh information. And Adam would ask God what he had been doing and God would have to stoop to describe in human language the operation of the universe and the depths of the trinity. It was a strange, unequal friendship in which they both found wonderful satisfaction.

When I was a boy growing up in New Jersey, the small town of Princeton had a very famous citizen named Albert Einstein. Although considered to be the smartest man alive he was amazingly visible and accessible both on the university campus and around the town.

There is a Princeton story about a grade school boy who lived in the town who was very poor in arithmetic. But there was a startling change in his arithmetic homework. He went from having almost everything wrong to having everything right. When asked by his parents how he could suddenly do so well, he admitted to getting help from a white haired man he met in the park. The boy explained, *“He likes my jelly beans and I like the way he does my homework.”*

It seems unlikely that Albert Einstein would find much satisfaction talking with a young boy in a New Jersey park and doing arithmetic problems rather than teaching the Theory of Relativity, but apparently he did. He found special sat-

isfaction in his unequal friend. And so did God find special satisfaction in Adam.

Adam also found satisfaction in God. They had much in common. They both loved the creation. They spoke the same language, felt the same feelings and knew each other so very well.

It’s wonderful to have a friend who really understands you, one who will listen, who knows when to speak and when to be silent. Someone who is sensitive to who you are yet also freely shares himself in return.

Adam must have loved the way God talked to him about himself, his heaven, his earth, his plans, his dreams, his concerns. Imagine being that kind of a friend with God that both you and he are filled with satisfaction in your relationship!

Some may object to the limitation that was placed on the friendship of Adam and God. In Genesis 2:16-17 God is quoted as telling Adam, *“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”*

People have wondered about this for centuries. If God loved Adam so much, why did he limit him? Why did God create a perfect environment and then put something in the middle of it that was so tempting it could destroy that environment? If God and Adam were such good

friends, and God had created Adam to be his friend, why would God even consider creating something that could destroy such a magnificent relationship? And why were the consequences so great? It

seems almost too much that a single infraction could bring destruction and death, not just to Adam and Eve, but to their descendants and to us and our descendants as well.

Theologians have given adequate answers to those sticky questions, but I invite you to reconsider these words from the perspective of friendship. Even the best of friendships have their

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limitations. If there are no limitations in the relationship between two friends something is dramatically wrong with that friendship. If you and I are best friends we must respect each other's property and preferences. I dare not take your car when you tell me not to. You can't assault my family and expect us to stay friends. You may not always understand or even agree with the limits I set and I may sometimes think your limits strange but our friendship requires us to live within each other's limits.

And so it was with Adam and God. It was God's tree. For God's own good reasons, which we may or may not understand, God posted a limit on it. He clearly stated the limit and warned of the consequences to their friendship if the limit was ignored.

And so we have it . . . the perfect friendship between God and Adam; the closeness of intimacy without infringing on the individuality of either of them; the clear limitations without losing any of their deep mutual satisfaction.

While our imagination is far too limited to even guess at what this friendship was like for God, I do think we can guess what it was like for Adam. I think I am safe in saying that he was a happy man. He was a contented man. He had absolutely everything. Adam shared a perfect friendship with God that was everything a friendship was ever meant to be.

But you know the story does not end well. In a wicked act of stupidity, Adam stepped over the limit and sacrificed his perfect friendship with

God for a piece of forbidden fruit. It was humanity's worst mistake. Paradise was lost and friendship was broken. It left a void in Adam's soul that no one or nothing could ever fill.

It was the French philosopher Pascal who said that "every man has a God-shaped void in his heart." What a loss! And not just for Adam but for all of us who are Adam's children.

That's the bad news. But there's good news. The good news is that God never gave up on the friendship. In his extraordinary goodness he chose to take the initiative to enable us to come back. It is the gospel story that is the sequel to the Genesis story. Jesus, God's Son, came to earth and died on the cross to ransom us from sin and bring us back to God. Because of Jesus we can once again be friends with God. We can begin a friendship now that will last forever. We, like Adam, can be perfect friends with God.

Let me tell you how. As Adam chose for sin, we may chose not to sin. As Adam chose to break his friendship with God, we can choose to begin our friendship with God. To paraphrase the words of Jesus: Whoever receives him as Savior, to them he gives the power to become friends with God.

I invite you to communicate with God now. Talk to him. Tell him you want to be his friend. Tell him you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. And then you, too, can delight in a friendship with God as friendship was meant to be!

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