

Best Friend: God? or World? • James 4:4-6

Author Robert Wuthnow, a Princeton University sociologist, wrote a book called *God and Mammon in America*. He did extensive research on what is important to Americans and concluded that material possessions are often more important than God.

The title of the book is based on a quotation from Jesus in Matthew 6:24: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.”

Jesus is uncomfortably blunt here. Most of us would like to think that we can love money and at the same time love God no less. We prefer to believe that having some sexual fun before marriage or outside of marriage hardly means a rejection of God in our lives. It is a popular notion that God can be a part of my life without being in charge of my life. But God sees things very differently.

Before we look at the actual words from James 4:4-6, I want to set the mood for what these verses have to say. So imagine a couple that has been married for as long as you have been a Christian. He just found out that his wife has been having an affair with another man for most of their marriage. He confronts her and she admits to it. He is more hurt than angry. She explains to him that she really loves him and wants their marriage to stay together and succeed. He answers that the only way is if she permanently breaks off her relationship with the other man. She says that she can't do that — she loves them both; she needs them both. Her husband should not think that she loves him any less because there is someone else.

Do you feel the mood? Can you sense the tension and the hurt? Can you feel the emotions of that kind of a situation and discussion?

Imagine that the husband is God and the spouse is you. Hearing the hurt in his voice, look at the words of James 4:4-6:

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward

God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that God jealously longs for the spirit that he made to live in us? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

God is very clear about friendship and relationship with him. Christians can have only one best friend. God doesn't share importance with anyone or anything else. He must be number one. He won't settle for a lower number.

When God says, “You adulterous people”, he is not necessarily talking about illicit sex. Since God thinks of his relationship with Christians like marriage, he considers it like adultery for us to be in love with anyone except God. Adultery is a terrible destroyer of relationships. There is no hurt worse than knowing that the person you love loves somebody else. Adultery breaks hearts — including the heart of God! These words are addressed to anyone who once promised to love God and then, somewhere along the way, fell in love with something or someone else.

Does this mean that I must hate everything in the world in order to love God? Must I hate trees or flowers or money or houses or cars or people? Of course not! God is the creator of the world and he wants us to enjoy his creation. We can be friendly with the world, but we cannot be best friends with the world. That is a relationship for him and him alone.

I'm married, which means I have an exclusive relationship with Charleen, my wife. But that doesn't mean that there aren't other women in my life. It doesn't

mean they can't be my friends. But there is a line of relationship with other women that I cannot cross if I am to be faithful to my wife. It is not just a physical line. It is emotional. No one else can be as important to me. No one else can have as much influence over me.

Just about everyone knows when a person

Since God thinks of his relationship with Christians like marriage, he considers it like adultery for us to be in love with anyone except God.

starts getting too friendly with a man or woman other than a husband or wife.

The same goes for God. As a Christian God is number one in my life. It is an exclusive relationship. He must be my best friend. He must be more important than anyone or anything else. To allow money, job, possessions, ambition or another person to become anything close to as important as God is spiritual adultery and is wrong.

Friendship with the world is seductive stuff. It seems so innocent at first but it becomes addictive. Pressures and temptations constantly surround us.

“God friendship” is the Christian way. It’s an exclusive relationship. God is our best friend. He has made vows to us and we have made vows to him. No one said it better than Jesus himself in Matthew 23:37 when he said, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and the greatest commandment.”

But to understand it better, it might be helpful to be specific and practical. Which would you say is your best friend: God or money? Research shows that many Christians who say they love God keep all their money for themselves. They give little or nothing to church or charity. They explain why they don’t give with a thousand different reasons. But the evidence is overwhelming that money is more important than God.

Let me use myself as an example. As a young adult, newly married, I began to give money to God through the church of which we were then a part. When I had very little money, frankly, I did better. But as I grew older I became more materialistic. There were cars, first house, new furniture, snow skiing, vacations. The more I had the less I gave until I gave virtually nothing. The more I had the more I owed and the more I wanted.

If you had asked me then I would have told you that I loved God most of all and that he was number one in my life. It was a lie that I convinced myself was true. But the truth was that money was far too important to me and that God was unimportant.

For me, at least, there had to be a change of heart. Now I make giving to God first. It is the first decision of the family budget. It is the first check I write when paying bills. My checks are written weekly even though I am paid bi-weekly.

It is an act of worship and an expression of commitment and something I need to do every seven days as a reminder that God is more important to me than money or anything money can buy.

I am convinced that every Sunday every one of us goes on record about who is our best friend. It is not just about money and it is not most about money, but money and possessions are God’s greatest competition and the most obvious evidence of our friendship. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.” And I believe Jesus was right! You can only have one best friend.

What is really exciting and life transforming is that God really wants to be best friends with us! That is stunningly good news. God doesn’t want to be our enemy. He is not against us. God is for us. God loves us. God wants to be very best friends with every one of us. In the words of James 4:5, “God jealously longs for the spirit he has made to live in us.”

“Jealousy” is often a negative term in our vocabulary. But not with God! God has every right to be protective and exclusive. He wants to share with us an intimacy that no one else can fully understand. It is better than anything else. God created us. He is our heavenly Father. He loves us. He has a heart for us. God yearns to be good friends, on best terms and well connected to us.

God becomes deeply hurt and upset when he has to compete with a job, a friend, money or a sexual experience. He made us and loves us and should not have to compete with anyone or anything else for our affection and friendship.

God also wants us to be loyal to him. He wants the spirit inside of us to be 100% faithful to him. We understand that. Ask any teenager with a steady boyfriend or girlfriend about loyalty. There is an expectation that if you are going out with someone that person will be loyal to you even if you are not around. Friendship is for all of the time.

God wants us to be loyal to him when we are on business trips, when we are out of our parents’ sight, when under pressure and when facing strong temptations. Loyal is what a friend is always supposed to be. Those who aren’t loyal aren’t really friends.

What does God do for those of us who are his

friends? He does what a best friend always does. In James 4:6 we read, “. . . he gives us more and more. That is why the Scripture says ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ ”

God is anti-proud. God is against proud people. To me it’s a scary thing to ever be opposed by someone who is significantly stronger or smarter. And God is far stronger and smarter than any of us. So it’s a dangerous place to be — having God against us.

This raises the key question: “What makes a person proud?” The answer is fairly simple. A person is proud who thinks he is better than other people. The proud person has no sense of personal need. She is independent. The person who is proud doesn’t see anything wrong with herself. He has no sense of sin. But most of all, the person who is proud has no need for God.

The God who is anti-proud is the God who is pro-humble. He loves to help out humble people. He loves to give grace to get humble people through hard times. He generously makes things work out for good when Christians are humble. In other words, God lets proud people make it on their own until they crash. But God comes alongside humble people and gives them what they need.

One important fact to remember is that humble people don’t manipulate God for what they can get. Humble people love God for himself, not for what he gives. They make God number one in their lives just for himself. Jesus told one of the biggest and best secrets of all of eternity in Matthew 6:33 when he said, “Seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.”

What do you think of your own relationship with God? Is he your best friend? Is your love and loyalty for him exclusive? Or have other loves and loyalties taken first place in your life? If so, tell God right now that you will break off your love for anyone or anything else that has taken his place. Humbly make God your best friend.

University of Central Arkansas student worker Nancy Patterson uses a favorite question to get new students to talk about themselves. The question – “Do you remember your first kiss?” - evokes fond memories in some

students and laughter in others. But one day, a student’s answer yielded surprising – and life-changing – results.

Freshman Becki Nicholes remembered her first kiss: “My family was living in Batesville, Arkansas, and I was in a church preschool. A little boy ran over and kissed me.”

Nancy couldn’t believe she’d heard Becki correctly. “Wait a minute! A little boy ran over and kissed you at a church preschool in Batesville?” she asked. “Becki, I’ve got someone you just *have* to meet!”

Earlier, a sophomore named Randy Whiteaker had met with Patterson. He said his first kiss occurred at a church preschool when he was living in Batesville. “There was this cute little girl,” he said. “Somebody dared me

to go over and kiss her, and I did.” He had never seen that cute little girl again because her family moved away.

Patterson arranged for the grown-up preschoolers to meet.

Becki and Randy dated for ten months and got married. They also moved back to Batesville – where it all began.

They say you’ll always remember your first kiss. I’m sure the Whiteakers wholeheartedly agree. *

Do you remember when God first kissed you with his love and friendship? Maybe since then you’ve had a lot of other kisses and too many other loves. But today you would like to get back to God as your number one. Tell God for sure, “I love you, Lord!”

*(Amy Ronne, *It Was In His Kiss*, MARRIAGE PARTNER-SHIP, Fall, 1994, page 14, adapted from HAVE A GOOD DAY. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.)

Faith Matters® is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.wooddale.org
©Leith Anderson

God comes alongside humble people and gives them what they need.