

THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE OF FRIENDSHIP

Some Prophetic and Secular Perspectives

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Friendship is a vital relationship and a great blessing in our lives, but also a concept that many of us may not have contemplated theologically as a fundamental principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This essay seeks to explore, through Latter-day Saint lenses, friendship as a divinely established doctrine undergirded by such traits as honesty, loyalty, faithfulness, forgiveness, mercy, and tolerance.

Discussing friendship is tricky business. Some readers may feel it is not a topic worthy of discussion in a scholarly volume. Others will want to know why the essay does not treat such things as the scholarly literature on friendship. Still others will question why the essay does not delve into the negative aspects of friendship. But our present interest is to try to understand the mind of God on this subject through examination of scriptural and modern prophetic pronouncements. We seek to understand what the scriptures and prophets say about friendship and how those teachings might be applied in real life. After all, if scriptures have no application to real life they are of very limited value. But, as Paul declared, “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

This Festschrift seems an appropriate venue for discussion of our topic since Robert Millet has offered his friendship to many religious educators over the last four decades—a kind of friendship that can be characterized as radiating an active and constant interest in seeing others succeed, and, along the way, facilitating the doctrinal education of the Latter-day Saints. His goodwill and total absence of pettiness cause us to think more deeply about the divine concept of friendship.

Because all we do as Latter-day Saints is influenced by the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, it seems logical to begin with the Prophet of the Restoration and examine his statements on friendship. Those statements tell us much about the principle as well as the man. We next look at the expressed views of Joseph Smith’s successors, including a paradigm-shifting teaching by Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve about the principle of true friendship. We try to illuminate Latter-day Saint views of friendships against the backdrop of what many consider to be the greatest philosophical discussion of friendship in Western secular literature—Aristotle’s discourse in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. We conclude with an examination of Jesus’ teachings on friendship and offer personal observations about the far-reaching doctrinal implications of his statements.

JOSEPH SMITH’S VIEW OF FRIENDSHIP

Significantly, the historical record indicates that Joseph Smith not only appreciated true and faithful friends, but revealed to us the place of friendship in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. “Friendship,” he said in July 1843, “is one of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism [designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease, and men to become friends and brothers.”¹ For Joseph, friendship was not predicated upon utility but loyalty. So important to him were the qualities of faithfulness and unwavering loyalty in friends that he felt to express this strong statement: “I don’t care what a man’s character is, if he’s my friend, a true friend, I will be a friend to him, and preach the

Gospel of salvation to him, and give him good counsel, helping him out of his difficulties.”²

Loyalty and faithfulness in friendship formed something of a theme in the Prophet’s thinking. Of family and friends who visited him when he was in hiding on August 11, 1842, he said: “How good and glorious it has seemed unto me, to find pure and holy friends, who are faithful, just and true, and whose hearts fail not; and whose knees are confirmed and do not falter, while they wait upon the Lord, in administering to my necessities, in the day when the wrath of mine enemies was poured out upon me. . . . How glorious were my feelings when I met that faithful and friendly band, on the night of the eleventh on Thursday, on the Island, at the mouth of the slough [swamp], between Zarahemla and Nauvoo. . . . There was brother Hyrum who next took me by the hand, a natural brother. Thought I to myself, brother Hyrum, what a faithful heart you have got.”³ Indeed, Hyrum shared much of the same adversity as his brother, or, more accurately, *with* his brother, even to the point of being shot to death alongside of him in Carthage, Illinois (see D&C 135:1). Here one immediately thinks of Proverbs 17:17, and it is quite possible Joseph himself knew these words, given his familiarity with the entire Bible: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” Like Joseph, Hyrum certainly seems to have been born for adversity, and perhaps this helps explain their close friendship.

Clearly, Joseph Smith’s views on friendship were shaped by his sufferings. On August 23, 1842, a time of ongoing tribulation, he spoke again of faithfulness in friendship: “I find my feelings . . . towards my friends revived, and while I contemplate the virtues and the good qualifications [qualities], and characteristics of the faithful few, which I am now recording in the Book of the Law of the Lord[,] of such as have stood by me in every hour of peril, for these fifteen long years past; say for instance; my aged and beloved brother[,] Joseph Knight, Sen., who was among the number of the first to administer to my necessities, while I was laboring, in the commencement of the bringing forth of the work of the Lord, and of laying the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints; for fifteen years has he been faithful and true . . . and it shall be said of him by the sons of Zion, while there is one of them remaining[,] that this man was a faithful man in Israel; therefore his name shall never be forgotten.”⁴

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Although there is no evidence that Joseph Smith's fundamental beliefs about friendship were informed by literary sources other than the Bible, it seems almost certain that he would have agreed with Shakespeare, who said through the character Cassius in his play *Julius Caesar*, "A friend should bear his friends' infirmities."⁵ The ancient Greek biographer Plutarch also reflected a concept which seems to underlie Joseph's experience with friends, namely that "prosperity is no just scale; adversity is the only balance to weigh friends."⁶ Consider as well the words of another Greek writer in relation to Joseph Smith's beliefs—the Athenian dramatist Menander (341–290 BC), who was one of the most popular writers of antiquity: "As gold is tried in the furnace, so friends are tried in adversity."⁷ One might say Joseph Smith's views on friendship reflect the generally noble outlook of Western culture.

Not surprisingly, the qualities of friendship that Joseph regarded as paramount in others are those same qualities that others saw in him. His personal secretary, Benjamin F. Johnson, said of him, "As a friend he was faithful, long-suffering, noble and true."⁸ And, it seems clear that Joseph thought of himself as Brother Johnson saw him: "There are many souls whom I have loved stronger than death. To them I have proved faithful—to them I am determined to prove faithful, until God calls me to resign up my breath."⁹ In a letter to his wife Emma, written while he was in chains in Richmond, Missouri, Joseph wrote, "Oh my affectionate Emma, I want you to remember that I am a true and faithful friend to you."¹⁰ Canonized scripture records that Joseph Smith considered himself "a never deviating friend" (D&C 128:25).

Thus, for Joseph Smith, true, faithful, constant friendship was an ideal, a standard to live by. For him a fundamental virtue of friendship was its power to unite the human family with its influence—an idea we shall return to later.

THE NECESSITY OF FRIENDSHIP

Though few of Joseph Smith's more immediate apostolic successors spoke of the principle of friendship, *per se*, they did speak about humankind's relationships to each other in terms such as the importance of loving one's

fellow man, having compassion for each other, and showing charity. President Brigham Young can be taken as a good representative of other Church leaders. He said, “Love each other—go on until we are perfect, loving our neighbor more than we love ourselves. . . . Let us have compassion upon each other, and let the strong tenderly nurse the weak into strength and let those who can see guide the blind until they can see the way for themselves. . . . Let us be just, merciful, faithful, and true. . . . Let all Latter-day Saints learn that the weaknesses of their brethren are not sins. . . . Let us be patient with one another.”¹¹ Again the qualities of being just, faithful, and true come to the fore.

One of the most significant statements on friendship in the last seventy-five years came from President David O. McKay (1873–1970), ninth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. During the April 1940 general conference, he said, “Next to a sense of kinship with God come the helpfulness, encouragement, and inspiration of friends. Friendship is a sacred possession. As air, water and sunshine [are] to flowers, trees, and verdure, so smiles, sympathy, and love of friends [are] to the daily life of man! ‘To live, laugh, love one’s friends, and be loved by them is to bask in the sunshine of life.’”¹²

Here we have it. President McKay, then a counselor in the First Presidency, publicly stated that next to a sense of kinship with Deity stands the kinship we feel with friends. Friendship is an important, even necessary, part of our mortal lives. In fact, true friendship is the second most important relationship mortals enjoy, according to President McKay. Friendship is a *sacred* possession! Few possessions in our lives are as precious as true, loyal, faithful friends.

Practically speaking, what does this mean? I believe the implications are stunning. Friendship can be one of the greatest blessings people enjoy in mortality, or like much of the world today, individuals can discount friendship and cut themselves off from a divinely established relationship that comes through association with other human beings. True and loyal friends can help one another get through tough and challenging times. Friendships can lift the burdens of loneliness that come to individuals as a natural result of mortality. True friends can and will build each other up when they have been torn down.

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Here I echo the musings of one of the founders of our Western intellectual tradition, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–323 BC), who devoted two entire books (sections) of his *Nicomachean Ethics* to a discussion of the concept and principles of friendship. He introduces the topic by declaring that friendship is “most indispensable for life. No one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all other goods.”¹³ He continues:

In poverty and all other kinds of misfortune men believe that their only refuge consists in their friends. Friends help young men avoid error; to older people they give the care and help needed to supplement the failing powers of action which infirmity brings in its train; and to those in their prime they give the opportunity to perform noble actions. (This is what is meant when men quote Homer’s verse:) “When two go together . . .”: friends enhance our ability to think and to act. . . . When people are friends, they have no need of justice, but when they are just, they need friendship in addition. In fact, the just in the fullest sense is regarded as constituting an element of friendship. Friendship is noble as well as necessary: we praise those who love their friends and consider the possession of many friends a noble thing. And further, we believe of our friends that they are good men.¹⁴

From the standpoint of personally improving our lives, Aristotle seems to be telling us that friendships can help us break out of our shells of self-absorption and even selfishness by causing us to turn our energy to help others.

PHILIA AND AGAPE

The Greek word Aristotle uses in discussing friendship is *philia*. “It designates the relationship between a person and any other person(s) or being which that person regards as peculiarly his own and to which he has a peculiar attachment.”¹⁵ However, the connotations of *philia* are much broader than “attachment,” as one would expect, since the root meaning of *philia* is “love” (*phileō*, *philos*, and so forth),¹⁶ and love in some form, it seems to me, must be at the heart of true friendship. However, *philia* does not denote the

highest form of affection or friendship, especially from a Christian viewpoint. That is embodied in the term *agape*.

Principally, *philia* in the Greco-Roman mind constituted “the bond that holds the members of any association together, regardless of whether the association is the family, the state, a club, a business partnership,”¹⁷ and so forth. But *agape* comprehends a selfless concern for the welfare of others that is not called forth by any quality of loveableness vested in the person loved. *Agape* in scriptural terms is the product of a desire to love in obedience to God’s command, in contrast to *philia*. One either possesses *philia* or does not. This is reflected in the Greek proverb *Koina ta tōv philōn*,¹⁸ “friends are what they have in common.” Not so with *agape*. It may be worked for, prayed for, increased by a desire to be strengthened (see Moroni 7:48). Significantly, *agape* is “charity,” as defined by Lidell and Scott’s Greek lexicon.¹⁹

Contrast *agape*, or charity, with Aristotle’s dissection of friendship as he asks, “What is the object worthy of affection?” He continues, “For it seems, we do not feel affection for everything, but only *for* the lovable, and that means what is good, pleasant, or useful.” This is different from a relationship grounded in *agape*, or charity. For, says Aristotle, when we ask, “Which good, then, is it that men love?” it seems apparent that “each man loves what is good for him: in an unqualified sense it is the good which is worthy of affection, but for each individual it is what is good for him.”²⁰

Aristotle goes on to elucidate the “three causes of affection or friendship,” namely, usefulness, pleasure, and goodness.²¹ He concludes, “The perfect form of friendship is that between good men who are alike in excellence or virtue.” But, notice here, again, the implications of Aristotle’s analysis for an understanding of *philia* versus *agape*: “For these friends wish alike for one another’s good because they are [both] good men.”²² In other words, *philia* is manifest in its ultimate form when two parties are both good and appreciate that the other individual is good. In contrast, *agape* is concerned with loving or having affection for those others who are not necessarily good, in the sense Aristotle uses the term. That is, the person being loved or receiving *agape* may not be concerned for the welfare of the one possessing *agape*, may not even appreciate the goodness of the one offering love, or may not possess any quality of loveableness.

In the Greco-Roman world, *philia* (Latin, *amicita*) was even used of patron-client relationships. Society was highly stratified, and *philia* was suitable to denote relationships between the rich and powerful and their social inferiors. This is undoubtedly why the Apostle Paul largely avoids such language in his letters to branches of the Church²³ and why he expends considerable effort in discussing *agape*, or charity. Notable is 1 Corinthians 13, where Paul uses the word *agape* throughout and which the King James Version translates as “charity.”

CHARITY AS PARADIGM

Probably most Latter-day Saints would agree that Paul’s equal in discussing the doctrine of charity is Mormon, who is quoted by his son Moroni (see Moroni 7:45–47). I have long believed that this passage in the Book of Mormon describes Christ-centered friendship as well as Christlike love. A short article by Elder Richard G. Scott, “The Comforting Circle of True Friendship,” also links Mormon’s discussion with the essence and fundamental nature of genuine friendship. After quoting Moroni 7:45–47, Elder Scott muses, “What a priceless message for any that would enjoy the comforting circle of true friendship.”²⁴ He noted it was prayer and application of this familiar scripture that guided him to new depths of understanding and appreciation of the principle of friendship.

Indeed, the words of Mormon regarding charity take on new meaning as we contemplate friendship as a divine doctrine. Those words provide a kind of blueprint, a paradigm, to be followed by all who desire to *be* true and loyal friends, and enjoy the blessings of *having* true and loyal friends. Ultimately, only charity makes possible the attainment of Joseph Smith’s ideal—true, loyal, faithful, constant friendship. In this light, it not only becomes easy but imperative to substitute the word “friendship” for the word “charity” in the following verses of Mormon’s instruction:

And charity [friendship] suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. . . .

But charity [friendship] is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. (Moroni 7:45, 47)

According to Mormon's paradigm, true and loyal friendship "*suffereth long and is kind*"—that is, friends bound together by charity are patient; they allow others to make mistakes or errors in judgment and to say or do thoughtless things at times without becoming critical, unkind, mean-spirited, or vengeful or adopting a "holier than thou" attitude.

Orthodox rabbi and professor Stanley Wagner often told a story attributed to the Talmud, the great repository of Jewish law and tradition, about Father Abraham, who is called the *friend* of God in both Jewish *and* Christian scripture (see 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). The patriarch is camped out in the wilderness and invites a traveler into his tent to enjoy some hospitality. During the course of their conversation, Abraham learns that the stranger is a fire worshipper and won't pray with the patriarch. Abraham immediately throws the man out of his tent. He goes to bed, satisfied, I suppose, that he has upheld Jehovah's honor. That night, Abraham has a dream in which the Lord comes to him and says, "Abraham, Abraham, I have borne with that ignorant man for all these many years. Could you not have suffered him one night?"²⁵ The message is clear: if Abraham was "the friend of God," he was supposed to act like his friend by exercising patience in the face of ignorance.

According to Mormon's paradigm, true and loyal friends know and remember that *all* human beings are subject to the foibles, follies, and weaknesses of mortality; all make mistakes, and thus friends can help each other out of their difficulties by exercising patience.

True and loyal friendship "*envieth not, and is not puffed up*." True and loyal friends do not gossip, backbite, think they are better than everyone else, or denigrate others to exalt themselves. True and loyal friends are *not* jealous of the success of others. Rather, they celebrate the achievements and happiness of their friends. They pay sincere compliments to their associates. They embrace cooperation.

I have spent my entire professional life associated with universities—a seedbed of fierce competition. And yet the irony is that the greatest scholars I have known are those who have been ever-present mentors—cheering

on their colleagues—encouraging their work, congratulating them for their breakthroughs—and expressing genuine pleasure at the accomplishments of associates. These mentors offer real help. They remember their debt to others.

Are we not all mentors and protégés at different stages in our lives? A relatively recent publication on the life of Albert Einstein and his close circle of colleagues describes, among other things, how Einstein, arguably one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century, was glad to hear of the accomplishments of his friends. He encouraged them and even remained a loyal friend to those with whom he disagreed—sometimes vociferously. Yet Einstein and his associates did not deal with inconsequential questions or with concepts that could not instantly establish the reputation of their “first” discoverer. When it came to attempting to understand something as profound as the structure of the universe, there were no bigger issues than relativity on the one hand (Einstein’s position) and the uncertainty principle on the other (others’ positions). Yet if a discovery, proposal, or theory advanced the state of the discipline, Einstein was one of the first to congratulate the concept’s proponent.²⁶ There does not seem to be pettiness or smallness of soul in truly big people.

True and loyal friendship “*seeketh not her own*”—meaning that real friends do not look out for their own welfare to the exclusion or detriment of others. They prize cooperation over competition. A heartwarming story may serve to illustrate the point. Several years ago during the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants lined up at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. All nine were either physically or mentally disabled or both. At the sound of the gun, they all started out with the same excitement and desire to win that any athlete would have in a race. However, this race turned out to be unlike any other. One of the runners, a boy who had an especially hard time, stumbled on the track, tumbled over, and began to cry. The other eight contestants heard the boy and without hesitating, stopped running, turned around, and went back to their fallen competitor. They helped the boy up, and then all nine competitors linked arms, finished the rest of the race, and walked across the finish line together. By cooperating, the result desired by each of these competitors was not diminished but greatly enhanced because they worked together. In this case, all nine were winners, and literally no one lost.²⁷

True and loyal friends are “*not easily provoked, . . . [think] no evil, . . . [and bear] all things.*” Perhaps the single word that summarizes theologically this part of Mormon’s message is “meekness.” True and loyal friends are meek. Yes, they are humble, but meekness means something more. It denotes calmness in the face of provocation, poise under pressure, returning goodness for evil, helping others when those others lose control or have a meltdown (in modern parlance).

Scripture teaches that Jesus and the prophet Moses were the meekest of all men on earth (see Numbers 12:3; Matthew 11:29; 2 Corinthians 10:1; D&C 19:23). When one contemplates the provocation these two figures endured, their responses to external threats and violence are stunning. The Apostle Peter tells us that though Jesus was reviled against, he did not return revilement or hostility. When he suffered at the hands of wicked men, he did not threaten retribution (see 1 Peter 2:23). Can we imagine how different the universe would be for all of us—for eternity—if Jesus had actually called on twelve legions of angels to respond to the undeserved abuse and suffering heaped upon him, as Matthew 26:53 says he could have? Instead, he meekly submitted to the Father’s will. True and loyal friends seek to cultivate the godly attribute of meekness.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles offered profound insight on the attribute of meekness, as it relates to the concept of true and loyal friendship. He said:

Meekness . . . is more than self-restraint, it is the presentation of self in a posture of kindness and gentleness, reflecting certitude, strength, serenity, and healthy self-esteem and self-control. . . . Meekness does not mean tentativeness. But thoughtfulness. Meekness makes room for others. [The Apostle Paul said:] “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other[s] better than themselves” (Philip. 2:3). . . . Meekness cultivates in us a generosity in viewing the mistakes and imperfections of others. [As Moroni said:] “Condemn me not because of mine imperfection . . . but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been” (Morm. 9:31).²⁸

Elder Maxwell went on to provide an example of meekness from the life of President Brigham Young, who viewed with charity and generosity a situation in which he received a scolding, undeserved, from someone he so much loved and admired—someone he regarded as one of his truest and closest friends. He “took it” without protest, said Elder Maxwell, “because he was meek. Yet, surely, none of us . . . would think of Brigham Young as lacking in boldness or firmness!” Some clever pundit has said, if you think meekness is weakness, try being meek for a week!

True and loyal friendship recognizes that charity, “*the pure love of Christ . . . endureth forever.*” True and loyal friends seek to cultivate charity; they pray for it, as they are commanded to do in Mormon’s urging (Moroni 7:48). *Agape* is the foundation of the most profound kind of friendship—meaningful and everlasting. Friendships that are based on—and imbued with—charity are eternal.

Aristotle recognized that friendships based on usefulness or pleasure are fleeting, for “such friendships are easily dissolved when the partners do not remain unchanged: the affection ceases as soon as one partner is no longer pleasant or useful to the other. . . . Accordingly, with the disappearance of the motive for being friends, the friendship, too, is dissolved.”²⁹ By extension, we add that relationships based on anything other than *agape* stand in danger of dissolving.

True, loyal, and lasting friendship “*rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth, . . . believeth all [good] things, hopeth all things.*” True friendship grounded in charity (*agape*) demands that human beings forgive one another and hope for better days. It seems to me that those possessing charity will naturally understand and appreciate the Lord’s declaration that he “will forgive whom [he] will forgive,” but the rest of us are “required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). Thus true friendship disdains grudges—even when we believe that hurtful wrongs have been perpetrated. True and loyal friendship means that we will forgive. We will let go of the impulse to remember the hurt. True friendship demands that we extend mercy to others.

One of the most impressive illustrations of such magnanimous behavior comes from the life of Job, who is described foremost as a righteous, wealthy man. After multiple tragedies strike (loss of family, loss of wealth,

debilitating illness, and so on), Job's friends come forth to "help" him out of his misery. They pronounce their diagnoses: there is a cause for every effect; therefore, wickedness must be behind Job's suffering. After all, "who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?" (Job 4:7). Those who are cut down are they who have forgotten God. God doesn't cast away the innocent, but he will not uphold evildoers (see Job 8:5, 8, 11, 20).

Perhaps the lessons of Job's friends seem so powerful because they have such significant application to our own circumstances: when we sit in judgment of others under the guise of friendship, especially when we do not know all the facts, we make their burdens greater.

Job's friends made quite an impression on the Lord. When he was consoling the Prophet Joseph Smith during a time of extreme tribulation, he used the example of Job's friends as the ultimate measure of the Prophet's circumstances: "Thy friends do stand by thee. . . . Thou art not yet as Job; thy friends do not contend against thee, neither charge thee with transgression, as they did Job" (D&C 121:9–10).

In the end, Job's friends are chastised by the Lord (Job 42:7). But the greatest lesson of all comes from Job himself. He did not hold a grudge, he dealt with his friends charitably, he extended mercy, and he prayed for them, the very ones who had compounded his misery. By so doing, he was given release from the physical, spiritual, and emotional torment and bondage brought on by his suffering: "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

Friendships give us the privilege of being able to feel what God feels when he helps one of us overcome a problem, or answers one of our prayers, or extends mercy to any one of his children. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland reminded us in the April 2012 general conference, "Surely the thing God enjoys most about being God is the thrill of being merciful, especially to those who don't expect it and often feel they don't deserve it."³⁰ In other words, friendships in mortality allow us the thrill of knowing the joy of both *extending* mercy to others, extending acts of love and compassion, and *receiving* mercy from others. Indeed, friendships grounded in *agape* provide a platform for us to know how God himself feels.

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True friendship “*hopeth all things, endureth all things.*” True friendship forgoes the temptation to feel sorry for oneself and resists the lure of self-pity. I do not think God assigns blame to others for the depressed, lonely feelings of some of his children. Depression, loneliness, feelings of social inadequacy emanate from the environment of our fallen world. But it seems to me that God does expect his disciples to help change the miserable circumstances of others (see Matthew 25:31–40). And he expects that all individuals invest something of themselves in changing their own miserable circumstances.

In a much appreciated self-disclosure, Elder Scott discussed ways to overcome feelings of aloneness and enjoy the blessings of friendship. Of his youth, he said he participated in social activities but always felt he was on the periphery, on the sidelines, watching others enjoying themselves but personally left out, alone, and unwanted. It wasn’t until later in life he realized it was largely his own fault:

I have since learned that one cannot demand love and respect or require that the bonds of friendship and appreciation be extended as an unearned right. These blessings must be earned. . . . Sincere concern for others, selfless service, and worthy example, qualify one for such respect. All my rationalization, that others had formed select groups and knowingly ruled out my participation, was largely a figment of my imagination. Had I practiced correct principles, I need not have felt alone.³¹

FRIENDSHIP AND SACRIFICE

Of the many requirements of true, loyal, and lasting friendship, one thing may well be the most important, though it is not mentioned explicitly by Mormon. However, it underlies all the other attributes of charity as well as friendship. True friendship requires its practitioners to make sacrifices. As Jesus reminds us, love is at the heart of friendship, and love increases where sacrifices are made. In this regard, Jesus is both our greatest teacher and our greatest exemplar.

On the eve of his great suffering in Gethsemane, Jesus took time to talk about friendship with his Apostles. Presumably, these men were some of his closest associates in mortality. On that emotionally charged night, after the Last Supper had concluded, Jesus paid the highest personal compliment to the Apostles that we find in the four Gospels. Here are his words taken from the fifteenth chapter of John:

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you. (John 15:9–16)

What messages do we see embedded in Jesus' words? I suggest at least the following: first, significantly, the original Greek words in this passage that are translated as "love" are all *agape*, or a form of it, the same word that is rendered as "charity" in 1 Corinthians 13. "Friends" is translated from the now familiar (and common) *philōn*. Friendship and charity are officially and inextricably linked by Jesus in this post-Last Supper discourse. In Jesus' view, eternal *philōn* and *agape* are cut of the same cloth. Jesus' friendship is born of *agape*. The kind of friendship Jesus extends to his disciples, and expects them to practice, is bound up with the highest, most ennobling and selfless form of love we can contemplate. (There is another kind of love found in Greek literature that is never mentioned in the New Testament—that is *eros*. Erotic love is not

of any interest to Jesus Christ, nor of importance in understanding the doctrines of friendship or eternal life.)

Second, Jesus tells his disciples that the foundation of the relationship between himself and all other people is *agape*, or charity. As the Father loved him, so he loves us with the purest and deepest love of all. Charity is not only the pure love of Christ but the pure love of the Father.

Third, because Jesus loves his disciples, he expects them to love each other—to cultivate *agape* for one another. It is a commandment. Even after the Resurrection Jesus continued to try to teach Peter and the others about the demands of *agape*. This was one of the reasons Jesus undertook his forty-day post-Resurrection ministry. The last recorded episode in John's Gospel seems to indicate that Peter did not yet fully grasp the lessons of *agape*. He and his associates had gone fishing in Galilee but caught nothing until a man on the shore told them where to fish. They finally recognized their Master, went to the shore, and found him preparing a fire and warm meal because they were cold, tired, and hungry.

Jesus had already performed an eternity's worth of service through his atoning sacrifice. But now he *showed* them through seemingly mundane acts the true nature of *agape*. He demonstrated his continuing concern for their economic and temporal welfare by helping them fish successfully. Then he stooped to cook dinner and care for their immediate physical comfort. He again sacrificed for them. When he finished feeding them physically, he fed them spiritually—teaching them about *agape*. Turning to Peter, he asked the chief Apostle if he loved (*agapas*) Jesus (see John 21:15). Peter responded not by declaring his own *agape* (pure love) for Jesus but his *philō* (affection and fondness). Jesus asked again, “Lovest [*agapas*] thou me?” (21:16) Peter again responded by declaring his *philō*. It is instructive that Jesus asked Peter a third time, but, at this point seems to have lowered expectations, perhaps to begin at Peter's level, by asking the chief Apostle, “Lovest [*phileis*] thou me?” or “Are you fond of me?” (21:17). Peter was grieved over the same kind of question. But it was not exactly the same question, and Peter seemed oblivious to its intent.

Was Jesus attempting to get Peter to perceive the difference between *agape* and *phileo*, even asking a less-intense question when Peter could not see the difference? Perhaps. Whatever the case, we may rest assured

that Peter would come to understand fully the demanding nature of *agape* and would act accordingly. Peter would indeed “follow” Jesus, even to the point of suffering death for his Master’s sake (see John 21:18–19). *Agape*, true friendship, the kind of friendship Jesus spoke of, demands much (even everything?) of all who profess the deepest kind of love for the Savior.

Fourth, the greatest testament of Jesus’ love (*agape*, or charity) for others is the sacrifice of his perfect life. Willingly giving up his life is the great exhibition or demonstration of his love or charity toward others. Of this, Elder Holland made an arresting statement. He said we are to “cherish” charity. “That is, all Christians should try to love as the Savior loved, showing pure, redeeming compassion for all.” Interesting. *We* are to demonstrate pure, redeeming compassion. It isn’t just the Savior who does that; we are supposed to do that as well. It is only on this basis that true, faithful, and lasting friendship with Jesus Christ is actually possible. However, and here is the bombshell, “Unfortunately few, if any, mortals have been entirely successful in this endeavor. . . . *True* charity has been known only once.” To repeat, true charity has been known only once! Yet “this does not in any way minimize the commandment that we are to try to acquire this kind of love for one another.”³²

Ironically, the pure love of Christ, which is precisely that—Christ’s own love—is also that which aids us, assists, complements and strengthens our sometimes weak or flagging quest to acquire the pure love of Christ. Such bestowals of his love to assist us in the very acquisition of his love are part of the grace of Christ—the enabling power to allow us to “do all things through Christ which strengtheneth [you and] me” (Philippians 4:13).

Fifth, the disciples and, by extension, all individuals may become the friends of the Savior *if* they keep his commandments and honor his sacrifice. Jesus’ friendship is an extension of his love, but it is *not* automatic. Jesus does the choosing as to whom his friends will be. We do not choose him to be our friend; he chooses us—which leads to the last point.

Sixth, while Jesus’ love is constant, his friendship is not. There is a special relationship with Jesus that is reserved for those who keep his commandments (or who seek to do so). That special relationship is founded on righteousness and is called friendship with the Savior.

The prophet Nephi summarized this last point using different words, but one believes the meaning is the same: “Behold, the Lord esteemeth all flesh as one; [but] he that is righteous is favored of God” (1 Nephi 17:35).

I believe that the aggregate of the Savior’s words found in the New Testament, as well as his whole life, show that he loves us and constantly desires to help us; he wishes all people would think enough of him to desire his friendship. But I also believe that his friendship, which by definition is an eternal relationship since he is eternal (see D&C 19:10), is not handed out cheaply! His friendship demands something, and it means something—it is worth something. What it demands from mortals is allegiance enough to be strictly obedient, to love others as Jesus loves. What that is worth is nothing less than the offer to enjoy the greatest of all the gifts of God, eternal life, also called the riches of eternity (see D&C 14:7; 6:7; 38:39). In other words, the Savior’s *friendship* is synonymous with *eternal life*.

Space does not permit us to examine in depth all of the passages that help us appreciate what it cost the Savior to *be* our Savior and extend his unique friendship to us. But we may rest assured that

all the negative aspects of human existence brought about by the Fall, Jesus Christ absorbed into himself. He experienced vicariously in Gethsemane [and on the cross] all the private griefs and heartaches, all the physical pains and handicaps, all the emotional burdens and depressions of the human family. . . . Having personally lived a perfect life, he then chose to experience our imperfect lives. In . . . Gethsemane and on the Cross . . . he lived a billion billion lifetimes of sin, pain, disease, and sorrow. God has no magic wand with which to simply wave bad things into non-existence. The sins that he remits, he remits by making them his own and suffering them. The pain and heartache that he relieves, he relieves by suffering them himself. These things can be transferred, but they cannot be simply wished or waved away. They must be suffered. Thus we owe him not only for our spiritual cleansing from sin, but for our physical, mental and emotional healings as well, for he has borne these infirmities for us also.³³

This great transfer, great substitution (see 2 Corinthians 5:21), is at the heart of Jesus Christ’s offer of friendship. His personal and infinite sacrifice

is an infinite gift, infinitely superior to any other gift given by one friend to another. This great substitution was well expressed by the church father Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373): “For He [God] was made man that we [man] might be made God.”³⁴

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, we return to where we began our discussion, to the statement made by the Prophet Joseph Smith about the place of friendship in Mormonism. But let us quote it within its context. In July of 1843, less than a year before his martyrdom, Joseph said:

Let me be resurrected with the Saints, whether I ascend to heaven, or descend to hell, or go to any other place. And if we go to hell, we will turn the devils out of doors and make a heaven of it. Where this people are, there is good society. What do we care where we are, if the society be good? I don't care what a man's character is; if he's my friend—a true friend, I will be a friend to him, and preach the Gospel of salvation to him, and give him good counsel, helping him out of his difficulties. Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of Mormonism [designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers.³⁵

Perhaps like me, many readers have heard or read that statement many times. And perhaps, like me, many have not paid attention to what follows it. But here is how the Prophet ended this particular discussion on friendship: “Even the wolf and the lamb shall dwell together, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf, the young lion and the fatling; and a little child shall lead them, the bear and the cow shall lie down together, and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp [viper], and the weaned child shall play on the cockatrice's den; and they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord of hosts.”³⁶

This last statement is almost an exact quotation from Isaiah 11:6–9, and is a clear reference to the conditions that will exist during the Millennium. Because of it, I now see something else behind the Prophet's

discussion of the concept of friendship. I believe that Joseph Smith saw a connection between the principle or doctrine of friendship and the environment that will exist during the Millennium. The atmosphere of the millennial reign of Christ on earth is the same that forms the core of true and loyal friendships. Bluntly stated, true, loyal, and righteous friendship is the vehicle provided to prepare us to enjoy the environment of the Millennium and, beyond that, the environment of the celestial kingdom, where the needs of all are met. That is the environment of charity, or the pure love of Christ. Friendship is part of a schooling process that molds us and prepares us for the environment of the Millennium and the celestial kingdom, where all will enjoy the friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ—and then God the Father. In fact, it is friendship that will maintain the righteous environment of the Millennium for a thousand years and the celestial kingdom for eternity.

Our friendships as mortals not only bless our lives here and now but are also a way for Deity to see if we can and will prepare ourselves to become the kind of beings fit to enjoy millennial and celestial environments and be worthy of the friendship of the Gods. Friends of the kind described in prophetic discourses are to be united in one overarching purpose: to help each other prepare for exaltation; they are to be “united according to the union required by the law of the celestial kingdom” (D&C 105:4). This, I submit, is the mind and will of God as it relates to friendship.

It is now clear to me that, indeed, friendship is one of the grand, fundamental principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, as Joseph Smith stated from his expansive perspective. The reach of friendship extends far and its influence deep. Little wonder that President Gordon B. Hinckley stated that all members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints need three critical things in their lives in order for their associations with the Church to remain vibrant: a friend, a responsibility, and nourishment by the good word of God.³⁷ Should we not seek to cultivate the kind of friendship Mormon’s instruction comprehends? After all is said and done, aren’t we nothing in the Lord’s eyes if we do not possess the qualities and characteristics upon which eternal friendship is predicated (see Moroni 7:46)?

NOTES

1. Manuscript History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, July 23, 1843, vol. E-1, 1680, Church History Library, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Manuscript History of the Church).
2. Manuscript History of the Church, July 23, 1843, vol. E-1, 1680.
3. Manuscript History of the Church, August 16, 1842, vol. D-1, 1372.
4. Manuscript History of the Church, August 22, 1842, vol. D-1, 1381–82.
5. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, act 4, scene 3, line 89.
6. Mark Water, comp., *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 385.
7. Water, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations*, 385.
8. Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, 1903, 6–8, Benjamin Franklin Johnson Papers, 1852–1911, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
9. Manuscript History of the Church, August 23, 1842, vol. D-1, 1383.
10. Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, November 12, 1838, Community of Christ Library and Archives, Independence, Missouri.
11. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 271–73.
12. David O. McKay, in Conference Report, April 1940, 116.
13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), 214.
14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 215. The quotation from Homer is found in *Iliad* X, 224.
15. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 214n1.
16. It is really only after the time of the early Greek poet Hesiod that “friendship” becomes an equal partner with love as a definition for *philia*. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 214n1.
17. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 214n1.
18. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 214n1.
19. *A Lexicon Abridged from Lidell and Scott’s Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 3.
20. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 217.
21. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 217–19.
22. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 219.

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23. Ben Witherington, *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 39.
24. Richard G. Scott, “The Comforting Circle of True Friendship,” *Ensign*, July 1983, 65. This essay was originally presented as a devotional address given at Brigham Young University, August 10, 1982.
25. See, for example, Megan McKenna and Tony Cowan, *Keepers of the Story* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 79–80.
26. Burton Feldman, *Einstein’s Genius Club* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2011).
27. John Shelton, “When I Work with You We Both Succeed,” *Lindon Character Connection*, January 2010, 1.
28. Neal A. Maxwell, “Meekness—A Dimension of True Discipleship,” *Ensign*, March 1983, 71–72.
29. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 218–19.
30. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Laborers in the Vineyard,” *Ensign*, May 2012, 33.
31. Richard G. Scott, “The Comforting Circle of True Friendship,” 64.
32. Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 336.
33. Stephen E. Robinson, remarks at Religious Education prayer meeting, February 12, 1992.
34. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, section 54.
35. Manuscript History of the Church, July 23, 1843, vol. E-1, 1680.
36. Manuscript History of the Church, July 23, 1843, vol. E-1, 1680.
37. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Converts and Young Men,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 47. It is interesting that most scriptural and prophetic instruction on friendship does not link it directly to marriage. A significant exception is Elder Marlin K. Jensen, “Friendship: A Gospel Principle,” *Ensign*, May 1999, 64–65.