

We just returned from visiting dear friends with whom we co-labored in ministry over thirty years ago. We had seen them briefly at their daughter's wedding six months ago, which only served to whet our appetite for a longer visit. Our time together was all we hoped for and more.

We shared news of our families – the marriages of our children, the birth of grandchildren, the decline and death of parents. And we got caught up on mutual friends' lives and activities. Much of the news was good and happy, causing us to rejoice, but there were also hard situations and poor choices that brought us sadness and grief. We shared the joys and struggles of our own lives. We laughed, almost cried, and prayed together. We gave and received wise counsel.

On the long drive home, I was mulling it all over and the Scripture came to mind that "Abraham was called the friend of God" (James 2:23). It made me wonder if Abraham and God had the kinds of conversations we had with our friends this week.

As I think back over the life of Abraham, it seems there were a number of times when God spoke to him and he obeyed or believed, as the case may be. God told him to leave his homeland and go to a place He would show him, and Abraham obeyed. God promised to give him all the land he had walked around on and he believed it. God promised him a son even though both he and Sarah were very old, and Abraham believed even that. Later God told Abraham to sacrifice that son of promise and he set out to do so, even though I'm sure his heart was breaking.

The only conversation of theirs I can recall in which Abraham had a speaking part was when God disclosed to him His intent to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their great sinfulness. Abraham questioned God about the propriety of sweeping away the righteous along with the wicked and God said he would relent if fifty righteous people could be found there. Abraham evidently knew just how wicked the cities were, for he began dickering with God about how few righteous persons would need to be found for Him to spare the city where his nephew Lot lived. When he got it down to ten, the conversation was over.

Moses, on the other hand, had many conversations with God, encompassing everything from questioning God's identity, to trying to decline his call, to interceding for the people, to confronting God about His promises. These are not the kinds of conversations I would consider friendly. Yet the Scripture says God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Ex. 33:11).

Jesus told His disciples that He called them friends because He had made known to them everything the Father had told Him (John 15:15). This, I believe, is the essence of true friendship: to be able to speak whatever is on your heart and to hear whatever is on your friend's heart. Between friends our questions, our doubts and fears, our needs, and even our disappointment or anger are all on the table. And since "a friend loves at all times" (Prov. 17:17) we can know we are safe in expressing them.

I am so grateful for the dear friends we visited recently (you know who you are). Their love, their words, and their deeds buoyed our hearts and encouraged us in the faith. I am even more grateful to be called a friend by Jesus. His love is boundless; His compassion never fails; His fellowship is sweet, and His counsel is always perfect. And to think – He ever lives to make intercession for me! Grateful doesn't begin to cover it.