

This Is My Friend

Charles Fry

One hundred and forty-three years ago, a fellow named Charles W. Fry wrote a hymn entitled “The Lily of The Valley.” The opening line is, “I have found a friend in Jesus; he’s everything to me.” That sentiment of friendship with Jesus turns up in quite a few Christian songs, singing of “friendship with Jesus, fellowship divine,” or “I’ll be a friend to Jesus,” or “Jesus is all the world to me... he’s my friend.” Friendship with Jesus is a common theme in Christian songs.

During his ministry in the flesh, some of Jesus’ critics described him as “*a friend of tax collectors and sinners*” (**Matthew 11:19**), a description he did not repudiate. On the night of his betrayal, he reminded his disciples that “*I have called you friends*” (**John 15:15**), right after saying that “*Greater love has no one than this: that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you*” (**John 15:13-14**). Jesus was about to demonstrate his total commitment by dying for his friends, both those disciples there and then and everyone afterward who believes in him and obeys his commands. This is a sound Biblical basis for thinking of Jesus as a friend to Christians.

Probably, though, the actual source of Charles W. Fry saying, “I have found a friend in Jesus” is the **Song of Songs**, where the bride says of the groom,

His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable.

This is my beloved and this is my friend,

O daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Songs 5:16).

In the **Song of Songs**, the bride describes herself as “*a lily of the valley*” and “*a rose of Sharon*” (**Song of Songs 2:1**), but numerous songs used by the church have taken that language as descriptive of Christ, the groom, thinking of the **Song of Songs** as an allegory, and multitudes of interpreters have read the Song as an allegory of Christ and the church. From that perspective, it would be the church or the Christian who is “*a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys,*” which is a self-deprecating reference to being a very ordinary flower found growing among thousands of similar flowers. His response is that she is “*a lily among brambles*” (**Song of Songs 2:2**), radiant in beauty that surpasses all around her. This is indeed Jesus’s perception of his church, his bride, having died for her to make her radiant and glorious, clean and beautiful (**Ephesians 5:25-27**), the epitome of what a husband should do for his wife.

Despite some misreading of the Song on the part of several songwriters, most Christian singers will see beauty in the authors’ intentions when applying the “*lily of the valley*” or “*rose of Sharon*” to the Lord Jesus. He is indeed beautiful beyond description and yet presents himself to us simply. He is raised in glory, but he came in humility (**1 Corinthians 15:43**), and in every way really has proven himself a friend to all who will receive him (**John 1:12**).

If, as the bride said of her groom, “this is my friend,” what does friendship with Jesus entail? There are many ways to describe friendship, including companionship and shared interests and trustworthiness. Friends enjoy being together and are glad to know each other. In **Proverbs**, we also have the observation that “*faithful are the wounds of a friend*” (**27:6**), meaning that a friend will do and say what’s for your own good, even if it hurts. And again, “*the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel*” (**Proverbs 27:9**). Everyone needs to know someone like that, who is supportive and honest, not ignoring problems but

meeting them head-on together, just as Jesus offered to do with anyone who would accept his yoke and learn from him (**Matthew 11:28-30**).

For most people, one of the great benefits of friendship is having someone to talk to, sharing hopes and fears, pain and joy. Jesus is that sort of friend to whom you can say anything and know that he can handle it. He became human like us so that he can be “*a merciful and faithful high priest... in that he himself has suffered, being tempted, he is able to aid those who are tempted*” (**Hebrews 2:17-18**). Unlike every Jewish high priest in Jerusalem in the days of Jesus and the apostles, Jesus is utterly sympathetic and approachable for his brethren, followers of God. He understands and responds to our hopes and our fears, joys and pains. Again,

we have a great high priest... Jesus the Son of God... [who] was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need” (**Hebrews 4:14-16**).

Jesus, the great high priest, is not aloof or distant but rather is sympathetic and approachable. “This is my friend.”

When Paul suffered bouts of illness with what he called “*my thorn in the flesh,*” he “*pleaded with the Lord three times.*” In Paul’s letters, the Lord is almost always Jesus Christ, and when he wrote of this struggle in **2 Corinthians 12:8-10**, he’s very clear that he means he took it up with Jesus. The Lord replied that “*My grace is sufficient for you, and my strength is made perfect in weakness,*” which Paul elaborated on by saying, “*I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*” The Lord whose grace and power are sufficient, to whom Paul pleaded three times, is the Lord Jesus Christ, the same Lord who is a faithful friend to all who will receive him and obey his commands, sympathetic and helpful. “This is my friend.”