

★ Friendship: The Heart of Being Human

Victor Lee Austin

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Friendship is an elegant theological text that emphasizes the importance of friends in developing a spiritual and emotional life.

Arguing that the “characteristic activity” of being human is living in friendship with others, Victor Lee Austin suggests that friendship warrants deeper theological consideration. Austin’s intriguing claims are set in the context of marriage, too, to suggest that God’s love for people, and people’s love for God, is mutual and affirming. Here, God cares about creation because, in doing so, God gets a friend.

Austin draws on Aristotle’s notions of friendship, too, and explores the cultural roots of friendship through the Greek philosopher’s notion that friendship is “the point of human life.” From this perspective, true friendship is “stable, enduring through time and events, good and bad.” Such relationships, the book argues, demand “mutual trust” and take time to build. Austin also claims that Aristotle would “come down against Facebook” friending—friendship requires “trial” and “testing” more than it does “shopping.”

Considerations of the trinity address the friendship that Jesus offers as “the fulfillment of the created goodness of humanity,” while the book addresses Genesis and Eden as evidence that God knew that it was not good for people to live alone; they needed friendship. Atonement, too, becomes an offer of friendship in Austin’s eyes.

The book closes with concrete suggestions for being a better friend to people and God, including identifying true friends (from three to six trusted people) and focusing on building those relationships. From its perspective, old friendships matter, too, even if they’re “on hold.”

Austin’s achievable, human advice is beautiful, and *Friendship* is a rare and wonderful theological book that turns something ordinary—being a friend—into an expression of God’s greatness.

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