

The background of the cover is a photograph of a snowy forest at night. The trees are covered in snow, and the sky is dark with a vibrant green aurora borealis (Northern Lights) visible. The overall color palette is a mix of deep blues, greens, and whites.

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Eternal Friendship

BY ANDREA JAEGER

The holiday season has a standard for invoking cheer, love, light, and faith. Lights, decorations, gifts, faith in Jesus, festive gatherings of friends and family, homes with the aroma of favorite meals cooking invoke different memories for each person. This is a story of how Jesus sought and found, and how the busyness of the holidays and life in general can still result in an eternal friendship with Jesus for all seasons.

While the world participates in holiday parties, celebrations, and social gatherings with family, friends, and co-workers, for many, the “holiday blues” is real with sadness, loneliness, and anxiety. However, the best and fullest life can be enjoyed on holidays and every day through an eternal friendship with Jesus.

Holiday commercialization is its own industry. Its relishing can trigger the lifting of spirits, and if mindful of this, the lowering of spirits can be avoided. When I walk into The Home Depot or other decorated store, I smile at the seasonal bright lights and colorful displays of holiday cheer. An eternal friendship with Jesus supports the true meaning of Christmas granting grace to join in, appreciate, respect the singing of carols, the ringing of bells, and the vast merry ways in which humanity celebrates the season’s joyfulness.

Since childhood, God was the presence I strived for, connected to, and established as my go-to within—playfully and consistently comfortable in our conversation and friendship far beyond the holidays.

This was further secured fresh out of my teenage years when I had an interesting vision of Jesus. Far from my first vision or pattern of receiving visions, I was in

abundant fields and pastures, not in green manicured splendor, but wilder in nature. The fields continued endlessly with no buildings in sight. Everywhere I looked were sunshine and fields.

A crowd started gathering in the field. First, only a few people talked and mingled. Eventually, the numbers increased, then escalated rapidly. I recognized several people from my professional tennis years.

When I became a professional tennis player at age fourteen, I competed consistently against top pro players. For me, there were no enemies. I never looked at my opponents as winners, losers, or ranking numbers, good or bad.

On tour I was unimpressed by anyone’s sporting, intellectual, celebrity, or financial achievements. I fervently searched for “knowingness” in people to see if anyone’s life reflected an interest in being God’s friend. If my quests were left unmet or with low occurrence, I figured God’s intentions were for later-in-life experiences when either my or another’s prophetic knowledge would increase. At the very least I knew a rise of divine awareness would reveal itself later in life or even thereafter. I accepted these situations as part of life’s adventures.

In this detailed vision, the crowd's growing numbers changed in mindset and intention. Normal banter shifted when one volatile threatening voice took over, creating a hostile and menacing environment. Within moments the energy of the group grew in astonishingly combative ways even among the quiet, do-no-harm personality types. More troubling was the enabling of hostility which surged in scope as well.

Separate parts of the group reacted and morphed into complacency. At first the mounting furor was avoided and ignored by larger sections. Then the hostility escalated with wielding clubs and weapons becoming the norm. Fearing retaliation, the majority eventually yielded to the mob's influence. Even the pleasant-colored scenery took on a "storm is brewing" appearance.

While encountering this vision, I did not know the Scripture: **"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you"** (John 15:19 NIV).

I had my own interpretation of that soon-to-be-known Bible message. It was well-groomed in me before I started nursery school, "God is my friend and I am happy to be anyone's friend who is nice to my friend, God." My three-year-old innocent self took this notion onward.

I measured potential friends by that bar. In my friendship with God, I knew God would keep me centered, raise my bar, guide, watch, and teach me. Our perceptions are each our own. A contemplation with God that continued from my nursery school reality was that friends are okay, so long as they are cleared by God. Others may think my friendship guidelines are irrational or unachievable. I have a long list of falling short, so how we clear our paths for friendships works both ways.

Now past that midpoint and well into adulthood, my contemplation remains; intentions that are respectful toward God and in friendship with God are the qualities I want in a friend.

Back to the vision. As clear today as many decades ago when Jesus appeared, the angry crowd was nearing recruitment completion upon their approach to me. Several were

foaming at the mouth in rhetoric not suitable to share; much of it contained blasphemy against God. Those surrounding their kingpin never confronted their leader. In doing so, they would face ostracization or harsher punishments.

I found myself alone with my beliefs thinking this was strange how quickly everyone compromised and felt comfort in hatred, jealousy, and violence. Everything prior was peaceful, serene, and welcoming.

A defiant booming, "Join and no harm will come to you" was shouted in unison at me from the assemblage. I did not step forward. Noticing my noncompliance to join, members with weapons and clubs started running towards me. Those fearing retaliation were also overwhelmed by the crowd's pervasive ways to cause harm. They accepted the group's violent and destructive mission.

I turned in the opposite direction of the mob and ran as fast as my legs would carry me. Using every ounce of athletic training from years of dedication and discipline, I maintained a small lead on the collective unit. However, the space between us dwindled as adults with stronger legs and larger strides gained on me. I was incapable of outrunning them all.

During my attempt to flee, I heard, "Come to Me, climb on Me. You will be safe." I looked in the distance and a mountain had mysteriously appeared. A large, beckoning mountain as large and carved out as Mount Rushmore. There were no presidents carved in this mountain, rather the mountain was the presence of Jesus. Jesus' face was the entire mountain.

I found a new speed—my arms and legs moved faster than ever. I arrived at the mountain of Jesus just before the looming, angry swarm of people descended upon me. Moments prior to them overtaking me, my motion had come to an abrupt halt.

I refused to climb on Jesus for safety. Using footholds and hand placements to climb the mountain would be climbing on Jesus' face to get to safety. I thought doing so would be disrespectful, so I declined the opportunity to be safe.

Turning to face the masses, I braced myself, "This is going to hurt." Again, Jesus' voice beckoned, "Come to

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Me, climb on Me. You will be safe.” As if Jesus understood my consternation, memories of adorable puppies that climbed on me to play, sleep, and be safe and comforted appeared in my heart. Also, the countless times I had helped children with cancer and safely guided them through adventures of skiing, whitewater rafting, sledding, horseback riding, tennis, ropes courses, surgeries, chemo treatments, and more.

I understood better. Jesus was showing me it was okay to climb the Jesus mountain like a ropes course. No disrespect was involved. I could climb while still being respectful to Jesus and kind to God. With that, I climbed.

Ascending, reaching a safe ledge, I turned and looked down. The crowd had no reply to my friendship and action of faith. Unable to go further, they left disappointed, then dissipated and disappeared.

Friendship, connection, and contemplation with God are gifts for you to receive this holiday season and any time of year. From early childhood to today, my friendship with God is still the most important friendship in my life. The Jesus mountain appeared and continues to appear in many forms.

If you are weary, remember, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”** (Matthew 11:28-30 RSV).

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16 NIV). It seems God is introducing friendships for us all. In that welcoming, grace, love, and light rejoicing, we know the Name of the greatest of friends. 🙏

ANDREA JAEGER became the #2-ranked professional tennis player in the world at the age of sixteen. While on the pro tennis circuit, Andrea helped ease the pain and suffering of children in hospitals, schools, and street corners. Using all her pro tennis career earnings, Andrea began her own children's cancer foundation. For the past thirty-seven years, Little Star Foundation (littlestar.org) has provided long-term care and better quality of life for children with cancer and children in need around the world. Andrea has been connected to MorningStar for decades and has authored *First Service-Following God's Calling* and *Finding Life's Purpose*.

Little Star Foundation

Little Star Foundation provides long term care and better quality of life to children with cancer and children in hospitals, schools, orphanages and shelters throughout the U.S. and the world.

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