Four Readings: The Death Of Ivan Ilyich, The Catholic Study Bible, The Confessions, And Into The Deep

In the four readings that are The Death of Ivan Ilyich, The Catholic Study Bible, The Confessions, and Into the Deep, there are similar themes regarding relationships and connections in terms of a human to human friendship, or a divine to human connection, all of which relate back to one's understanding of their own faith or directly to God. Friendship doesn't necessarily have to be between two people though the idea of companionship usually holds this ideal to be the most common type. In a sense of religion, God is always present and in these collections of texts, each character or person finds their way to Him as they venture throughout life, trying to find their faith and strive to be more connected spiritually.

In The Death of Ivan Ilyich, the main character, Ivan Ilyich, found himself more alone as he came closer to death. Throughout his life, he was an ambitious man as he was confident and strong, but also arrogant. When his condition grew worse, he had to face the reality that he wasn't as healthy as he used to be. The only comfort he found was through his butler's helper, Gerasim. Gerasim could be described as the embodiment, if not a purer version, of who Ivan thought himself to be. He was young and full of vitality, but unliked Ivan, he was kind, poor, and humble (Tolstoy 16). Gerasim gave Ivan closure about his own death and was empathetic at the same time. Ivan connected to Gerasim in this way as he was compassionate and understanding with his needs. Through Gerasim, Ivan became open to relying on others solely because, for once, he wasn't fed lies. Ivan accepted his own vulnerability as he was going to die anyway and would rather have his family tell him the truth (Tolstoy 37). Despite having an inevitable death, Gerasim helps Ivan whole-heartedly, as he tells Ivan, 'Maybe if you weren't sick, but why not be a help?'. Through this act of kindness, Ivan develops a friendship with Gerasim, though this is specifically a master to servant relationship. Ivan knows that it is Gerasim's job to assist him but as the text tells that Gerasim didn't lie and that he understood his master's situation enough to pity him. Only then would Ivan feel close enough to feel good with Gerasim. The comparison between what kind of person Ivan thought he was and what kind of person Gerasim is, could infer that Ivan had a realization of how he should have lived his life, as someone who was not materialistic and selfish (Tolstoy 37-38). In the end Ivan falls into a 'black sack', which represents his struggle for self-actualization. This moment of understanding that he could still make right with the life he has left allows him to escape the sack and to see the light. When he fully resolves his internal conflict with himself, he stops asking God why he is suffering. He finally understood that the suffering was a punishment for his deeds in the past. Ivan asked for forgiveness, despite not finishing his apology, and in this way, he gave himself to God (Tolstoy 52-53).

As the Catholic Study Bible is too generalized, the focus of this paragraph will be on one covenant. The focus will be on the Book of Genesis. In this case, the text contains a human-to-human friendship as well as a divine-to-human relationship. In the Book of Genesis, the Bible tells of how God created the heavens and earth. After creating the darkness, light, water, and vegetation, all that is essential to life, God brought forth living creatures. Among these living creatures were wild animals, tamed animals, animals that crawled on the ground, and human beings. The most important were human beings as they were created in the image of God and were to have supremacy over the others creatures. (Genesis 1:1-28). In addition, God had

placed the man he had created in the garden of Eden to care for it under the condition that he doesn't eat from the tree of knowledge. This is the start of a covenant God had formed as the conditions are that man will be cared for as long as they obey God. As the man was alone, God decided to create a partner for him from his rib and, therefore, a human-to-human relationship had developed. (Genesis 2:15-16, 21). After the creation of the woman, she was deceived by the snake and ultimately, ate the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge. Her partner had done the same and the two soon learned the difference between what was good and evil. As punishment God had banished the two from the garden of Eden and revealed the divine to human relationship, that God is absolute and man will never be above Him. This message is meant to be kept in mind throughout reading the Bible.

In The Confessions, Saint Augustine tells of his experiences from childhood through adulthood. As a boy going through puberty, he lived a life of sin. He was lustful and had tendencies to do wrong for the sake of doing so. He wasn't surrounded by people who honored God as only his mother did and so he spent his time with his peers in mischief (Boulding 36-37). However, until Book 4, Augustine tells of a friend he had in Thagaste, who was dear to him. Though he loved this friend very much, Augustine knew that they were 'short of a true friendship'. What he meant by this was that true friendship could only be found when the grace of the Holy Spirit was brought upon their hearts, binding them together. In short, Augustine was holding his friend back from finding his faith. When this friend fell ill, he was baptized while unconscious. Augustine thought little of this notion as he believed his friend would just wake up and remember all of the times the two had spent together. Instead of returning back to normal, the friend wakes up only to scold Augustine for making fun of the Baptism and that if he wanted to continue being his friend, he would not disrespect what was holy. The friend died shortly after and Augustine was overcome with grief, but with time, his heartache healed and he was able to pursue God (Boulding 61-62). He learned through new friends in Carthage that, despite all of the consolations, friendship won't last forever, but God will. No one will lose God as long as they are willing to accept Him because He is eternal and loving. This is through the relationship of man to God and God to man that shapes the ideal connection. A higher-order or source of the divine may be the guidance man needs to establish a sense of earthly relationship (Boulding 65-66).

Throughout Into the Deep, Abigail Rine Favale doesn't specifically mention any particular cases in which she develops a close bond with anyone, except her husband or God. Rather she goes through life meeting people who help her shape her faith the way she wants to follow it. One of these people is Sister Juanita. Though Favale had joined other groups during her years in college to find what her faith was calling her to do, Sister Juanita had a major impact on Favale's conversion to Catholicism. She had always been interested in Catholicism but was blindly feeling her way into the faith. An example was when she realized that she didn't need to work at a Catholic university to be a part of the Catholic Church (Favale 61). She only needed to pick up the phone and reach out to someone who was willing to teach her more about her interests. Despite being put on an answering machine a few times, she pulled through and reached Sister Juanita, someone who was willing to guide her into the faith. Favale tells that while she was speaking to the nun, she was finally able to express her spiritual needs and that she needed the sacraments even though she didn't exactly know what they were. Through this experience, Favale was able to connect to someone who held a divine relationship, specifically someone who was devoted to God. In this sense, God is the true source of friendship as he connected Favale with Sister Juanita and was able to fulfill her needs to becoming a convert.

Drawing forth on each of these four texts, an argument could be made that God is the source of friendship, despite the fact that human connections were made to find Him. It could be that God is the true source of friendship because He is the almighty Creator, but it could also be that God is the reason people connect with each other and that He is truly the first connection they made with. A human to human relationship only brings us closer to God as it is said that we are made in His image. If this were the case to care and love for one another would be to care for God.

In The Death of Ivan Ilyich, it is true that without Gerasim, Ivan would have never known what he had done that made his way of living in the past incorrect. Living a life of materialism and boasting about his own ability had rendered him blind to what was truly important. Gerasim enabled Ivan to feel compassion as he grew closer to him. Ivan wanted nothing more than the presence of Gerasim up until the time of his death, in which he asks for forgiveness. He asks for forgiveness because he understood that what he should have wanted in life was love and care from his family and that he needed to return the same effort. Gerasim, the embodiment of Ivan's perfect self, was treating Ivan the way he should have treated everyone around him. The friendship the two shared was really a connection that came from God, as Ivan would not have found himself out of the black sack if Gerasim's acts of kindness didn't convince him to ask for forgiveness from his maker.

The covenant that man had made with God was not a contract that both sides would benefit from, instead it was God's way of taking care of his own creations. The story of God creating man proved that He is the first relationship we made, not with each other. God decided that man needed a companion and so he gave him one. God putting man in charge of the garden of Eden is His way of testing our understanding of the divine to human relationship. He will always be superior to us, but he will always love and care for us as well. The lesson isn't that we have to seek God through each other, but that we should find each other through God.

Saint Augustine lived his life surrounded by sin and partaking in wrongful acts but he wouldn't have been where he ended up if he had never met his friend who had died to the illness. When this friend woke up only to tell Augustine that he shouldn't mock God, it could be seen as a warning from God, telling him that he needs to change. Writing this off and telling himself that everything will be back to normal when his friend wakes up was Augustine's mistake and through this bond that he had lost, he grew closer to God. After reaching Carnage, he realized it was not these new friends that brought him closer to God, it was rather the other way around. God's presence is eternal; therefore, He is the source of all friendships.

In Favale's case, she had always been searching for God. It wasn't until she met Sister Juanita that she could fully act on becoming a Catholic. Despite being part of an Evangelic community since she was young, she was still a part of the Christian religion. In this way, Favale never left God from her heart as she was constantly searching for answers. The journey and experiences she had been through led her up to the point of meeting someone who would help her commit to her divine desires. All of this wouldn't have been possible if she had had a weaker relationship to God.

Through a human-to-human relationship one can find their divine to human relationship, though it is not obvious that the latter would be the first one to form. Each person is created with a divine connection and it is because it is not a physical connection that a human to human relationship would seem more common. A bond that can be seen is a test of what exists spiritually, as in this case, a human to human friendship reveals God in form of man.