

**Small Group Studies**

# **Cultivating Friendship**

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**Leader's Guide**

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## Week 1 – What is a friend?

### What is a friend?

#### Discussion Starter:

- Before we talk about other people's definition of a friend, can you tell us how you would define a friend?

*[Have everyone share at least one thought answering the question from their perspective, "What is a friend?"]*

#### Dictionary Definition

A friend as "one who cherishes kind regard for another person; an intimate and trustworthy companion."

#### Other People's Definitions

*[After reading each definition ask the group to react to each definition.]*

"A friend is someone with whom you dare to be yourself." --C. Raymond Beran

"A friend is someone who understands your past, believes in your future, and accepts you today just the way you are." --Unknown

"A friend is one who knows all about you and likes you just the same."  
--Elbert Hubbard

"A friend is a person with whom I may think out loud." --Ralph Waldo Emerson

"A real friend is one who warms you by his presence, trusts you with his secrets, and remembers you in his prayers." --Unknown

"A friend is:

- A push when you have stopped.
- A word when you are lonely.
- A guide when you are searching.
- A smile when you are sad.

- A song when you are glad." --Unknown

## **What are the various levels of friendship?**

There are at least four levels of friendship or relationship:

### **1. Acquaintance**

The word "acquaintance" is defined as follows:

"A person with whom you are familiar or conversant."

An acquaintance is someone that you see occasionally, that you know on a very surface or public level and that you can identify by name and general information.

### **2. Casual Friends**

The word "casual" is defined as follows:

"Occurring at irregular intervals, accidentally or by chance."

A casual friend is someone with whom you share common interests and with whom you participate in common activities. You bump into them occasionally, more by chance than by design. You may know very little about them except for those commonly shared areas or experiences.

### **3. Close Friends**

The word "close" is defined as follows:

"Affectionately associated with or trusted."

A close friend is someone with whom you share common life goals, mutual projects and personal conversations relative to family, values and beliefs. A close friend is someone that you trust and toward whom you feel a strong level of personal commitment.

### **4. Intimate Friends**

The word "intimate" is defined as:

"Closely connected on a personal, confidential and innermost level."

An intimate friend is reserved for only the **very closest** of friends and is based on covenant relationship. This includes a mutual commitment to build each other up, to love in spite of weaknesses and to sharpen character through personal accountability.

This is the relationship that David had with Jonathan (I Sam. 18:1-4).

*Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, even to his sword and his bow and his belt.*

### **Closing Discussion:**

Most people have many acquaintances and casual friends. Fewer people have close friends and a much smaller number have someone in their life that they could call an intimate friend.

Ask the group relative to the above statement:

- Why do you think that this is the case?
- Do you personally want friends on a deeper level? Why or why not?

Finish the discussion with the following:

The purpose of these studies that we will be going through is to help us to develop stronger friendship relationships. This week think about the relationships that you have now. Are they fully satisfying or can they be improved? As we study together, allow God to move you into new levels for His purpose.

## Week 2 – What is the purpose of friendship?

[Review previous lesson]

**What is the purpose of friendship?**

**A person who has no friends is missing out on a great blessing in life.**

Read Psalm 142:1-4

*[As you read ask the group to watch out for things that this verse teaches about friendship.]*

*I cry out to the LORD; I plead for the LORD's mercy. 2 I pour out my complaints before him and tell him all my troubles. 3 For I am overwhelmed, and you alone know the way I should turn. Wherever I go, my enemies have set traps for me. 4 I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me.*

*[After the group responds, highlight any of the five thoughts below that the group may have missed.]*

**This verse teaches that:**

1. A person without friends has no one to whom to tell his troubles (or his jokes).
2. A person without friends has no one to turn to when he is overwhelmed.
3. A person without friends has no one to protect his back when enemies come against him.
4. A person without friends has no one to help him when he needs help.
5. A person without friends has no one to care for him spontaneously.

**A person who has friends is blessed.**

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12:

*[As you read ask the group to watch out for things that this verse teaches about friendship.]*

*Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.<sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. <sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

*[After the group responds, highlight any of the four thoughts below that the group may have missed.]*

**This verse teaches that:**

1. A person who has friends has someone with whom to share in his or her labor.
2. A person who has friends has someone to lift him up when he or she falls.
3. A person who has friends has someone to bring warmth to his or her life.
4. A person who has friends has someone to help him or her overcome obstacles.

**A friend is someone who can refresh our souls.**

*[Ask the group, "How you think that friends refresh our souls?" After the group responds, highlight any of the three thoughts below that the group may have missed.]*

1. By sharing their life with us in fellowship and relationship.
2. By caring for us in our times of difficulty.
3. By growing with us in the purposes of God through mutual edification and accountability.

**Closing discussion:**

Ask the group, "What are your personal goals in relationship to your present and future friendships?"

**Close in prayer in relationship to these goals**

## Week 3 – What the Bible says about friendship

[Review previous lesson]

What does the Bible teach us about friendship?

The Book of Proverbs has much to say about friendship.

*[Have people in the group look up the verses and make a comment on what they believe it says about friendships.]*

### 1. Proverbs 18:24, Amplified

*The man of many friends [a friend of all the world] will prove himself a bad friend, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

Other quotes along these lines:

"A friend to everybody and to nobody is the same thing" -Spanish Proverb

"He who has many friends, has none." -Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

*[Ask group, "What do you think this Spanish proverb and Aristotle are trying to say?"]*

**Main point being made: True friendships in life are few in number.**

### 2. Proverbs 17:17

*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

*He that is a friend loveth at all times: and a brother is proved in distress.*

-Darby

**Main point being made: A true friend stands with you in times of trouble.**

### 3. Proverbs 19:4, 6

*Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man's friend deserts him...Many carry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts.*

*Everyone tries to be friends of those who can help them. -CEV*

**Main point being made: A true friend is not in the relationship for the wrong reasons.**

#### 4. Proverbs 27:9

*Ointment and perfume delight the heart, and the sweetness of a man's friend gives delight by hearty counsel.*

*The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense. -NLT*

**Main point being made: A true friend's counsel is very sweet.**

It is sweet because we know that it comes from a genuine care and concern for us as a person.

#### 5. Proverbs 27:5-6

*An open rebuke is better than hidden love! Wounds from a friend are better than many kisses from an enemy. -NLT*

**Main point being made: A true friend will tell you what you need to hear not what you want to hear.**

#### 6. Proverbs 27:17

*As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.*

**Main point being made: A true friend will clash with you at times for your personal improvement.**

#### 7. Proverbs 11:13; 17:17; 18:24

*A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.*

Proverbs 11:13, NIV

*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

Proverbs 17:17

*There are "friends" who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother. Proverbs 18:24, NLT*

**Main point being made: A true friend is loyal at all times.**

## 8. Proverbs 16:28; 17:9

*A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends.  
Proverbs 16:28*

*He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends. Proverbs 17:9*

**Main point being made: A true friendship can be destroyed by slander, whispering and not keeping confidences.**

## Jesus had something to say about friendship.

### 1. John 15:13

*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.*

**Main point being made: A friend lays his life down for the relationship.**

### 2. John 15:15

*No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

**Main point being made: A friend knows the real you.**

## The rest of the Bible adds to the concept of friendship.

### 1. Deuteronomy 13:6b

*...your friend who is as your own soul...*

**Main point being made: A true friend will know you as they know themselves.**

**2. Job 6:14, NIV**

*A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends, even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty.*

**Main point being made: A true friend will show you kindness when you are discouraged.**

**3. Job 16:21, NIV**

*...on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend.*

**Main point being made: A true friend will be an advocate or intercessor to plead your cause.**

**4. Ecclesiastes 4:10**

*If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!*

**Main point being made: A true friend will be there to restore you if you stumble.**

*[This lesson may take two weeks to go through depending on how engaged the group is.]*

**Closing Discussion:**

After finishing the list ask the group, "After reading all of these verses, what particular thing stands out to you or what did you learn the most?"

## Week 4 – How do friendships happen?

[Review previous lesson]

### How do friendships happen?

#### Discussion Starter:

- Have members of the group share testimonies of how one of their best friendships was formed and what they do to maintain it.

#### 1. For friendships to happen they must be desired.

You will never have close friends unless you desire them. And you can only be a close friend to those who desire to be one with you. You cannot force someone to want you as a friend. Deep friendships must be equal and mutual.

#### Discussion Questions:

Did you ever want to be a friend to someone who didn't want to be friends with you? What happened?

Did someone want to be your friend but you were not interested in their friendship? What happened?

#### 2. For friendships to happen they must be pursued.

They do not just happen. Casual friendships happen by chance. Deep friendships require regular contact. You must take initiative and not expect the other person to make the first move. This means that having friends must be a priority to you above some of the other things in your life.

#### 3. For friendships to happen they have to be built.

That means that we have to invest in them and put in the kind of things that will contribute to their success. This means a certain amount of work. Take advantage of common interests such as hobbies, exercise regimen, activities to spend time building the relationship.

#### 4. Friendships take time to build.

Friendships move gradually through the various stages. Not all friendships will reach the "intimate" friendship level. Before friendships can reach that level, both parties must be committed to that level.

**5. Friendships will be tested.**

Everyone will disappoint you or let you down at some point. People are still people. It is important to understand from the beginning that if perfection is required for being your friend, Jesus is the only friend that you will have until you get to heaven.

**6. Friendships must be maintained.**

We cannot take them for granted. The same things that build a relationship maintain a relationship.

**7. Friendships are to be enjoyed.**

You do not have to feel guilty about spending time with people that you enjoy being with. Yes, we have to avoid being exclusive of others and closed to outreach to those in need, but a good friendship can help us to reach all of the other goals in our lives.

**Closing Discussion:**

Ask the group, "What do you feel are the secrets to sustaining a long term friendship?"

## Week 5 – How do I choose my friends?

[Review previous lesson]

### Discussion Starter:

- Ask the group to share any instructions that their parents may have given to them about choosing friends as they were growing up.
- Ask the group to share what they feel they would tell their own children about choosing friends.

### What are some qualities to look for in a friend?

#### Quotes:

"Friendships form among people who strengthen each other." --Franklin Owen

"He who looks for advantage out of friendship strips it of all its nobility."  
--Seneca (4 B.C. -65 A.D.)

#### Five key qualities that you look for in friends

*[As you go through this list of five things, ask the group, "Why do you think this is important?"]*

1. Those who fear the Lord (Ps. 119:63, NIV).

*I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts.*

2. Those who can keep confidence.
3. Those who possess the fruit of the Spirit (Gal.5:23-24).
4. Those who enjoy life.
5. Those who share your basic values.

### What are some qualities to avoid in a friend?

As much as the Bible says about the positive aspects of friendship it also warns us not to associate with certain types of people. We must choose our friends wisely because we will be known by our friends or the company we keep (Pro. 12:26; 13:20; I Cor. 15:33). We will also become like our friends. We become like what we worship or admire (Ps. 106:19-20).

In this context we are really talking about close and intimate friends. We know that Jesus was a friend of sinners, but not on an intimate level. We can be friendly to all when it comes to acquaintances and casual friends, but we must be more discriminating when it comes to the deeper levels of friendship.

*The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray. Proverbs 12:26*

*He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. Proverbs 13:20*

*Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." I Corinthians 15:33*

*Bad company corrupts good character. -NLT*

*They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped the molded image. Thus they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass. Psalm 106:19-20*

### **Five key qualities that you do not want in your friends**

*[As you go through this list of five things, ask the group, "Why do you think this is important?"]*

#### **1. Angry or Hot-tempered People (Pro. 22:24-25)**

*Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.*

This verse clearly teaches that you become like what you associate with.

#### **2. Worldly People (Eph. 5:11; Jam. 4:4)**

*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. Ephesians 5:11*

*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*  
James 4:4

### 3. Wicked People (Pro. 12:26; II Cor. 6:14-15; Gal. 5:19-21)

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?* II Corinthians 6:14-15

### 4. Self-Centered People (II Tim. 3:1-5)

Paul discusses the nature of people in the end times. They are lovers of self, lovers of pleasure and lovers of money. He tells us how we are to view these people who maintain a form of godliness.

*And from such people turn away!* II Timothy 3:5b

### 5. Hypocritical, Unrepentant "Christian" People (Mt. 18:15-17; II Th. 3:6).

*But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.* Matthew 18:17b

*But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.* II Thessalonians 3:6

These are people who profess to be Christian but who live a lifestyle characterized by some of the following:

- Covetousness—Inordinately desirous or greedy
- Idolatry—Inordinately fond of anything above the Lord
- Railing—Abusive and scornful in their language
- Drunkenness—Habitually drinking to excess
- Extortion—Obtaining gain by dishonest means
- Fornication—Involved in illicit sexual relationships
- Hardness of Heart—Refusing to reconcile an offense with a brother

With these types of people we are encouraged not to eat with them or keep company with them (I Cor. 5:11; II Th. 3:14-15).

*But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner--not even to eat with such a person.*

I Corinthians 5:11

*And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. II Thessalonians 3:14-15*

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Have you ever violated any of these guidelines for choosing friends? What was the result?
- Have you been personally challenged about your own potential as a friend? If so, in what way?

## Week 6 – What can I do to develop good friends?

[Review previous lesson]

### Discussion Starter:

React to the following quotes:

"Friendship is like money, easier made than kept." --Samuel Butler (1612-1680)

"Promises may get friends, but it is performance that must nurse and keep them." -- Owen Felltham (1602-1668)

"Friendship is usually treated as a tough and everlasting thing which will survive all manner of bad treatment. But it may die in an hour of a single unwise word; its conditions of existence are that it should be dealt with delicately and tenderly. It is a plant and not a roadside thistle. We must not expect our friend to be above humanity." --Ouida (1839-1908)

**There are some skills that will help you to develop and foster good friendships**

### A. Becoming a good conversationalist.

*[Before you share the following list, ask the group to list things that they feel make someone a good conversationalist. Ask them what they feel are some things that will kill good conversation.]*

#### 1. Learn how to start a conversation and keep it going.

- Give a warm greeting.
- Wear a smile.
- Ask questions.
- Work to remember details, especially their name.
- Repeat their name several times in conversation.
- Notice things that stand out about the person or their environment.
- Compliment them (sincerely) on some area of achievement.

- Play off of their responses with more clarifying questions.
  - Paraphrase back to them what you believe they are saying (in your own words). They may add to or correct your perception of what they had said.
  - Find out what the person is interested in and explore it.
  - Discover things you may have in common (do not focus on yourself).
  - Avoid highly controversial subjects until you get to know them better.
  - If you must disagree, do it agreeably.
  - Do not interrupt.
  - Recognize when the conversation is over.
  - Remember the depth of conversation is based on the depth of friendship.
2. Be willing to give and to receive information.
- A good friendship is 50/50. You do not want to listen all of the time no more than you want to talk all of the time.
3. Do things together that require a certain amount of talking (e.g. going for coffee, walks, golf, etc).
4. Learn how to communicate creatively to further feed the friendship.
- Phone
  - Email
  - SMS
  - Fax
  - Answering Machine Messages
  - Occasional Card or Note

#### **B. Becoming a good listener.**

[As you go through these lists, allow the members of the group to share personal illustrations or examples of what is being said. Allow them the freedom to interrupt at any point along the way with a pertinent comment.]

1. Pay careful attention when they speak.

2. Maintain good eye contact with them as they speak.
3. Respect their point of view.
4. Do not react to what they say.
5. Do not feel that you must adjust every factual detail with which you disagree.
6. Give responses that indicate your interest (active listening).
7. Don't walk away until the conversation comes to resolve.

**C. Becoming a physical and moral support.**

1. This means acknowledging them as your friend.
2. This means attending to their physical and emotional needs.
3. This means providing a listening ear when they want to vent.
4. This means putting up with them when they are moody.
5. This means being cautious in criticism willing to overlook some of their imperfections.
6. This means encouraging them when they are down.
7. This means being ready to assist them financially.
8. This means providing a shoulder for them to cry on.
9. This means praising them for their positive actions and accomplishments.
10. This means rejoicing with their success (and their new car).
11. This means praying for them when they need it.
12. This means helping them solve the problems of their life.
13. This means surprising them with thoughtful gifts and remembrances.
14. This means staying true to them when they disappoint you.
15. This means giving them the benefit of the doubt when unexpected things come up and things do not work out as planned.
16. This means relaxing, slipping off your shoes, loosening your tie, kicking back on the couch and just "hanging out" with them.

## Week 7 – What does accountability mean in friendship?

[Review previous lesson]

### What does accountability look like in an intimate relationship?

If you ever want to move to the highest level of friendship with someone it will necessitate moving into realms of accountability.

#### 1. Accountability involves self-disclosure.

This means being willing to share some of your inner secrets. This includes such things as:

- Life goals, visions and ambitions
- Inner fears, values and beliefs
- Personal challenges
- Temptations and spiritual battles

#### 2. Accountability involves a commitment to absolute honesty and speaking the truth in love.

#### 3. Accountability involves apologizing when you are wrong.

#### 4. Accountability involves a high level of trust and confidentiality.

#### 5. Accountability involves giving permission to ask the tough questions.

The following 26 questions are excerpted from *Rebuilding Your Broken World* by Gordon MacDonald.

1. How is your relationship to God right now?
2. What have you read in the Bible in the past week?
3. What has God said to you in this reading?
4. Where do you find yourself resisting Him these days?
5. What specific things are you praying for in regard to others?
6. What specific things are you praying for in regard to yourself?

7. What are the specific tasks facing you right now that you consider incomplete?
8. What habits intimidate you?
9. What have you read in the secular press this week?
10. What general reading are you doing?
11. What have you done to play?
12. How are you doing with your spouse? Kids?
13. If I were to ask your spouse about your state of mind, state of your spirit or state of your energy level, what would be the response?
14. Are you sensing any spiritual attacks from the enemy right now?
15. If Satan were to try to invalidate you as a person or as a servant of the Lord, how might he do it?
16. What is the state of your sexual perspective? Tempted? Dealing with fantasies? Wrong entertainment?
17. Where are you financially right now? Things under control? Under anxiety? In serious debt?
18. Are there any unresolved conflicts in your circle of relationships right now?
19. When was the last time you spent time with a good friend of your own gender?
20. What kind of time have you spent with anyone who is a non-Christian this past month?
21. What challenges do you think you are going to face in the coming week? Month?
22. What would you say are your fears at this present time?
23. Are you sleeping well?
24. What three things are you most thankful for?
25. Do you like yourself at this point in your pilgrimage?
26. What are your greatest confusions about your relationship with God?

**Closing Discussion:**

Ask the group, "Do any of you have a relationship of true accountability with a friend from whom you can be asked the above questions? If so, how does it work? Has it ever saved you from serious trouble?"

## Week 8 – Do all friendships last forever?

[Review previous lesson]

### Discussion Starter Questions:

- In your experience does every close friendship have a lifespan?
- Have you ever had a close friendship that lasted more than ten years? If so, what do you think kept it alive?
- What are some ways a friendship can change for positive reasons?
- What are some reasons why a friendship may can for negative reasons?

### Do all friendships last forever?

No! In a perfect world, all relationships would last forever. Some of the friends that you have, you will have for life. In other cases they may have a shorter life span because of things that change. In addition, one person can only nurture a limited number of close relationships without neglecting others.

### Three reasons why friendships change

1. Sometimes relationships change due to conflict.

We should not just accept the termination of such a relationship easily. We should work to see it restored.

2. Sometimes relationships change due to the change of life's seasons.

- **Marriage.** Sometimes when single people get married it changes their relationships in favor of other married couples.
- **Children.** Sometimes when people have children it affects their relationship with people who are not in the same phase of life.
- **Relocation.** Sometimes when one relocates a long ways away it is difficult to maintain the same intimacy levels.
- **Spiritual Shift.** Sometimes the relationship that began at the same level changes as one person moves on or falls back.

### 3. Sometimes relationships change due to other factors including:

- Breach of Trust.

A good friend will be very cautious about what was said to them in confidence. It only takes one careless conversation to undo months of relationship building.

- Clinging Jealousy.

A good friend will allow for other friendship in the person's life of which they are not a part.

- Smothering.

A good friend will not dominate a relationship but will allow space for other activities of life.

Good friends are worth fighting for, because they are the things that make our life rich and full.

### **Closing Discussion**

1. What has been the most important thing that you have gained from this study?
2. Are you going to do anything differently in the realm of relationship? If so, what?

## Friendship from A to Z

*What is a friend? Someone who...*

A ccepts you as you are,  
B elieves in "you",  
C alls you just to say "HI",  
D oesn't give up on you,  
E nvisions the whole of you (even the unfinished parts),  
F orgives your mistakes,  
G ives unconditionally,  
H elps you,  
I nspires you to be the best you can be,  
J ust happy to be with you,  
K eeps you close at heart,  
L oves you for who you are,  
M akes a difference in your life,  
N ever judges,  
O ffers support,  
P icks you up,  
Q uiets your fears,  
R aises your spirits,  
S ays nice things about you,  
T ells you the truth when you need to hear it,  
U nderstands you,  
V alues you,  
W alks beside you,  
X -plains things you don't understand,  
Y ells when you won't listen and  
Z aps you back to reality.

--Author Unknown