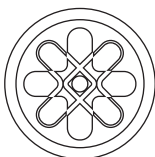




PURSuing GODLY FRIENDSHIPS

A Grace Fellowship Study



Grab some colored pencils and create your own unique cover!

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Grace Fellowship
1449 Refugee Road
Pickerington, OH 43147

Week One

Jesus Calls Us Friend

In John 15:12-17, Jesus says: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s *friends*. You are my *friends* if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you *friends*, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.” (*emphasis added*)

In this passage, Jesus uses the word “friends” three times and says that we are His friends. Me? You? A friend of Jesus? Certainly we are not worthy. But there it is. He said it.

This week’s study will center around this heartwarming passage. Together, we will look at what it means that Jesus has called us friends, and we will learn what it means to be a friend to Jesus.

Day One

What is a Friend?

The meaning of “friend” will vary depending on where you look for a definition! Webster’s dictionary says a friend is “a person you like and enjoy being with, one attached to another by affection or esteem.”

“Friend” has undergone a shift in meaning in our technological, social-networking-crazed world. Today, we say we have lots of friends, which may simply mean we have a lot of people following us on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter! But are all of those “friends” really friends?

It’s important to know what Jesus meant when He called us friend. When we understand Jesus’ meaning of friend, we have a greater understanding of our identity in Him and we will know how to be His friend. Today, let’s look closely at the passage to see exactly what Jesus was saying.

READ JOHN 15:12-17. FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS.

_____ love has no one than this: to _____
_____ one’s life for one’s _____. (v. 13) You are
my _____ if you _____ what I _____.
(v. 14) I have _____ you _____, for
everything that I learned from my Father I have made _____
to _____. (v. 15)

The word “friend” used in this passage is *philos* in the original Greek. It means someone who is dearly loved and valued in a personal way. Another way of describing it is a trusted confidante – someone we would trust with our deepest secrets. Our friendship with Jesus is nothing like a Facebook friend or contact. Our friendship with Jesus is one of depth, intimacy, and trust.

Think about your relationship with Jesus. You are *dearly loved* and *valued in a personal way*. What impact should that truth make in your sense of personal identity?

How should acceptance as a friend of Jesus affect our sense of self-worth?

Consider people in your circle of influence who feel unvalued or unimportant. How can you use the truth of John 15 to encourage them in their importance to God?

What difference has a personal relationship with Jesus made in your life concerning your significance and purpose?

How might your story help your friend?

JOHN 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Many people think this verse means that God loves the whole world generically with a one-size-fits-all, distant, and impersonal love. But that's not true! God offers us an intimate, personal relationship. Jesus' love is real and available to all who come to Him.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Two

The Vine and the Branches

When I was a new Christian just beginning my journey of faith, God brought a new family into our neighborhood. With a cinnamon coffee cake and my two children in tow, I knocked on the door, introduced myself to the new woman, and a friendship began. In time, we developed the habit of walking together each morning after the kids were on the school bus. Five days a week, we would walk a 45-minute circuit around our neighborhood. We shared life, prayed for one another, and encouraged each other in the faith. By her example, I learned what it meant to abide in Christ. She was a woman who read her Bible every day and studied to grow in knowledge and understanding. She was a faithful woman of prayer. But most importantly, she spent time with Jesus. Just being. Resting. Listening. Waiting.

This week's passage comes from perhaps the most treasured chapter in the book of John. Jesus knew that His time had come to leave the world and return to the Father. He begins to share His heart with His disciples. He wants to prepare them for His death and to give tender encouragement for the days to follow.

Chapters 13-17 reveal what Jesus said and did with His closest disciples on the night before His death. In Chapter 13, He modeled servant leadership by washing the disciples' feet and then sharing the last supper with them. In Chapter 14, Jesus assured them that because of their belief in Him, they were eternally secure. He then promised to send the Holy Spirit – the Counselor, the Spirit of truth. The gift of the Holy Spirit was the greatest gift He could give. The Spirit would care for them and be their guide after Jesus was gone. The Holy Spirit would indwell, or come to live inside, each person who believed in Jesus as the way to the Father.

JOHN 14:6

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

In Chapter 15, Jesus begins to teach His disciples about their relationship with Him. He uses an illustration of a vine and branches to help them understand their unique position in Him. Just as the branch gets its life source from the vine, so the believer gets her very life from connection to Jesus.

Remaining – abiding, dwelling with, residing – in Christ is the only way to a happy, fruitful, and satisfying life.

READ JOHN 15:1-11

Who is the vine (v. 1)?

Who is the gardener (v. 1)?

What is the purpose of pruning (v. 2)?

Who are the branches (v. 5)?

FROM VERSE 5, FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS:

_____ am the _____; you are the _____.
_____ a man _____ in me and I in him, He will
_____ much _____. Apart from _____,
you can do _____.

The “branches” that Jesus refers to here are His disciples and followers who believe in Him as the only way to the Father (John 14:6). When we accept the message of the gospel by believing in Jesus Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection for forgiveness of our sins, we are saved. We are eternally secure in Christ. We are branches connected to the true vine, Jesus.

Have you made a definite decision to be in Christ? Do you know with certainty that you are saved, made new in Jesus Christ? If yes, spend some time now thanking Him for the beautiful gift of new life – life eternal with Him!

If you want the salvation that is available through Jesus, place your faith in Him. Trust His death on the cross as the sufficient sacrifice for your sins. Totally depend on Him as your Savior. Salvation is found in belief and trust in Jesus Christ. It does not depend on you – how good you are or how bad you are, what you’ve done, or what you haven’t

done. Once you’ve made this decision, tell someone! Share the good news with another Christian, a small group leader, or pastor!

What promise does Jesus make to His disciples (v. 7)?

What condition surrounds the promise?

Explain in your own words what it means to “remain” in Jesus.

How does total and complete devotion to Jesus and His way change your heart and your desires?

What brings the Father glory (v. 8)?

What does it mean to bear fruit as a disciple of Jesus?

Verse 8 says that bearing fruit and being a disciple of Jesus are not two separate things but one single action. We will bear fruit if we are His disciples.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Three

He Calls Us Friend

Jesus calls us to love radically and will occasionally put someone in our life who is a challenge. A friend of mine introduced me to her new neighbor. Shannon was not the type of woman that I would naturally pursue a friendship with. We had virtually nothing in common. But God gave me His supernatural love and concern for her. She was a sweet, kind woman with a lot of emotional pain. I knew God was asking me to spend time with her to point her to Him. I was available to her for long phone calls, cups of coffee, and emergency home visits. I helped her when she was hospitalized and even spent time with her daughter. I did everything I could to encourage her faith and point her to Jesus. In the end, nothing worked. She was determined to follow her own path and made choices that went against God's Word. Her decisions caused more heartache and pain – for her and her family. Eventually, I felt God was releasing me from the relationship. As I began to let the friendship fade, she moved on to people who would tell her what she wanted to hear. My heart broke for her.

JOHN 15:12-17

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

From yesterday's study, we know how vitally important it is to stay connected to Jesus. To "remain" is to abide, live, or continue; so, to remain in Christ is to live in Him or abide in Him. When a person is saved, we are described as being "in Christ," kept secure forever because of our relationship with Jesus.

Today, let's look closely at John 15:12-17. In this passage of Scripture, Jesus describes Himself as our friend, and He explains what that means. Jesus tells us what He does as our friend, and He tells us what we will do if we are His friend. He calls those who love Him to love others as He has loved.

It's easy to love people we like and people who are good. But Jesus calls us to love radically. He calls us to love everyone, even those who oppose us (Matthew 5:44-45). Jesus loved His enemies and asks us to do the same. His love was limitless. Remember Judas? He was there in the upper room, at the last supper. Jesus loved Judas even though He knew Judas would betray Him. Jesus loved Judas the same way He loved the other disciples. His love was not conditional or based upon the behavior of the recipient. If we are to love our enemies, how much more should we love each other as believers in Christ?

What does Jesus command (v. 12)?

How does Jesus define greater love (v. 13)?

When Jesus spoke of laying down one's life for another, He was telling us to love others selflessly. That means putting their needs ahead of our own. We may not have to die physically for those we love, but there are other ways that we may die to our personal needs for their benefit. Stopping to listen, taking a moment to encourage, extending a helping hand – all of these are examples of laying down one's life.

LET'S THINK

Think back over the last week. Were there opportunities that you missed to love someone sacrificially? A phone call you didn't make? A conversation you didn't take time to have? Are there people around you that need financial or material help but you've procrastinated? List practical ways that you "can lay your life down" for a friend.

What must we do to be considered Jesus' friend (v. 14)?

RE-READ VERSE 16

What does it mean to you personally that Jesus chose you?

Most of us know the sting of not be chosen by someone for something. How does being chosen by Jesus cover all sources of rejection?

Many people are lonely and lost, looking for acceptance and unconditional love. Who in your circle of influence would be encouraged and helped to know that Jesus offers His unconditional love? Write their names here and pray for opportunity to share Christ's with them.

What does verse 16 say we are to do because we are chosen by Jesus?

What is the significance of the word "go" to you?

What is "fruit that will last"?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Four

Abiding

ROMANS 5:6-8

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Describe the closest friendship you've experienced.

What characteristics made it strong?

What made it different from casual relationships?

How would you describe your relationship with Jesus? Very close, very distant, or somewhere in between? Explain.

What keeps you from a deeper, more intimate relationship with Jesus?

Jesus is omniscient – He knows everything about you, and He loves you unconditionally. How do these truths encourage you?

How does knowing His unconditional love open the door to a deeper walk with Him?

Earlier, we looked at the story of the vine and the branches. Jesus is the believer's life source. We must remain in Christ and continually nurture a growing relationship with Him that is vibrant and healthy. Our relationship with Jesus is like any other – it takes time.

DEVELOP A HABIT

The first step is to set aside time in your day to spend with the Lord. It helps to make it the same time each day so that you develop a habit. Some people have a favorite place or favorite chair they always go to for their quiet time. Once you've committed to spend time with Him, what do you do? Keep it simple.

Sit quietly and prepare to listen. This is called waiting on God. It simply means you have settled down and are quietly, expectantly listening. Gear down, calm down.

Pray. Start with a short prayer asking God to be with you during your quiet time and guide you as you read the Bible.

Read His Word. Choose a portion of the Bible to read. You choose how long – a chapter or a few verses. Read the passage slowly and allow its meaning to sink in. A simple and effective method to use is SOAP.

- S** - Scripture – Read the passage.
- O** - Observe – What is the passage saying?
- A** - Apply – How will you apply what the passage is saying?
- P** - Pray – Pray about what you have learned and what you will do about it.

LET IT SINK IN

The Bible contains many promises of God's love and affirms how much He wants to be in relationship with you. We've read some of them in this study.

Let these truths sink in. Memorize the verses or phrases that are the most meaningful to you. Write them on index cards and sticky notes – put the truth where you will see it!

Talk to Him throughout the day. As you go through your day – driving, working, doing your daily activities – remember to think about Jesus. Pray a short, silent prayer to Him. Tell Him you love Him, ask for help or wisdom, thank Him for small things, or just think about who He is and how much He loves you.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Five

Am I a Godly Friend?

In today's lesson, we will look at a variety of Bible verses and think about them in the context of our friendships. Today is a day for you to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart about the kind of friend you are and the kind of friends you have. Enjoy reading and reflecting on God's Word!

AMOS 3:3

Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?

When two people walk together as friends, they do not need to agree with each other about everything. But they must want to keep each other company on the journey, and they must be headed in the same direction! It sounds so simple, but have you ever found yourself trying to keep a friendship alive with someone who really gets on your last nerve? Or with someone whose life goals and dreams are on an entirely different trajectory than yours? It's painful for everyone.

Are you currently investing time in friendships with women you enjoy and who are equally committed to the relationship? If not, what will you do now?

Are your closest, most intimate, friendships with other Christian women who hold to the same moral and spiritual beliefs as you? If not, what is God prompting you to do?

Has God recently brought new people around with whom you could nurture a friendship?

Ask yourself the following questions in regard to your relationship with one of your friends. Don't just answer a simple yes or no. Personally reflect on what the passage is teaching and how you are applying it in your life. Look for areas where you are a good, godly friend. Look for areas where you could improve. Write an action you feel prompted to make in response to each question.

JOHN 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Is your love for your friend stronger than it was a few months ago?

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Do you honestly consider your friend's need to be more urgent or important than your own needs?

COLOSSIANS 3:13

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Do you graciously and quickly offer forgiveness to your friend when she offends you?

HEBREWS 3:13

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Do you lovingly challenge your friend in a positive way to live a pure, holy, and obedient life?

EPHESIANS 6:18

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

How often do you pray for your friend?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.



Ruth & Naomi – Unlikely Friends –

This week, we will dive into the story of Ruth and Naomi in the Old Testament. It's an inspiring story of friendship and hope set in the midst of loneliness, loss, and hard times.

- It's an encouraging story for people who wonder where God is when tragedy after tragedy threatens their faith.
- It's a reassuring story for people who wonder whether a life of integrity can be maintained during hard times and if it's worth it.
- And it's a heartwarming story for people who can't imagine that anything great could ever come of their ordinary lives.

Day One

An Intergenerational Friendship (Part 1)

The book of Ruth tells us about the beautiful relationship shared between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. They are family, yes. But they are also friends. Ruth and Naomi could not have been more different, and yet they shared many similarities.

READ RUTH 1 AND 2

Ruth was young; Naomi, her mother-in-law, was older. Ruth was from Moab, a nation known for hostile relations with Israel; Naomi was from Bethlehem in Judah. Ruth's culture worshiped false gods; Naomi worshiped Yahweh, the One True God.

Despite their differences, they had many things in common. Each was widowed. They were living during a dark and violent time in a famine-stricken land. Each had faith in God. And each found grace under His sovereign, protective care.

Reading their story, we see Naomi as tired and bitter, temporarily pressed down by her difficult circumstances. We see Ruth as a strong, young woman of integrity ready to do whatever was necessary to care for Naomi and herself.

In the following verses, what does each woman say about God?

Naomi (1:20-21, 2:20)

Ruth (1:16-18)

What do you learn about their faith?

How did their belief in God affect their actions toward each other?

How did Naomi's faith spill over to Ruth? Consider that Ruth may not have learned about God without knowing Naomi.

We can all agree that life is sometimes hard. Our problems come in all sizes. From the common challenges of day-to-day living – balancing the budget, managing the kids' sports schedules, keeping the home and car in working order – to more difficult struggles like job stability, elder care, a personal health crisis, or a child that rebels. No one is immune. And no one is exempt from experiencing the tragedy of losing loved ones. Life, at times, is unbearably difficult.

Rising above their differences in age and background, the story of Ruth and Naomi shows us the importance of loyal friends during hard times. Ruth is a striking example of godly friendship to a person who is in pain. She steadfastly demonstrates kindness, love, and loyalty to Naomi even though she was suffering too. Naomi continually extends grace, love, and kindness to the young Moabite, Ruth.

Think of a time when you were really hurting and a friend helped you. What did she do? How did it help?

As you consider the people God has placed around you, is there someone undergoing difficult times for whom you can be a loyal and kind friend? Write her name and what you might do to express your friendship.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Two

An Intergenerational Friendship (Part 2)

Today we will continue to look at the friendship of Ruth and Naomi. To refresh your memory – and perhaps see something new – read Ruth 1-2 again.

Ruth and Naomi had each lost their husbands. Widows in the ancient world faced nearly impossible circumstances. They were often destitute, having no means of providing for themselves. They depended on extended family to care for their needs but were often ignored and sometimes taken advantage of.

Ruth and Naomi faced even more hardship because of the culture and times in which they found themselves. Judges 21:25 gives us insight: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit.”

It was a dark time of violence, disobedience, and idolatry. In that day, the people of Israel were in a cycle of perpetual sin. God sent judges to deliver them and prophets to warn them. They were a stubborn, rebellious nation who would not repent.

In the darkest hour, when it seemed as if God were absent, His unseen hand was at work in the lives of Ruth and Naomi. Even when we think God is far from us, He is close and active! God often uses the hardships of life to do a new thing. His unseen hand is working behind the scenes laying the groundwork for joy and security in our life.

What do the following verses tell you about God’s presence in your life? Write the verse or a summary in your own words that helps you remember the principle.

DEUTERONOMY 31:8

JOSHUA 1:9

PSALM 139:7-10

ISAIAH 41:10

MATTHEW 28:20

ROMANS 8:38-39

Mark the verse that is the most meaningful to you personally. Spend a few minutes thinking about the verse and thanking God for His promise.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

The name Naomi comes from the Hebrew word for “pleasant” or “lovely.”

Naomi, although worn down by circumstances, continued to love her daughters-in-law. When she arrives in Bethlehem and is greeted by the women of the town, Naomi calls herself “Mara,” meaning bitter (Ruth 1:20). In saying that she is bitter, Naomi acknowledges her hardship and is honest about the way she feels.

There is a lesson here. Naomi is doing what most of us do when things go badly. We concentrate with laser-like focus on all that’s wrong, and our view becomes very skewed. We tend to exaggerate our hardship. We become so negative in our mindset that we don’t see the good things around us. But there is always something to be thankful for.

It’s important to see that while Naomi was bitter, she didn’t turn her back on God. She did not harden her heart against God, which eventually allowed Ruth’s faith to help rekindle Naomi’s faith. Ruth’s selflessness and strength carried Naomi through a season of sadness and helped her remember God’s unfailing love for each of them.

What blessings of God's provision was Naomi overlooking? (see Ruth 1:6, 18)

Imagine that you have a friend who is struggling with a very difficult situation. How would you encourage her to transparently acknowledge her emotions to God while maintaining a reverent, worshipful attitude?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Three

Naomi's Story

I became friends with Mademoiselle Monique in Madame Bryson's high school French class. I won't say how many years ago that was, but it's been more than a few (she has three grandchildren!). We've stayed friends through college, marriage, children, job change, and relocations! We see each other every year - I'll be visiting her soon in her beloved Texas. Years before I understood Jesus and Christians, she was my friend. She has loved Jesus since she was a little girl and, unbeknownst to me, always prayed for me. She was the responsible friend who was always there to pull me back from doing something foolish. No judgment. No finger pointing. No lectures. She simply offered unconditional love and acceptance. She didn't push anything on me, but she was (and is!) my faithful, loving friend. As I look back over my life, she is one of the key players God used as He was drawing me to Himself. She would totally crack up if she heard me say this...but I'll say it anyway: She has been the perfect friend.

As widows, Naomi and her daughters-in-law were in a desperate situation without men to provide for them. Naomi prepared to return to Bethlehem where the food shortage had ended and she where she had extended family who could help her. She and her daughters-in-law set out on the journey.

Perhaps emotionally and physically exhausted from the tragic events, Naomi suddenly urges the young women to go back to their families rather than go with her to Bethlehem. Although it would mean additional hardship and loneliness for her, she urged Ruth and Orpah to do what was best for them. They were most likely young enough to be able to remarry if they stayed in their country.

READ RUTH 1:8-18

List the ways Naomi affirmed and blessed her daughters-in-law.

List the ways her daughters-in-law expressed their love for her.

List the reasons Naomi had lost hope (v. 11-13).

What reasons does she give for sending the girls back?

What other reasons might there be?

In verse 14, how do the girls again show their love for Naomi?

In the famous passage of verses 15-17, Ruth chooses not to part with Naomi. What evidence do you find in this passage of her love for Naomi? What sacrifices may she be making?

We know that only Ruth stayed and Orpah went back to her home country. We don't know if Orpah was wrong in leaving, but we do know it was God's will for Ruth to stay. Sometimes letting go is God's will for one but not for the other.

Each time we come to a crossroads in a relationship we need to ask God to lead us in knowing what way to go. Often, we go when God wants us to stay and stay when God wants us to leave.

Is there a relationship in your life right now that you are struggling with knowing whether to let go or to keep pursuing?

In what ways can you proactively lean into Jesus to know His will for that relationship? Will you do it?

Despite her pain, Naomi selflessly looked out for Ruth and Orpah. We learn about Naomi's character from her relationship with the young women. She refers to them as "my daughters" (v. 11) rather than "daughters-in-law," suggesting they were very close. They were willing to leave their home, family, and all they knew to stay with her.

Naomi's faith undoubtedly influenced Ruth and Orpah. Even though they were very different in age and cultural background, they developed a loving and tender relationship. The young women must have seen Naomi's faith in God, her integrity, and her kindness throughout the years they knew her.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Four

Ruth's Story

The book of Ruth is a remarkable story of God working in the life of people in a very real and personal way. Ruth was a young widow with no means of providing for herself. She was facing poverty and unspeakable hardship. She came from a culture that worshiped false gods. She was at a point of crisis and needed to make decisions about her future.

God often works in mysterious ways in the lives of the most unlikely people to do the most unimaginable things. Despite how it appears on the surface, God is always working for the good of His people. He sovereignly rules over all things. Sovereign simply means total power. God rules with total power over all people everywhere.

He often allows hard things to happen and when He does, we need to remember the words of Paul writing to the Romans:

READ ROMANS 8:28. FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS.

And we _____ that in _____ things
_____ for the _____ of those
who _____ him, who have been called according to His
_____.

READ RUTH 3 AND 4

As you read, look for things that happened in Ruth's life that ultimately worked for her good even though she may not have understood it at the time. In the space below, write short phrases that will help you remember.

Now that you have the big picture of Ruth's life, let's zoom in on her faith in God.

We don't know all the details of how Ruth turned from the false gods of her culture to Yahweh, but her words to Naomi gives us great insight to her faith and character.

RUTH 1:16-17

Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.

What do you think as you read this heartfelt vow of loyalty? Jot down ideas that came to mind, things that impressed you about Ruth from her words. There is no right or wrong answer here – just your thoughts.

THINK ABOUT RUTH

Circle the words that best describe Ruth:

Loyal Faithful Kind Lazy Selfish

Reflect on Ruth's character and her faith in God. Write out the quality or qualities of Ruth that you most want to emulate in your life

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Five

Hope for the Hopeless

How do we maintain hope in the midst of hopelessness? By focusing on the character of God and His unchanging promises. Our circumstances change, but God doesn't. His Word is faithful and true.

In the height of her pain, Naomi was bitter, and most of us would agree she was not off base to feel that way. But God brought Naomi through her suffering and restored her to a life of joy. It is comforting to know that even in our moments of doubt and weak faith, God is faithful! His love is unconditional and unrelenting!

READ PSALM 119:49-56

Underline the ways the psalmist finds hope.

Remember your word to your servant,
for you have given me hope.
My comfort in my suffering is this:
Your promise preserves my life.
The arrogant mock me unmercifully,
but I do not turn from your law.
I remember, Lord, your ancient laws,
and I find comfort in them.
Indignation grips me because of the wicked,
who have forsaken your law.
Your decrees are the theme of my song
wherever I lodge.
In the night, Lord, I remember your name,
that I may keep your law.
This has been my practice:
I obey your precepts.
Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.
My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life.

What verse or phrase is most meaningful to you?

The book of Psalms is a collection of 150 songs positioned in the middle of the Bible. These cherished songs are a treasure of encouragement and hope for the hurting. The writers of the Psalms expressed their true emotions by pouring their hearts out to God. They asked for His help in their situations and worshiped God as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer.

The Psalms express the full range of human conditions and emotions. Use them as a prayer guide – a way to express your heart to God and receive His love and affirmation for you.

What pain or difficulty are you facing now?

What specific promises of God would help you maintain hope?

Look through the Psalms to find a passage that speaks to your heart.

Consider friends who are facing difficult situations. What Psalm or promise of God can you share to encourage them?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Week Three

Friendship Wisdom

The Bible is full of helpful insight into relationships. We were created for relationship, so God gives us plenty of instruction within the pages of His written Word!

This week, we will look at the best ways to handle sticky situations. What do we do when we have a disagreement or tension in a friendship? How do we resolve conflict in a healthy, affirming way? What's up with our tendency to gossip?

Our words are powerful and can either build up or tear down a friend. Let's invite the Holy Spirit to do a work in our hearts and heads so that what comes out of our mouth is life-giving and God-honoring!

Day One

Iron Sharpens Iron

PROVERBS 27:17

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Women are naturally warm and loving creatures. Our friendships can easily move to a more intimate level when we have friendships in which we feel safe. Intimacy opens the door to vulnerability. Vulnerability opens the door to experience pain. If you get close enough to any person, you will eventually see their flaws.

As imperfect women having friendships with other imperfect women, we are bound to hurt each other's feelings now and then. Sometimes it is a small hurt, and many times the pain is so deep that talking about it years later still causes us to cry.

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3

What problem is the Philippian church facing (v. 2-3)?

How does Paul specifically challenge the women?

What challenges does he give the church?

What proof is there that Euodia and Syntyche were pursuing a relationship with Jesus?

How is it that even people who truly love and are seeking after Christ can cause conflict and pain?

READ ROMANS 3:9-18

What is our natural being?

Where have you seen evidence of this in your own life?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:4

We can comfort others when we have been where they are. Think of a difficult season in your life. What did you need from others?

How did friends help you?

How can your experience help you comfort others?

There are many reasons why pain happens in our life. We are fallen creatures living in a fallen world. We have a very real enemy who opposes God and all who love Him. Regardless of the reason for the pain, there are always lessons to be learned. Often, God uses the pain we experience in relationships to make us more like Him. Don't run away from friendships because you have experienced pain. God desires you to be in community with other like-minded Christians to help sharpen and grow you.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Two

Conflict

PROVERBS 16:28

A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.

PROVERBS 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

One day I was hanging out with a girlfriend, and all our kids were playing together. I had questioned my son about a choice he made, and my friend's daughter thought I was directing it at her. Her feelings were hurt, and she went and cried to her mom. Immediately the mom came and questioned me about it, telling me I made her daughter cry. In that moment I could feel the defensiveness well up. How dare she jump to conclusions before she asked me if I said that? Does she really think I would discipline her child?

READ PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

What are some joys of being united with Christ (v. 1)?

Based on this, what challenge does Paul give (v. 2)?

What keys to overcoming conflict are given (v. 3)?

Think about a conflict in your life that was resolved or needs resolving. What difference could these keys make?

In the moment, I knew my friend loved me and I loved my friend. While my sinful nature wanted to prove a point and show her how wrong she was to accuse me of something, I did not do it. I knew that wouldn't help tame down mama bear (those of you who are moms know we have all let the mama bear come out at times!). So I said "Can we talk through this? I am so sorry your daughter thought that was directed at her, but I was actually talking to my son."

We talked through it and each expressed our feelings in a healthy way. I went one step further and apologized to her daughter. I told her that I was sorry that she felt sad about what was said and made sure she knew it wasn't directed at her. I could see from her perspective how it appeared that way.

The goal in that moment wasn't to be right. The goal was restoring that relationship with my friend. If the latter is your goal you will respond differently.

What challenge was given in verse 4?

How might this help you work through conflict?

Describe the attitude of Jesus (v. 5-11).

In every conflict you face, you must begin with personal repentance. If you have a conflict in your life right now, ask yourself:

How have I contributed to this problem?

What could I repent of?

What could I humbly confess with no excuses?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Three

Choose Wisely

PROVERBS 13:20

He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

When I met friend Liesl for the first time, I felt that “kindred-ness of spirit” immediately. Within 15 minutes of meeting her I was telling her some very personal stuff about me. She has a way with people where people just instantly trust her. I walked away from the conversation surprised at how much I opened up in that short amount of time. I thought “Wow, I hope I don’t freak her out.” Liesl was a seasonal friend, meaning that she was in my life for a short period of time. Looking back at that friendship, I see how God knit our hearts together for a specific time and purpose. During a trial that Liesl went through, I was able to play a part in encouraging her through it. Had we not had that first moment together where we felt the Spirit moving us toward each other, and responded to it, we might have missed out on a blessing of ministering to each other.

God often makes it known when you first meet someone that you are going to be friends. We feel drawn to a person in a special way. As you feel this in your heart, realize that God might be in it. Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit may help you seize God-ordained friendships you might have otherwise missed.

Today, we will look at two different friendships in the Bible: Mary and Elizabeth, and David and Jonathan. We will see how Mary saw that God was giving her a friend in Elizabeth, so she hurried to go see her. It is also interesting to notice how Jonathan bonded to David in their first encounter. God knew the trials the future held for David, so He provided the perfect support through a friendship with Jonathan.

When we were kids, we chose friends on the basis of appearance and popularity. It is time to put childish ways aside and choose instead on the basis of God’s leading of His Word and the Spirit.

What principle in Proverbs 13:20 can help guide you when choosing friends?

1 CORINTHIANS 15:33

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”

What does this passage teach us about what to look for in a friend?

Oftentimes we are drawn to other believers based on their walk with the Lord. Liesl showed me within 15 minutes of our first encounter how much she loved Jesus.

Let’s dive into God’s Word to look at examples of godly friendships. Their stories will help us discover what character qualities to look for in friendships.

READ 1 SAMUEL 17:33-37

David was Ruth’s grandson, and his story follows the book of Ruth in 1 Samuel. When Jonathan met David, he was still holding Goliath’s head! Describe what Jonathan knew about David in this passage.

READ LUKE 1:5-7

Mary was a descendant of David and was also Elizabeth’s relative. What was Elizabeth’s reputation according to this passage?

How important is godliness to you in choosing your closest friends?

What do you look for in the friends you are closest to?

Can you remember a time when you sensed God was giving you the gift of a friend? What do you remember about when you first met that makes you think God was involved?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Four

Friends Take Notice

PROVERBS 17:17

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

My mother-in-law is a major prayer warrior. I swear the blessings of God on my life have come upon me in abundance because of the prayers of my mother-in-law. Her prayers also help me never drift too far away from Jesus. One of the things she is so good at is remembering the small details of my life. I swear she has a "Beckie journal," where she writes down all of the important things I say. Weeks will go by and she will ask me about a situation I had long-forgotten about. If I have a doctor's appointment, she will call me within hours and ask how it went. The fact that she takes notice of the small things is a big thing to me. She constantly makes me feel valued, special, and loved.

READ RUTH 2

Re-read verses 19-22. It starts with Ruth's arms full of grain. What question does Naomi ask?

How does this show she is taking notice of the things in Ruth's life?

How does Ruth answer in verse 19b?

What are some specific ways a friend shows you she is taking notice of the things in your life and the things you say?

How good are you at taking notice of the things that are going on in your friends' lives? Not your kids' lives. Not your spouse's or family's lives. But your friends'. Our friendships are a choice, and choosing to notice them is a huge intimacy builder.

Would your friends say of you “_____ [your name] always goes above and beyond caring for me, because she takes notice of the little things.”?

In what ways can you improve noticing the little things in the lives of your friends?

This may seem like an unimportant detail of friendship, but it's one that builds relationships fast. Whenever you put someone's needs before your own, you build trust and intimacy.

Boaz was a “kinsman redeemer” who had a special responsibility to Naomi. What do you think Naomi was feeling in response to Ruth telling her it was Boaz?

Naomi was excited. She sensed God was doing a work! When women watch God at work in each other's lives, we have the chance to share in each other's joy. It is a powerful thing!

Do you have a woman in your life who blesses you by paying attention to your life, drawing you out, asking questions, and being enthusiastic about God's work in your life? Take a moment and thank God for her.

What do women say in conversations that bless you?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Five

Gossip

PROVERBS 18:8

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.

We are all weak. We are all prone to relational idolatry, which leads to jealousy, possessiveness, and gossip – for gossip springs from idolatry. In Proverbs 18:8, Solomon tells us gossip is like a “choice morsel,” for when we gossip, there is often laughter, the thrill of connection, and the fleeting feeling of superiority. But then those “choice morsels” turn to gravel in our mouths, as the Holy Spirit brings awareness that we have wounded another and disappointed God.

I had an experience with a dear friend, Amy. I knew something about what was going on in her life. And while I didn't tell everything in its entirety, I told enough to Lisa that she was able to put two and two together and figure out the rest of the story. Lisa was the type of person who thrived on being the first to know something about the friends in her life. So she went back to Amy to “see how she was doing” and mentioned that I said she was struggling. Amy was devastated that I betrayed her trust and confronted me right away. Talk about feeling gravel in my mouth! I was so brokenhearted that I had betrayed her, and I vowed to her that I would do whatever it took to restore that relationship. For many months, the trust was broken, and I had to work hard to repair it. All because gossip had led me astray and caused a rift between us.

READ EPHESIANS 5

Pay close attention to verse 5. What challenge does Paul give?

How might this challenge change your day?

What should there not even be a hint of (v. 3)? Why?

What should replace foolish talk (v. 4)? And how would this change your conversations?

Ultimately, what is the sin of immorality and greed (v. 5)?

What warning comes with this? Why do you think there is need for such warning?

What characteristics are given in how we should live? What are descriptions of this life (v. 8-11)?

Is there any area of gossip in your life?

In what circumstances do you struggle most with gossip?

How can you turn from this and pursue holiness?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.



Friendship Dynamics

Learning how to fully enjoy our friendships while holding loosely so that God can direct the relationship to His purpose is important. This week we will consider the issue of letting go of friendships. Every friendship that we enter into will not last forever. Some are just for a season in time.

The friendship between Jonathan and David is a touching biblical example that will help us when it is time to let go. We will also look at how our friendships should be pushing us toward Jesus.

Are you encouraging your friends to move on to maturity in their faith? Do they faithfully point you to Him when you need encouragement?

Day One

Mentoring Relationships

The word “mentor” doesn’t actually appear in the Bible, but the concept of mentoring is very biblical. Mentor is a word we are all familiar with. You may have had someone coach you in your professional career, or perhaps you have had a spiritual mentor – someone who came alongside to nurture you in the faith. A mentoring relationship is a friendship with a distinct purpose. The mentor shares wisdom from life experience with her friend to encourage her to spiritual maturity and future success while maneuvering the twists and turns of life.

Today we will look at Elijah, the Old Testament prophet, and the young man he mentored in ministry, Elisha. Elijah was one of many prophets God sent to Israel and Judah to confront the people regarding their sin and to call them back to God. Elijah devoted himself wholeheartedly to God and His calling. Elijah possessed a bold personality and performed dramatic miracles – his face-off with the priests of Baal is a great story (1 Kings 18:16-39). But the greatest aspect of Elijah’s life; it was the reality of his strong relationship with God.

Elisha was a disciple of the great prophet Elijah. The Bible does not go into detail about their personal relationship, but surely they became friends. 1 Kings 19:19-21 records Elijah wrapping his cloak around Elisha, which was understood as a symbolic gesture, anointing Elisha as his successor. As the two men worked shoulder-to-shoulder for many years, Elisha was molded and shaped by Elijah to be a great servant of God.

READ 1 KINGS 18:16-39 AND 2 KINGS 2:1-17

Have you been in a mentoring relationship? If so, did you mentor someone or were you mentored?

What characteristics would a good mentor have?

If you were mentoring someone, what attitude or characteristics would you look for?

How could a mentoring relationship blossom into a meaningful friendship?

What role does trust and respect play in the success of a mentoring friendship?

Titus 2 reveals God’s desire for women to train other women to live godly lives. Read and think about this passage.

READ TITUS 2:3-5

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

List the two positive qualities that mentors (older women) should have. What do you think each quality means?

List the two negative habits a mentor should not have. Why should these things be avoided?

What does the mentor urge the younger women to do?

Beyond using words, how does a mentor teach these things?

What does it mean to be self-controlled and pure?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Two

Letting Go

One challenge of relationships is discerning when it is time to let go. Some of our friendships are only meant for a season of time. Yet as women, we sometimes hold so tightly to those friendships that we bring undue pain in our life. Sometimes God brings friends into your life for a time to help encourage, stretch, or comfort you.

The story of Jonathan and David in 1 Samuel is a poignant picture of letting go. They were loyal and committed friends, but circumstances around them changed. Perhaps you have experienced a sudden job transfer or the need to move to a new community. Saying goodbye to friends is so hard.

Though parting may be hard and sorrow may be deep, it is never wasted sadness when friendships change. Don't shrink back from the sadness, but seize each opportunity of letting go and saying goodbye. Choose to throw yourself into new friendships. Don't let the fear of losing a friendship deprive you of the gift of friendship! Parting is hard, but it is sweet sorrow.

When King Saul was trying to kill David, Jonathan couldn't believe his own father would be so evil. David tried to convince Jonathan of his need for protection. Eventually, Jonathan listened to David's insistent plea for help and agreed to a test that would reveal Saul's motives. In 1 Samuel 20:20-33, Saul flunked the "pure motive" test, and Jonathan helped David flee to safety. Before David left, there was a very emotional parting scene, revealing the bond of friendship shared between the two men.

READ 1 SAMUEL 20:32-42

Why was Jonathan so sorrowful (v. 32-34)?

What emotions did Jonathan feel (v. 41)?

What do you think Shakespeare meant when he said: “Parting is such sweet sorrow.”?

How do you see this in the David and Jonathan’s parting scene?

What does Jonathan do to help David (v. 42)?

I remember when I moved from Washington to Indiana. My very best friend Shannon had just gone through a major life change. God had brought her through the infidelity of her husband. It was a beautiful picture of God’s redemptive love, and it was amazing to watch as God put the pieces of their marriage back together.

Our friendship was a key component during that rough patch. I prayed with her, encouraged her, and even told her to “put on her big girl panties” when she needed to hear it. The day we moved from Washington was emotional on so many levels for Tim and me, but saying goodbye to Shannon was the hardest. With nearly half a country between us, we both knew seeing each other, even occasionally, would prove to be difficult. As I left for the airport that day, she clung to me and we both wept. She said, “What will I do without you?” I said, “You will be fine, you are stronger than you think you are, and He is greater than you can see right now.”

Can you remember a goodbye scene that ministered to you personally as the years have gone by? Share something about it.

Sometimes an abrupt tragedy occurs. We do not know ahead of time that we will lose someone we love.

Are there friends in your life today to whom you should express your love in case that happens?

How can you seize opportunities in the near future to communicate how much they meant to you?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Three

Holding too Tightly

Many women fear isolation. Our sense of worth is often grounded in the ability to make and maintain relationships. When men attempt suicide, it is often because of a loss of status, a lost income, job, or reputation. When women attempt suicide, it is usually because of failures involving lovers, family, or friends. What this reveals about us is that we are highly relational and often tend to worship people instead of the One True God.

Just as Solomon put his trust in his wealth and position, we often put our trust in people. As amazing as our loved ones may be, they will never take the place of God. Friends can move away, betray us, or die. We need God to gently pry our fingers away from holding too tightly to people.

READ JEREMIAH 17:5-13

What warning is given (v. 5)?

What two things do people do that can ruin them (v. 5)?

How is this person described (v. 6)?

What characteristics are given about the one who is blessed (v. 7)?

What descriptive words are given about this person (v. 8)?

What does verse 9 say about our hearts?

We must hold each relationship in our life loosely and not see them as our source of security. People cannot be what only God can be. They will, unlike God, let us down because they have a sin nature. If we are shocked when they do let us down, it's because we have made them into gods.

God tells us not to put our trust in people, not because He is unkind, but because He cares so deeply for us. He wants what is best for us, and therefore, He exhorts us to put our roots down deeply into Him and Him alone.

RE-READ JEREMIAH 17:5-13

Who does understand us (v. 10)?

What can we learn from this?

What should be our ultimate source of joy, and why (v. 12-13)?

Who are you holding too tightly? How can you let go and allow God to fill that void?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Four

Carry Her Mat

Do you have a girl squad? A team of friends you can count on to be there for you? Sometimes we need the girl squad to celebrate the sweetness of life, moments of accomplishment, success, and dreams coming true! Other times, we need the team to carry us when life has gotten so hard that we can barely breathe. Ever been there?

You thought everything was perfect. Well, not perfect, but really, really good. Go to church. Pray. Read your Bible every morning. Put some Scripture in frames on the walls. Isn't that nice? We are so blessed.

And then, the bottom drops out. You wake up to find out that your nearly perfect child has _____. What?! How can that be? You know better than this! How could you?! Then, as emotions settle down, guilt rushes in. What did I do wrong? How did I fail him/her?

You begin to go through the motions of damage control. You love your nearly perfect child, and so you do everything you possibly can to help. You can't sleep at night, so you sleep late in the morning, and you drift from quiet time with God. You pray and nothing seems to happen, so your prayer life begins to wane. You don't want to see people and answer their questions, so you quit going to small group and church. You isolate yourself. You wonder why God let this happen. And you drift. You become paralyzed, emotionally and spiritually.

READ MARK 2:1-12

Paralysis comes in many forms – not just physical. We can become emotionally paralyzed when the pain is so great that we practically shut down. We can become spiritually paralyzed when we think the problem has become bigger than our God. We can be paralyzed by addiction, self-pity, blame, fear, anxiety, grief, and shame.

Regardless of the cause, the result is an inability to think, move, or pray. We simply cannot get ourselves to the One who can help. This is when we need the girl squad: a team of trusted, godly, spiritually strong friends to pick up a corner of our mat and carry us to the Savior.

Read verses 1-4 again. Imagine the scene. Let the details form a picture in your mind. What did the friends of the paralytic do (v. 3-4)? Make a list of their actions.

What did the paralytic do?

Describe the faith of the friends. What was the reason for their determination and persistence?

What do we know of the faith of the paralytic?

How does the story end for the paralytic (v. 11-12)?

Spend some time imagining yourself as the paralytic – unable to move. Read the story again, letting each detail add to your understanding of the paralytic. Describe the experience from his perspective.

How did the faith of the friends affect him?

Think of a time when you were the paralytic on the mat in need of help. Who took up a corner of your mat?

What was your initial response: cooperation or resistance?

What was the final outcome?

What lesson does this lesson teach you about taking up the corner of the mat for a friend in dire need?

True, God-honoring friendship requires discernment and tact. It's a balancing act between stepping in to help and letting your friend work it out. It means choosing the right time to help or waiting while God continues to work in the situation. It's a delicate balance between forcing your opinion and your solutions on your friend or letting her find her own answer. Always pray for the Spirit's leading and always be ready to carry her mat.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Five

Pushing Each Other Toward Jesus

Many times in our relationships with others, life happens. Does that happen in any of your relationships? People get disappointed, children make mistakes, family members die, jobs change, and marriage gets hard. Life is messy. In friendships, God calls us to be beacons of light to show our friends Jesus.

My friend Amanda went through a very messy divorce. It was very painful to watch. She was constantly calling me begging for encouragement. I knew Amanda's relationship with Jesus was shaky. I also knew the only way she would survive this painful divorce was with Jesus. So I constantly pushed her towards Him. I shared verses and biblical principles with her in an attempt for her to rely on Jesus. I knew I had nothing to offer her but Jesus.

Amanda made it out on the other side, but not without some major battle scars. And her relationship with Jesus is so precious now. She jokes to this day about our friendship during that time and always describes me as a friend who "led her to the water but wouldn't help her drink." I laughed when she said that, but I am also grateful. Jesus is the Living Water, and He got her to drink. Our jobs as godly friends is to lead our friends to the trough and let Jesus help them drink.

READ EPHESIANS 5:8-20

How are we to live (v. 8)?

What helps us maintain a humble, contrite attitude towards someone in sin (v. 8)?

A principle of God is that as we choose the light, it grows stronger in us. How can you see this in the quotation in verse 14?

How many times is “light” or “darkness” used in this short passage?

What are examples of deeds of light?

What are examples of deeds of darkness?

What does light do to the darkness?

Explain what this means about a child of God as she lives out her faith in front of those around her.

What warning occurs in verse 15?

What are we exhorted to do in verse 16?

Practically speaking, how will you obey both verse 15 and 16?

What is the Holy Spirit bringing to mind?

What is the secret to helping one another find strength in God (v. 18)?

How can one be “filled with the Spirit”?

Describe some of the ways to help one another find strength in God (v. 19). Have you experienced this with other believers?

What instruction is repeated in verse 20?

How can you be a better friend by pushing people towards Jesus?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Week Five

Friendships are a Gift

As our study draws to a close, we will tackle a few other issues that are vitally important to healthy, God-honoring, biblical friendships. As with any human relationship, the ability to forgive is essential. We will look at a number of passages that will help us recognize our need to extend and receive forgiveness.

Friends who love each other will speak up if one is drifting away from God's perfect and best for their life. Holding a friend accountable to godly living isn't easy, but we can equip ourselves for the task by looking at what God has to say through His Word.

Finally, I hope we all agree that godly friendships are worth the pursuit. We will end our study by considering beautiful prayers authored by the apostle Paul that will help guide your prayers for your friends.

Day One

Job and His Friends

For the past four weeks, we've been looking at positive examples in the Bible of friendship. There is a person in the Bible for whom friends are a prominent part of his story. His name is Job.

Earlier in our study we looked at the life of Naomi. She has often been called the "female Job," because she suffered a great deal. No one in Scripture endured more loss in his lifetime than Job. When Job became afflicted, his friends came to help him. You can decide for yourself whether they were helpful or not. Either way you look at it, there are lessons for us in Job's story.

Job was a wealthy and respected man. He lost all of his possessions, his family, and then his health. Job did not understand why so many tragedies were assaulting him.

SCAN JOB CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Job trusted God even though he was experiencing great pain.

LOOK UP JOB 13:15 AND WRITE IT HERE.

Job trusted God. When he lost his possessions, he trusted God. When he lost his family and was consumed with grief, he trusted God. And when his health was afflicted with unbearable physical pain, he continued to trust God. Job demonstrated a tenacious, rigorous faith in the Lord.

What is your reaction when hard or unfair things happen in your life?

Objectively consider how your level of trust in God is impacted by your circumstances. How does Job's example encourage you?

READ JOB 42:10

Job's friends were loyal but did not always provide the best advice.

What did Job do?

What happened next?

Job extended grace to his friends. He forgave them for their shortcomings and prayed for them. Only after he had prayed for his friends did the Lord bless him.

How does this encourage you?

While going through her difficulty, Naomi changed her name to Mara, meaning "bitter." Similarly, Job at times complained about his hardship. Explain how a person can have full trust in God and yet honestly acknowledge their sorrow.

What do you most value in friends and mentors: artificial happiness or authentic honesty?

Reflect on when you have been artificial to your friends. Why did you not share your true emotions?

Think of friends or mentors who have been authentic in acknowledging their struggles. How did their transparency help you?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Two

Forgiving Friends

Why is it so hard to forgive a friend when they have sinned against us? It seems the closer we are to someone and the more we have trusted them, the more difficult it can be to forgive.

Look up the following verses on forgiveness and write them in the spaces below.

ROMANS 12:14

EPHESIANS 4:31

1 PETER 3:9

The biggest reason we should readily forgive our friends who hurt us is that Jesus has forgiven us.

WRITE OUT ROMANS 5:8

Relationships give us ample opportunity to practice forgiveness, and Jesus taught about it frequently. Read the passage on the following page to identify the four steps Jesus gave for dealing with someone who sins against us. Notice that this is a guideline for handling offenses between two Christians.

MATTHEW 18:15-17

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

List the four steps of reconciliation from this passage:

1. (v. 15):
2. (v. 16):
3. (v. 16):
4. (v. 17):

What makes each of these steps difficult?

Why is the first step the most important? Why must it be done before the others?

Each of us has talked about a problem with other people before confronting the person who hurt us. What problems occur when we don't approach the person privately first?

When you are the one who has hurt or offended someone, how important is it to you that the friend come to you first?

In Matthew 18:15, Jesus says the goal of reconciliation is to win your brother or sister over. How could these steps help a person not wander from God?

Think about a person you have had a hard time forgiving. Pray, thanking God that He has forgiven you, and ask forgiveness for not forgiving your friend. Ask for the Holy Spirit's help in forgiving the person as you reflect on today's Bible verses.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Three

Accountability with Friends

Cindy and I have been friends for over 10 years. Recently, as we shared a lunch of sushi and miso soup, she looked at me and said, "I think we will be friends for life!" "Absolutely!" I said. And then we made a promise: we vowed to always speak truth to each other. I gave her permission to call me out if she ever saw me veering from God's standard. And she insisted I do the same. It's on the table now: we will boldly, without hesitation, speak truth to each other without fear of hurting the friendship. I've always counted on her to be honest with me, but there is something about looking your friend in the eyes and saying, "I'm counting on you to hold me accountable."

GALATIANS 6:1-5

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load.

As Christians, God wants us to live life in community. The Bible often talks about encouraging and admonishing one another in the faith, so that each of us grows up to maturity in our faith. We need people around us who love us and want God's best in our lives. Sometimes, friends can see things in our lives that we do not objectively see.

What does Paul mean in Galatians 6:1, when he says, "you who live by the Spirit..."?

Before approaching someone about sin, why is it important to examine yourself first?

How does this help you approach in humility?

What role should prayer play in holding a friend accountable?

What attitude should we have as we talk to a friend about a sin in their life (v. 1)?

What words of warning are given (v. 1-5)?

Why do you think we must be careful when we are trying to help someone else with their sin?

READ 2 TIMOTHY 3:16. FILL IN THE MISSING WORDS.

_____ is inspired by God and profitable (used) for _____, for _____, for _____, and for _____ in _____.

The Bible is our guidebook for life. It reveals God's standard for our behavior and helps us see our true nature. Scripture reveals our thinking, our attitude, our character, and our flaws.

One of the most loving things we can do is to gently warn a friend who is headed in the wrong direction. It's a hard conversation to have, but it's necessary if you really care.

Does this mean we correct every wrong? No. But when we see a friend who is a believer in major or persistent sin, we must gently and humbly help them get back on path.

TRUE OR FALSE

Mark true or false beside each guideline that would be helpful as you correct someone.

- _____ Practice humility. Examine your own heart first.
- _____ Beat around the bush. Don't be honest and clear.
- _____ Be judgmental and make big assumptions.
- _____ Approach with questions of concern and observations.
- _____ Use reminders from God's Word.
- _____ Speak privately to the person. Don't initially involve others.
- _____ Make your point, but don't keep repeating it.
- _____ Express love and affirm positive attributes of the person.
- _____ Express willingness to be with the person through the process of making change.
- _____ Be patient and pray - change doesn't happen quickly.

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Four

Praying for Friends

It's 6:30 am. I've taken a few sips of morning coffee. My eyes are open, but I am not awake. My mind is slowly rebooting and I remember the insane day I have ahead of me. How can any one person possibly get it all done? My phone dings – I have a text. It's Kim. I knew it would be from her. Kim is my faithful praying friend. She remembers to pray for things that I've already forgotten! I smile at her emojis and the reminder that she is praying for me. She had remembered my to-do list with all of its details, and she was praying me through my day before I even got started! Kim has taught me about really listening to a friend and remembering to set aside time each morning to pray. I value her friendship and I covet her prayers.

We are drawing close to the end of this study on friendships. We've looked into God's Word to see what He has said regarding our relationships. There is one vital piece that we will cover today: prayer.

True friendship, when it follows the teaching of the Bible, will be mutually edifying. Each friend will nurture the other to grow to full maturity in Christ. The apostle Paul was a great friend. We can learn a great deal from his prayers for his friends.

For today's lesson on prayer, please...pray. Read each of the following passages. Sit quietly and think about Paul's prayer. Let God speak to your heart. Write down any thoughts you have in the space that follows. Perhaps a certain friend or situation will come to mind. Write down what you feel God is leading you to do. Use the passages and your thoughts to guide your prayer today.

EPHESIANS 1:15-19

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.

My thoughts...

EPHESIANS 3:14-19

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

My thoughts...

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

My thoughts...

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

My thoughts...

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Day Five

Friends – A Gift Worth Pursuing

When I was a young girl, I had a friend named Jennifer. Jennifer wasn't what you would call "cool" by elementary girl standards. She was a bit frumpy, with thick glasses and uneven pigtails. But Jennifer loved me. She was the most faithful friend during my elementary years. She laughed with me and cried with me. She bore my deepest secrets, and never once, in all our years of friendship, did she ever tell a single one of my secrets. We even had a secret language that we could speak fluently to each other. She let me borrow her Strawberry Shortcake dolls, because my parents wouldn't buy them for me. We wrote each other notes and rode bikes to each other's houses.

Back then I didn't know Jesus, but what I do know is Jennifer was a gift to me in my young years, teaching me faithfulness, unconditional love, and trust. I needed her as I went through some very difficult things in my childhood.

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

Underline the benefits of a friend and list them below.

Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.
Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Based on this Ecclesiastes passage, what significance does the writer see in friendships?

How does having God at the center of the relationship make for a better friendship?

Earlier in the same chapter, the writer expresses a negative outlook on life. He speaks of hard work and loneliness. He summarizes all of life as “meaningless!” Many people today live with a similar outlook. How do healthy relationships help us from falling into such despair?

When God gives you a gift, He expects you to enjoy it to its fullest. Friendship is a gift. And God-honoring friendships build you up, push you towards Christ, and allow you to experience intimacy with another woman through prayer, accountability, and trust.

Think back over your friendship history. On a scale of 1-10 (1 is not so great and 10 is awesome), how would you rate yourself as a friend?

What patterns do you see in your relationships?

In what ways have your friendships (past or present) given you strength, comfort, and love?

In what ways have your friendships (past or present) hurt you?

How have your friendship successes or disasters shaped the way you approach new relationships?

Think of a time when you were struggling and a friend demonstrated her love to you. What did she do, and how did that make you feel?

REFLECT

What has the Holy Spirit impressed upon you as you studied today?

What is God asking you to do?

Write a prayer to God reflecting what you have learned.

Additional Notes



GRACE
FELLOWSHIP