

Small Group Discussion Guide

The Gift of Friendship: For the week of June 26 - July 2, 2022

Main Thought and Scriptures:

(Break into groups of 3-5 to discuss. 50 minutes)

In this broken world, we need a revolution of biblical friendships. The gift of friendship can offer hope and healing to many amid life's challenges and the mental health epidemic causing pain and violence worldwide. Scripture discusses the importance of biblical friendships.

“Again, I saw vanity under the sun: ⁸one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, ‘For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?’ This also is vanity and an unhappy business. ⁹Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! ¹¹Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹²And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 ESV)

King Solomon, who had it all, asserts three things:

- Having it all is meaningless without meaningful relationships.
- Two or three quality relationships are essential in times of difficulty and adversity.
- While family is important, scripture emphasizes the importance of friendship and gives us several important truths.

Truth 1: True friends are few and stay close while acquaintances are many and remain distant.

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” (Proverbs 18:24 ESV)

- Sometimes, "friends" are more like good companions or acquaintances.
- There are degrees of friendship; seasons of life can alter the degree of closeness.
- Close friends tend to be like glue: *“...there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*

Truth 2: We form friendships through consistent connection.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” (Proverbs 17:17 ESV)

This refers to all times: friends are available when things are tough.

- Potential friendships begin through usefulness: what we need from one another.
- Real friendships don't stay there and treat you only as a means to an end.

Truth 3: We deepen friendships through sensitive truth-telling and encouraging counsel.

"Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend..."

(Proverbs 27:5-6 ESV)

"Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel." (Proverbs 27:9 ESV)

- This blends sensitive correction with enlightening, encouraging counsel: both/and not either-or.
- We are usually good with counsel but not as good with correction.
- When we withhold important truth from a friend, self-love rules over God's love.
- We are more concerned about the pain we will feel than the greater pain they could experience.

Truth 4: We preserve friendships by respecting boundaries.

"Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor's house, lest he have his fill of you and hate you."

(Proverbs 25:17 ESV)

- Discern and respect limits on their time, the load they are carrying, and the energy they possess.

Truth 5: True friends are sacrificial.

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide..." (John 15:13-16 ESV)

- Deepest friendships are sacrificial, preferring the other over oneself. Jesus laid down his life.
- The Lord has chosen us and wants to choose others through us. Will we choose him? Will we lead others to him?

Discussion Questions:

(Select the questions that best apply)

- As you reflect on the weekend sermon and the main thoughts and scriptures above, what is the Lord highlighting to you and why?
- How is God challenging you to be a friend to someone? What practical steps can you take to be a godly friend to them?

Prayer:

(Partner up to pray for one another. 10 minutes)

- Pray for one another to be a godly friend to someone. Pray that God will use us to lead them to Jesus.