



DISCUSSION STARTER: What has been the biggest blessing you've experienced through a past friendship and why does that stick out in your mind even today?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: We were created to experience life in a small community of close friends. The Scriptures clearly call us to pursue close friendships. The friendship of fellow Christians empowers us to grow and advance God's mission in ways that would be impossible for us alone. To say it differently, God created us in such a way that life is not fully experienced if it's not shared with close friends.

Understanding

- **Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 & Proverbs 17:17; 27:6, 9, 17.** What does the biblical picture of friendship look like? What are some spiritual and practical benefits that come from those friendships?
- **Read Proverbs 13:20 and 1 Corinthians 15:33.** What are some of the effects that can come from choosing friends unwisely?
 - **Tell of a time when you shared the gospel with a person or invited them to Sojourn, but their friends influenced this person not to believe or not go. This person's friends were unwise and kept him/her from believing or hearing the gospel.**
- What do we learn about God and his character from the biblical emphasis on friendship? How has friendship been shown to us and given to us through Jesus (i.e. John 15:13-16; Romans 5:11)?

Application

- Think about the circle of friends you have right now (or the lack thereof). Which godly and/or ungodly attributes characterize your friendships? How deeply do you truly allow your friends into your life?
 - **As you reflect and answer this question, remember that mission and service is to take place together amongst friends. It can be hard to be on the front lines of mission alone. Remember that a cord of three strands is not easily broken. Perhaps a key to mobilizing your group is to form deeper, more biblical friendships.**
- Think about yourself as a friend to others. Are you the type of person who is quick to listen or quick to speak? Have you lovingly confronted friends about sin in their lives or have you been too afraid to speak hard truths? Do you stay close to a friend so that you know when they're in need or are you distant?
 - **Lead by being honest. Celebrate where you have been faithful and confess your sin and failure where you need to. Perhaps you need to confess to your group for not being there for them in their time of need or for not confronting them in love.**
 - **If your group has adopted a family in your neighborhood, take a moment to reflect on your group's friendship toward that family.**

Analysis

- If you're a person who has many shallow friends but no close ones, why do you hide from deeper relationships with others? If you have very few friends or you fear social contact, what are you so afraid of? If you react poorly when a friend rebukes you in love, why are you unable to hear criticism that you know deep down to be true?
- As a friend, if you give quick or ill-informed counsel, what does that reveal about your heart? If you've never had the courage to speak the truth in love to a friend, what do you fear more than God? When a friend is in need and you bail on them, what does that say about your kingdom priorities?

Evaluation (i.e. Repentance and Renewed Faith)

- Take a look at the landscape of your current friendships. Where do you need to drop friends that are harming your soul and where do you need to deepen relationships that are good for your soul? Do you have friends to whom you need to confess your sinful neglect of them or grudges against them for the past? How can you fight in faith to love them as Jesus loves them?
 - **Share about a coworker who you will seek to befriend as a result of this message.**
- In your community groups, do you seek after deeper relationships for the sake of holiness? Or do you make a show of holiness, keeping things at surface level when in reality you're crumbling away inside?

Do you sinfully think that you don't need the help of others because you can do it all "on your own?"

Where can you pursue humility with your group by admitting your need for help from others?

- Be open about where you need any help. Some of you are carrying heavy burdens as you serve your neighbors and the poor by yourselves. Some of you need to be encouraged and reminded of God's grace, as you grow weary of doing good. Being open about where you need help will allow your group to be your friend!

PRAYING THE MISSION FORWARD: Pray for wisdom from God to accurately assess your current friendships to determine which need cultivating and which need uprooting. Pray for the courage to be a godly friend to others, even when it's hard and uncomfortable. Pray for the discipline to pursue godly friendships that will help to bear lasting fruit. Pray that our friendships with one another would not just benefit ourselves, but our families, neighbors, coworkers, and communities. Pray that we would find friendships that point us to the great Friendship which we have with God through Jesus, and that those friendships would stir us to extend that friendship to those who don't know Jesus.