



**Sermon Based Small Group
Leader Discussion Guide**

Sermon Title: “Spiritual Friendship”

**Sermon by Pastor Tom Harrington
Week of May 30, 2010**

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Icebreaker	Who were your closest friends when you were growing up, and what did you enjoy doing together?
Session Objectives	<p>By the end of the session, group members should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name at least one way that a relationship with a <i>spiritual</i> friend differs from a relationship with other kinds of friends. • Have written down the name of a friend or acquaintance who may need a listening ear, emotional support, or spiritual care.
Personal Connection	<p>How does my story connect to the reading? To prepare to lead this Bible study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call to mind the spiritual friendships God has used in your life. Who are/were those friends? How are you different as a result of those friendships? • To whom have you been a friend? What does/did that relationship mean to you and your spiritual development? • Pray for each member of your group by name.
Sermon Text	<p>John 15:12-17 - New International Version</p> <p><i>¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything</i></p>

that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

Digging Deeper

Learning more about the lesson

Some use the term “friends” to describe both mere acquaintances and people who are especially dear to us. But the Greek language and some English translations of the Bible differentiate between the two, using the term *hetairois* (pronounced, he-tī-ros) for comrade or associate and the term *philo* (pronounced, fī-lō) for a true friend. *Philos* (which is translated friend) was originally an adjective denoting loved, dear, or friendly and later became used as a noun. So a friend is one for whom we have affection. A friend is one whom we love; we do good toward our friends out of affectionate conviction. Friends who love one another the way Jesus describes in John 15:12-17 share a very close bond indeed.

1. Jesus gave this teaching only hours before his arrest, torture, and execution. If you were in a crisis, even at 3:00 a.m., which of your friends would you call?
2. Jesus’ friends do what he commands (v. 14), which is to love each other (v. 17). When friends share a sturdy commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord, a *spiritual* friendship is possible. They have experienced the benefits of self-giving love - Jesus laid down his life for them! Can you think of one instance of self-giving love expressed between Christian friends?

Abraham is an example of a man whose obedience revealed him to be God's friend.

²⁰You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. - James 2:21-23

Obedience completes faith. God promised Abraham that one day his descendants would be numbered like stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5). Abraham’s son Isaac was apparently the only way that promise could be fulfilled, and one day God commanded Abraham to prepare to sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:2). Abraham’s complete trust in God was demonstrated in his willingness to obey. In this instance Abraham went so far out on a limb for God that you could hear the

wood cracking!

3. Has God ever tested or challenged you to attempt something difficult? How did you respond?

4. What area of your life do you especially need to commit to the Lord right now? How might “a friend of God” respond to such a challenge?

Psychologists tell us that the bond between friends becomes even stronger when they hold in common both things they like and things they dislike - for example, if they have common friends and a common enemy. To be a friend of God requires NOT being a friend of the world.

⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. - James 4:4. “The world” here refers not to the physical world, God’s good creation. Rather, it refers to the world of sin and evil. Just as the phrase “the world of sports” describes the domain in which sports dominates, so this “world” is one in which sin dominates. A similar warning appears in 1 John:

¹⁵Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. - 1 John 2:15-17.

5. American Christians today are sometimes criticized for being too worldly. What aspects of “the world” today do you think are especially dangerous or toxic to the soul?

The sermon encouraged spiritual friends to share confidences. Our unwillingness to do this is one of the main reasons why there is so much loneliness in the world.

It is our own secrets, however, that separate us the most from others: remorse for our wrongdoings, fears that haunt us, disgust with ourselves that we continually succumb to a certain recurring temptation, inner doubts so vividly in contrast with our air of self-confidence, our jealousy and our anger, and even the naïve daydreams of glory by which we console ourselves. - Paul Tournier, Christian psychiatrist, in Escape from Loneliness p. 45

6. When spiritual friends share confidences they create a sacred bond. What are the risks and rewards of sharing confidences with a spiritual friend?

Finally, consider the role of spiritual friends in introducing people to Jesus. Read Mark 2:1-12.

¹A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ²So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

⁸Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? ⁹Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?' ¹⁰But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . ." He said to the paralytic, ¹¹"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹²He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

1. When was the last time you had to go to the Emergency Room?
2. What is the closest you have come to having a supportive community who cared for you when you were hurting?
3. Is there a friend you would consider bringing to Jesus for healing? What kind of healing does this friend need - physical, spiritual, emotional, relational? Write down the name of that friend in the space below.

	Sources: "Can an Enemy be a Child's Friend?" - www.nytimes.com 05/17/10. "Friends," www.BibleStudyGuide.org .
Taking it Home	<p>How will I live it? Apply it?</p> <p>1. How do you need to change to receive more support from spiritual friends?</p> <p>___ Be more open</p> <p>___ Be a better listener</p> <p>___ Stop trying to be so self-sufficient</p> <p>___ Be more supportive myself</p> <p>___ Find some new or different friends</p> <p>___ Be more patient</p> <p>___ Deal with a past friend's painful betrayal</p> <p>___ Other:</p> <p>2. What is one specific action you can take as "a friend of God," either to rise to a challenge or to reach out to a friend in need?</p>
Looking Ahead	<p>How can I prepare for the next Small Group meeting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read Psalm 30 and prepare to explore the theme of JOY with the message/study, "All God's Children Can Dance!" (June 6, 2010)
Prayer Focus	<p>How can I connect with God and others through prayer?</p> <p>1. How can the group pray for you or the friend in need you identified during the Bible Study?</p>
Updates	<p>Announcements from:</p> <p>Care Coordinator Outreach Coordinator, Social Coordinator</p>