

Small Group Discussion Outline



This is the first in a series of studies looking at the subject of Christian Friendship.

Much of this material is taken from a series of studies produced by *Christianity Today*. Each study in this series will examine one or two key questions and explore the Biblical answers to them.



1. What are the marks of a good friendship?

There are many possible answers to this question, but there are five main areas which are essential to building strong, healthy friendships. We will look at the first three this week and the other two next week.



Read: Ruth 1:1-18



2. What is the main mark of friendship in this passage?

It has staying power and commitment.

The friendship between Ruth and Naomi had much against it. They were in-laws. They were from different generations, cultures, and religions. They each had been weakened by tragedy. Yet they also had bonds that held them together. Their understanding of each other's intense pain united them in ways more gentle forces could not. But even after their fresh grief eased, Ruth and Naomi remained committed to each other.

When Naomi returned to Bethlehem, Ruth left her own culture and returned with Naomi. She also adopted Naomi's Hebrew faith. Naomi, in turn, integrated Ruth into her culture by employing the ancient rights of levirate marriage and the privileges of gleaning. Their friendship became well known in the community.

Boaz said, "It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband" (2:11). Naomi's neighbours remarked, "Your daughter-in-law [Ruth], who loves you, ... is better to you than seven sons" (4:15).

Friendship takes work, time, endurance, and sometimes sacrifice. But the best friendships are worth it. As you overcome your differences with another person, you'll see your own character refined. God can use this softening toward each other to make you both more like Himself.

Good Words to Remember: Ruth 4:15

He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

3. Has knowing a good friend changed your character?

Friendship

What Are the Marks of a Good Friendship? (Part I)

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Read: Proverbs 17:17; 18:24

4. What is the main mark of friendship in this passage?

It “hangs in there.”

Loyalty is a primary mark of friendship. A true friend is someone who’s been through fun times and hard times with you and is there when you need him. While some people claim to be friends, when they have to give as well as receive, they look for other friends. Proverbs 18:24 uses direct language: “A man who has friends must himself be friendly.” (New King James Version)

Both proverbs speak of family. Family members are obligated to share each other’s troubles because they are family, yet often that sense of obligation stands in the way of experiencing the closeness with family that you do with true friends. It can be a real challenge—but a real blessing—to develop meaningful friendships with extended family members.

These proverbs show you what to look for in friendship. But they also show that you need to evaluate your own loyalty in friendships. Are you being the kind of friend Proverbs talks about?

Good Words to Remember: Proverbs 17:17

A friend loves at all times.

How loyal of a friend are you?



Read: Proverbs 27:17-19



5. What is the main mark of friendship in this passage?

It shapes your character and reputation—for the good.

“As iron sharpens iron” (27:17), a good friend will challenge what you think and even who you are. As you test yourself against each other, you rub away those qualities that are loose and weak. What’s left is even stronger than when you began. You sharpen each other in thought and in character.

A second image this proverb supplies about friendship is the mirror. When you look in your mirror, you expect to see your own face. As you look close into your own eyes, you can almost read your thoughts. But how startling it’d be to look in your mirror some sleepy morning and see instead the thoughts of your friend. That’s how influential friendship is! For good or for bad, we rub off on each other.

The best friendships are those where both persons are strong in their faith and they encourage each other to grow stronger in it. This takes work, but when you nurture friendships, you benefit from having someone to share with and receive helpful correction from. The key to good friendships is mutuality—mutual respect, mutual independence, mutual caring, and mutual submission.

Choose friends who sharpen you in good ways, instead of cutting you to pieces. And provide the same service for your friends.



6. Do your friends “sharpen” you?

7. How do your friends “sharpen” you?

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