



Start a Conversation about...

Choosing (and Keeping) Friends

God blesses us with many types of relationships, but friendship can be one of the most beautiful and beneficial gifts He provides. Not everyone will get married, and not everyone will have children. Some of us might have strained or struggling experiences with our families of origin. But friends can be found anywhere and at any age. As Christians, friendships found in the community of believers are especially valuable as we are brought into God's family in Baptism and spend time together not just socially but in God'

Friendships can weather personal challenges and crises and can transcend physical distance and age gaps. Friendships with fellow Christians can encourage us to be in worship, God's Word, and pray for us. Of course, this doesn't mean that it's easy to find great friends. Those relationships don't grow and strengthen overnight, and sometimes they deteriorate despite our best efforts. Some friendships last only a season, but others will remain for a lifetime. We must learn to find friends who can speak into our lives and encourage us in faith, and how to be a friend who does that for others.

Teenagers are especially in need of valuable and meaningful friendships and can sometimes use extra guidance in maintaining them or understanding the keys to lasting friendship. These relationships will guide students through challenging adolescent years, with potential to continue long into adulthood. We should provide our youth with tools to choose friends wisely, as well as tools that will enable them to maintain friendships. In this age of screen-based activity and virtual interaction, the skills that support presence and conversation can grow rusty without practice.

We want to help teens seek and select faithful friendships and understand their purpose. It's important to point out that not all friendships are the same. Close friendships should bless and encourage us in faith. We might have some other more casual relationships that aren't deep but are still helpful to us and others. We might also have friendships with people who do not share our faith, and we can share with them our faith if these relationships don't negatively impact or influence us.

Potential Activities

- Create role-play scenarios and situations for students to consider how to best make and treat friends. Guide them to create conversations and actions to match various potential friend needs and questions
- Explore Biblical friendships. Some include David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Silas, Paul and Timothy, or Elijah and Elisha (some of these feature age gaps or mentorship roles). Help youth to identify how these friendships helped point to God, encouraged following God in difficult times, and showed examples of confession and forgiveness.
- Have teens write an encouraging note to a friend or take a moment to have them send a kind text message to someone who might benefit from it.

- Explore how Jesus used friendship in His ministry, especially how He spent time with His disciples and cared for other friends (like Lazarus, Mary, and Martha). Consider also how Jesus had an "inner circle" of close friends within the disciples.
- Play a game of "Guess Who" (the old classic) and consider the ways that we sometimes tend to judge or define people. Discuss the importance of seeing others as made in God's image, especially thinking about who our friends are.

Discussion Questions

- Think about your closest friends. How did you meet? What helped the friendship grow and continue?
- What qualities should you look for in a friend? What Biblical precedents point to those?
- What are some things we can do to nurture and strengthen friendships?
- How can we make sure that we are positively influencing others and sharing our faith with our friends, even if they aren't Christians?
- What are things that can be detrimental to friendships? How might non-Christian friends influence you away from faithful belief?
- Friendship is sacrificial, not selfish. What are ways we build friendship by looking out for others as well as ourselves?
- Why is honesty so important in friendship? How do you know when you can trust someone?
- Our identity as a Baptized Child of God is more important than any friendship. When do you know it's time to stop a friendship?
- Sometimes friends have to say hard things, including pointing out sin and encouraging confession and absolution. Think of times when it is important to have those conversations. What are ways we share Law and Gospel with love? Why might it be hard to call out ways people break God's commands? How can seeking God's forgiveness strengthen friendships?

Foundational Scriptural Truth

For these questions, refer to the scriptures below for guidance and direction.

Proverbs 17:17-22

"A brother is born for adversity." Friendships help us get through challenging times in our lives. This passage also reminds us that friends can bring joy to our hearts and act as "good medicine."

Proverbs 18:24

The best kinds of friendships can be even stronger than family ties. Even if our blood relatives are physically or emotionally distant, friendships can fill the gaps in those bonds.

Genesis 2:18

While this refers more to the bonds between husband and wife (the creation of Adam and Eve), it's a good reminder that God does not want us to be alone and creates us for relationships.

1 Samuel 18:1-5

This passage describes the friendship of David and Jonathan, which was somewhat unlikely. By all measures Jonathan should have been jealous of David but was loyal to him and "loved him as his own soul."

Luke 15:2

This gives us an example from the life of Christ. He did take time to associate and eat with sinners, loving and caring for them. Sometimes friendship can be a great way to show others the love of Jesus that saves us from our sins and let the Holy Spirit work faith in their lives. (Disclaimer note: this is not wise in dating! But that's another topic.)

Acts 2:42-47

Believers in the early church came together not just because they liked each other, but because they shared faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior. Because of how God worked through them and their relationships, others came to know Jesus. They are brought together in teaching and in Communion just like we continue to be today.

Romans 12:9-21

This passage reminds us that friendship requires us to weep with those who are hurting, and to rejoice when others rejoice. Friendship involves empathy and care on both sides of the relationship. It's important to share that we don't do these things just because of friendship. We do them because we have been shown love and mercy from Jesus who saved us. We want others to know Jesus' love and forgiveness as well.

1 Corinthians 15:33

While we want to influence others, this is a warning to beware of how others might influence us. We want to live to please God, rather than man.

Other Resources

- [Link to "Closer than a Brother"](#) is an article about Healthy Christian Friendships
- [Link to a Bible study on David and Jonathan's Friendship](#)
- [Link to "What are Friends For?"](#) a four-part Bible study series on Friendship
- [This article describes accountability and the gifts and blessings of friendship.](#)
(<https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/conference-messages/biblical-friendship-and-authentic-accountability/?srsltid=AfmBOoo-UQ6BaiHMOgdQYurdWAb8ebk2O4iEPb1hohPTtd8ratY2bks0>)
- [This is a great youth-focused article on qualities to look for and practice in strong friendships.](#)
(<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/developing-friendships-that-last/>)
- [This article has helpful warnings against toxic friendships.](#)
(<https://blog.cph.org/read/6-toxic-friendships-and-how-teens-can-deal-with-them-as-christians>)

