



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for

Friendship

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to retrieve the ancient ideal of friendship and explore its promise for Christian discipleship. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

Moving Beyond Friendly to Friendship 2

Friendship is so much more than being friendly to one another. As friends are open to the workings of God's grace and share their lives according to certain demanding rules, their love links to the chain of God's love.

I Have Called You Friends 4

Jesus gave everything to his friends—his knowledge of God and his own life. Jesus is our model for friendship because he loved without limits, and he makes it possible for us to live a life of friendship because we have been transformed by everything he shared with us.

The Beloved Disciple 6

The Gospel of John contrasts the fates of Peter and the beloved disciple. For Peter, as for Jesus, the full extent of love meant the laying down of one's life. For the beloved disciple, the full extent of that love meant testifying with his whole life to the love of God in Jesus. Both ways of loving are acts of faithfulness; both make one Jesus' friend.

A School of Christian Love 8

Friends, Augustine famously taught, are gifts entrusted to us by God for providential purposes. If so, a strong love for our friends does not detract from our love for God but is precisely the setting in which we come to learn what loving God rightly means.

Friendship's Role in Coming to Know as We Are Known 10

The best friendships are rooted in personal, even intimate, knowledge. From a Christian point of view, a true friend's endorsement of one's own self-conception does not stem just from personal loyalty; it must be based on insight into one's true self—the self rooted in God's intentions one's life.

The Meaning of Mentorship 12

Mentors give themselves over entirely to engendering in their chosen pupils essential qualities of character or skills that are crucial to the continuance of a practice or way of life. In our Christian churches we must recapture this original meaning of mentorship if for no others, than for our children.



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Focus Article:

📖 Moving Beyond Friendly to Friendship
(*Friendship*, pp. 11-19)

Suggested Article:

📖 The Practice of Christian Friendship
(*Friendship*, pp. 89-93)

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Moving Beyond Friendly to Friendship

Friendship is so much more than being friendly to one another. As friends are open to the workings of God's grace and share their lives according to certain demanding rules, their love links to the chain of God's love.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 18:24

Responsive Reading: Sirach 6:7-8, 11-12, 14-17

When you gain friends, gain them through testing,
and do not trust them hastily.

For there are friends who are such when it suits them,
but they will not stand by you in time of trouble.

**When you are prosperous, they become your second self,
and lord it over your servants;
but if you are brought low, they turn against you,
and hide themselves from you.**

Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter:
whoever finds one has found a treasure.

**Faithful friends are beyond price;
no amount can balance their worth.**

Faithful friends are life-saving medicine;
and those who fear the Lord will find them.

**Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship aright,
for as they are, so are their neighbors also.**

Reflection

Some people merely "play at friendship," Proverbs warns, but others stick to their friends closely. Finding a faithful friend is like discovering a priceless treasure—a "life-saving medicine," Jesus ben Sira observes. We should seek our friends carefully.

Where can we find such trustworthy people? Are they hiding? The sage's advice now takes a startling turn: it's not *where* we look, but *who* looks and *how*. "Those who fear the Lord direct their friendship aright" — under God's grace, we become the right sort of friends ourselves, and so we improve our friends — "for as they are, so are their neighbors also" (Sirach 6:17).

Fourth-century Christians, says Carolinne White, built a winsome ideal of friendship from pre-Christian as well as scriptural sources. With the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle they prized friendships based on virtue — on "a shared commitment to moral improvement, usually by means of the friends' encouraging, advising, and even criticizing each other, if it is done for the other's good" — rather than just pleasure or usefulness. But as Christians transposed this shared search for wisdom and goodness into a scriptural context, "the search became a focus on and a love of God, set against a conviction that true friendships are a gift from God." They drew the radical conclusion that friendship unites all who love God; and if this seems impossible to realize now, it will be true in a future life together with God.

Christians also gathered from Greek and Roman sources "advice about the day-to-day practice of friendship — the need for loyalty, the



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advisability of limiting the number of friends you had, the need to demonstrate your affection in practical terms, the ways of telling a flatterer from a true friend, and so on.” To this body of practical wisdom they added their own insights drawn from living in intentional communities and reflecting on Scripture. For example, the following guidelines for friendship from Abba Joseph (which John Cassian presents in *The Conferences*) clearly echo Paul’s teachings in Philippians 2:1-4:

- ▶ *Reject all the things of this world and give priority to your love for your friend.*
- ▶ *Restrain your own will, so that you do not think you always know better than your friend.*
- ▶ *Realize that nothing is as valuable as love and peace.*
- ▶ *Don’t allow yourself to become angry.*
- ▶ *Try to alleviate resentment your friend is harboring against you.*
- ▶ *Live as though each day is your last, for this attitude will put all transitory feelings and minor irritations into perspective.*

Abba Joseph, a leader among the Desert Christians, is urging us to “maintain love by working hard at cultivating a spirit of humility, patience, and harmony of wills in all matters, by means of calm discussion and a shared desire for truth,” White concludes.

Study Questions

1. How would you describe the difference between merely being friendly and gaining and maintaining a friendship?
2. Discuss how Abba Joseph’s six rules for friendship reflect or extend Paul’s teachings in Philippians 2:1-4. Do any of his rules seem strange or difficult from our perspective today?
3. Do you think true friendship is easier or more difficult to maintain today than in the fourth century, as described by Carolinne White? What barriers exist now to friendships based on virtue, or a shared striving for goodness?
4. What is the purpose of friendship? Discuss White’s view that “the success of the friendship will be proved by the happiness and love emanating from the friends and this will inevitably have a positive impact on the world around them.”

Departing Hymn: “Rest of the Weary” (verses 1, 3, and 4)

Rest of the weary, joy of the sad,
hope of the dreary, light of the glad;
home of the stranger, strength to the end,
refuge from danger, Savior and Friend!

When my feet stumble, to you I’ll cry,
crown of the humble, cross of the high;
when my steps wander, over me bend
truer and fonder, Savior and Friend!

Ever confessing you, I will raise
unto you blessing, glory and praise:
all my endeavor, world without end,
yours to be ever, Savior and Friend!

John S. B. Monsel (1863), alt.

Suggested Tune: ADELAIDE



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Focus Article:

📖 I Have Called You Friends
(*Friendship*, pp. 20-27)

Suggested Article:

📖 Love, Death, and
Friendship in the
Harry Potter Novels
(*Friendship*, pp. 59-62)

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I Have Called You Friends

Jesus gave everything to his friends – his knowledge of God and his own life. Jesus is our model for friendship because he loved without limits, and he makes it possible for us to live a life of friendship because we have been transformed by everything he shared with us.

Prayer

Lord, in spite of our shortcomings, you were, are, and will be our faithful friend. You became human to identify with the life we live, knowing that we will never fully understand you. You gave your life for us even though you knew we would not want to risk ours for your sake, and you continue to walk alongside us even though we often succumb to pressures calling us to walk the opposite direction.

Continue to be with us, Lord. Grant us forgiveness and freedom from guilt. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 15:12-17

Meditation†

[Christ] demands from us what he himself offers. If he strips himself before our eyes, he claims that we should do the same. As our God he knows every fiber of the being which he has made; as our Savior he knows every instant in the past in which we have swerved from his obedience; but, as our friend, he waits for us to tell him.

Robert Hugh Benson (1871-1914)

Reflection

With painful honesty the Gospel of John records that Jesus' first and closest disciples were on their best days easily distracted from their love of God, care for one another, and concern for their neighbors. Some, like Judas, even grew to be wayward, rebellious, and mean. Yet turning to all of these would-be followers, Jesus explained his and the Father's deep, sacrificial love for them in these words: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" and "I have called you *friends*" (15:15-16).

Today we rarely use "friendship" to describe what John calls "eternal life," the life of salvation that is made possible through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Yet in the Fourth Gospel, Gail O'Day claims, "friendship is the ultimate relationship with God and one another." Since in Greek the word for friend, *philos*, comes from a common verb for love, *phileō*, "in the New Testament a 'friend' is immediately understood as 'one who loves'" she notes. "This fundamental connection between love and friendship is an essential starting point for reclaiming friendship as a resource for faith and ethics for contemporary Christians."

Two dimensions of the classical ideal of friendship are salient in the way Jesus defined his love for the disciples:

- ▶ *the gift of one's life for one's friends*. Friendship was such a key relationship in the ancient world – the glue binding free persons to one another and a community – that friends ideally might sacrifice their lives for one another and the common good. What is so remarkable is that Jesus fully lives out this cultural ideal.



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“What Jesus teaches, he is already living,” O’Day notes. “Jesus’ entire life and death is an act of friendship.”

- ▶ *the use of frank and open speech.* Some so-called “friends” are just manipulators. They are not honest with us; they flatter us in order to further their own ends. (The phrase “friend of the emperor” in John 19:12 nicely captures such political expediency.) But Jesus is a true friend who speaks honestly and raises us to friendship by his open speech. The dramatic shift from a conditional (“you are my friends *if* you do what I command you”) to an assertion (“I have called you friends”), O’Day notes, does not depend on something the disciples do, “because their enactment of Jesus’ commandments still remains in the future. No, it is something that Jesus has done: ‘I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father’ (John 15:15)... The disciples are Jesus’ friends because he has spoken to them openly; he has made known to them everything that he has heard from the Father.”

“Because Jesus, in his life and death, his words and deeds, showed and told his followers ‘everything’ about God’s love, his followers’ relationship to the world and to one another was forever changed,” O’Day concludes. “Jesus’ openness is a model of how we are to treat one another, but it also provides the wellspring that makes our acts of friendship possible.”

Study Questions

1. Why do we rarely use “friendship” today to describe the deep love that Jesus and the Father have for us? How has the meaning of the word changed from the ancient times?
2. How was Jesus’ entire life and death an act of friendship?
3. Discuss the meditation by Robert Hugh Benson in light of Jesus’ definition of friendship.
4. To ministers Ambrose of Milan (c. 339-397) wrote, “Let us reveal our bosom to [a friend], and let him reveal his to us.... A friend hides nothing, if he is true: he pours forth his mind, just as the Lord Jesus poured forth the mysteries of his Father.” Discuss this application of Jesus’ model of friendship.
5. John Killinger says J. K. Rowling modeled her protagonist on Jesus’ friendship. How is Harry Potter a Christ-figure?

Departing Hymn: “Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine” (v. 4)

Let earthly friendships be redeemed
by Christ, both God and man,
who held our hand and God’s, it seemed,
in his, nailed to the span.
Be friends now, heaven, friends with earth
be friends now, thief with King.
Be friends now death, be friends with birth,
as friends, in chorus, sing.

Terry W. York, ASCAP (2007)

Tune: ROXIE, C. David Bolin (2007)

Words and Music © 2007 TextandTune.com

† Robert Hugh Benson, *The Friendship of Christ* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1912), 26.



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Focus Articles:

- 📖 I Have Called You Friends
(*Friendship*, pp. 20-27)
- 📖 Depicting Christ's Friends
(*Friendship*, pp. 48-51)
- 📖 Near the Cross of Jesus
(*Friendship*, pp. 52-55)

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The Beloved Disciple

The Gospel of John contrasts the fates of Peter and the beloved disciple. For Peter, as for Jesus, the full extent of love meant the laying down of one's life. For the beloved disciple, the full extent of that love meant testifying with his whole life to the love of God in Jesus. Both ways of loving are acts of faithfulness; both make one Jesus' friend.

Prayer

Lord, we call you our friend, but most of the time we are incapable of understanding what that means. It's too complex to fathom that you — our creator and the one who governs the world — want to have an intimate relationship with us. It's too absurd to believe that you — the one whom we cannot see — are our most loyal and faithful companion.

Continue to be with us, Lord. Continue calling us to a faithful relationship with you and the world you created. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 21:1-25

Responsive Reading: 1 John 1:1-4

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — **this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us —**

we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us;

and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Reflection

Who was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:20; cf. 19:16; 20:2; and 21:7)? Tradition says he authored the Gospel and Letters of John and is the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee. But if this is so, why did he identify himself in such an indirect way? It remains an intriguing mystery, for the beloved disciple is mentioned in only in a few stories in the Fourth Gospel. But what wonderful and memorable stories they are:

- ▶ "He was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper" (21:20; cf. 13:23). Heidi Hornik reminds us how artists over the centuries have imagined the scene: John is "close to Christ at the table, usually on his left, and...[sleeping] with his head on the table." In the two works she surveys, "Christ embraces or lays his left hand over the shoulder and back of the sleeping disciple. Clearly this is a position of intimacy and caring between friends. John is also depicted as unbearded, and younger and more effeminate than the other apostles."
- ▶ "And from that hour the disciple took [Jesus' mother] into his own home" (21:27). On the cross, Jesus commends Mary and the beloved disciple into one another's care. "Even as Jesus is suffering in order to draw all humanity to God — he was 'lifted up,' John



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says, so that 'whoever believes in him may have eternal life' (John 3:14-15; cf. 8:28, 12:32, 34) — Jesus pauses to care for his mother and his best friend's future life together on earth," notes Hornik. "In this vignette, God's universal love is revealed to be utterly specific and concrete."

- "The rumor spread in the community that this disciple would not die" (21:23). Jesus says that Peter will live out Jesus' love by dying a martyr's death. But the beloved disciple will not be martyred; instead he will live to be a very old man. "He will not love in the same way that Peter loved, but will enact Jesus' love in another way — by telling the stories on which this Gospel is based (21:24; see also 19:35). Both of these disciples are held up to the Gospel reader as true disciples, yet their enactments of love follow two completely different paths."

The stories about the disciple whom Jesus loved, and the stories he continued to tell about his friend Jesus, remind us "that the love that enabled Jesus to lay down his life for his friends is not unique to him," Gail O'Day writes. "This love can be replicated and embodied over and over again by his followers. To keep Jesus' commandment is to enact his love in our own lives."

Study Questions

1. How does the trajectory of the beloved disciple's life express his friendship with Jesus?
2. Discuss Gail O'Day's view: "To speak as openly to others as Jesus did...is different from what we normally mean when we 'tell people what they need to hear' or 'speak one's mind.' Those instances of plain speaking are the opposite of friendship, because they are based on a master/servant or teacher/student model — the speaker positions himself or herself over against the listener."
3. "Christ did not lay down his life for us as enemies so that we should remain enemies," Thomas Aquinas wrote, "but so that he could make us friends." How do Jesus' life and death enable us to be friends with God and one another?
4. What do we learn about the beloved disciple from the iconographic tradition of Christian art?
5. In relation to the Flemish sculpture *The Last Supper* (cover), discuss Gail O'Day's observation: "Jesus did not exclude Judas from the circle of his love, but loved him in the same ways that he loved all of his other followers. What counts most is the embodiment of God's love in the world, not the character of those who receive this love."

Departing Hymn: "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me"

I'm gonna live so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna live so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna work so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna work so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna pray so God can use me any time and anywhere.
I'm gonna pray so God can use me any time and anywhere.

African-American Spiritual
Tune: I'M GONNA LIVE



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Focus Article:

📖 A School of Christian Love
(*Friendship*, pp. 28-36)

Suggested Articles:

📖 The Neighborhood:
A Company of Friends
(*Friendship*, pp. 63-66)

📖 Sacred Companions
(*Friendship*, pp. 84-88)

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A School of Christian Love

Friends, Augustine famously taught, are gifts entrusted to us by God for providential purposes. If so, a strong love for our friends does not detract from our love for God but is precisely the setting in which we come to learn what loving God rightly means.

Prayer

Responsive Scripture Reading: 1 John 3:11, 14-18

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another.

Whoever does not love abides in death.

All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them.

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

Meditation†

According to the Christian story, at least on this side of eternity, neighbor love *is* something other than friendship. *Caritas* is the love based on an infinite hope that someday everyone will be God's friend; in the meantime, God, like everyone else, has fewer friends than neighbors.

Caroline J. Simon

Reflection

"In the Christian life the fundamental purpose of friendship is not to bring us satisfaction and success in the world, but to help us grow *together* in Christ in order that we might *together* enjoy friendship with God and the saints in heaven," Paul Wadell reminds us. To reach this goal, "friends must find ways in their life together to learn, be formed in, and witness the love of God." Not all of our friendships reach these lofty heights, he admits.

The Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) agreed friendship can be a school of Christian love, but he realized we sometimes mistake immature, manipulative, and self-serving relationships for the real thing. So, he drew these distinctions:

- ▶ *Carnal friends* play on our weaknesses and stir behavior that is morally or spiritually harmful—like encouraging us "to gossip, to remain bitter and unforgiving, to be stingy and inconsiderate." At their worst, Wadell says, such friendships can "deaden our consciences and harden our hearts."
- ▶ *Worldly friends* do not seek our good, but are self-serving. "Full of deceit and intrigue," Aelred says, they disguise their true motives. If we look past his quaint language, we can see Aelred is describing "relationships that often thrive in business, in poli-



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tics, in colleges and universities, and sometimes even in our churches," Wadell writes. "Aren't many of us at least occasionally tempted to seek out someone not because we really want a friendship with him or her, but because we suspect such an alliance might help us get ahead?"

- ▶ *Spiritual friends* draw us closer to God, because we share "a common love for Christ and a mutual desire to grow together in Christ," says Wadell. Since "Christ is actively present in the friendship...the friends not only learn how to love one another, but also learn how to love God for God's own sake. Such uncalculating love is not easily acquired. But it is something the friends grow into as they journey with Jesus and learn from him how to love God not out of fear or sheer obligation but from a genuine desire to seek the good of One who has always sought theirs."

"Christians should especially prize friendships because they recognize in them the potential to be schools of love, settings in which we encounter Christ in one another and gradually learn from one another how to grow resplendent in the goodness and holiness of God," Wadell concludes. "This is the secret of friendship's great intimacy and the clearest explanation of its joy."

Study Questions

1. Why is it important to delineate types of friendship? What do you think of Aelred's classification scheme?
2. In what ways can friendship be a school of Christian love?
3. How is "the Neighborhood," which Kyle Childress describes, a source of spiritual friendship? How might you find or nurture a similar group of friends?
4. How are spiritual friendships fostered in your congregation?

Departing Hymn: "Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine" (verses 1 and 2)

Their shoulders bend as low as mine
beneath my heavy load;
with tears as salty as are mine,
they walk my winding road.
Their hearts know all my guilt and greed,
know all my hopes and joy;
they know the help and strength I need,
these friends in God's employ.

They tell me what I need to hear,
point out what I must see;
they listen, when I will not hear
the truth God speaks to me.
They love me still for who I am
when all I am shows through.
They see in me the spotless Lamb;
I see him in them too.

Terry W. York, ASCAP (2007)

Tune: ROXIE, C. David Bolin (2007)

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† Caroline J. Simon, *The Disciplined Heart: Love, Destiny, and Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 107.



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Focus Article:

📖 Friendship's Role in Coming to Know as We Are Known
(*Friendship*, pp. 67-75)

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Friendship's Role in Coming to Know as We Are Known

The best friendships are rooted in personal, even intimate, knowledge. From a Christian point of view, a true friend's endorsement of one's own self-conception does not stem just from personal loyalty; it must be based on insight into one's true self—the self rooted in God's intentions for one's life.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: 1 Samuel 18:1-5

Meditation†

This is the meaning of the proposition that we can meet others only through the mediation of Christ. Human love constructs its own image of the other person, of what he is and what he should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. Spiritual love recognizes the true image of the other person which he has received from Jesus Christ; the image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stamp upon all men.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

Reflection

The Bible depicts Jonathan's great love for David as an intimate bond: "the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1). Likewise, the philosopher Aristotle described a friend as "another self" and the most significant friendships as "one soul in two bodies."

Caroline Simon agrees that friendship involves an intimate bond. "In loving my friend, my self expands and is enriched by his accomplishments and delights," she says. "This expansion of self is not selfish; the expansion of self involved in friendship is also costly. Sorrows double, not just joys, for my friend's suffering becomes my own. The compassionate suffering that is part and parcel of friendship, costly and painful as it can be, deepens our humanity. Places in our hearts that did not previously exist are created by compassion for our friends and loved ones."

She highlights three aspects of the love between true friends:

- ▶ *Friends have insight into one another's true self.* One of the best things about friendship is that "friends can help each other see themselves more clearly." Through their loving vision, good friends can see not only who we are "warts and all," but also what we aspire to be. "As a Christian, I believe that our true selves (the selves that we are destined but not fated to become) are rooted in God's intentions for us," Simon writes. Because our friends care for us, they encourage and help us grow into our true selves.
- ▶ *There is equality between friends.* Ideally friends have "mutual affirmation, mutual self-disclosure, caring and the sharing of activities and sorrows, along with mutual admonition and advice giving." But what if my friend has more insight into God's plan for my life than I do? The friend will need "patience, humility, and prayer, lest the equality and mutuality essential to friend-



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ship dwindle” and their correction become “unduly wounding or...paternalistic,” Simon writes. “Knowing when to speak and how to speak as a friend demands wisdom and skill. One wants to give one’s friend the benefit of the kind of insight only a friend can furnish; yet one wants the story that one’s friend lives out to be his own.”

- ▶ *Friends share intimate knowledge.* They may “disclose thoughts and feelings to one another that they would be unwilling to reveal to mere acquaintances.” And they can communicate by nonverbal *intimation*: “I can know my friends’ unspoken thoughts because I have seen them react to diverse situations; I understand their character and know their values.”

True friendship is a spiritual journey, which “both requires and produces growth in goodness, not as friendship’s goal, but in order to equip us for befriending,” Simon concludes. “Being a friend requires strength of character. As we strive to do what friendship calls for, we will grow. Sharing our friend’s sorrows will exercise our compassion; sharing our friend’s hardships and dangers will exercise our endurance and courage.”

Study Questions

1. Discuss the salient features of the intimate knowledge that true friends share, according to Caroline Simon. Have you enjoyed friendships characterized by such knowledge?
2. Tony Hendra recounts his long friendship with Dom Joseph Warrilow in *Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul*. According to Simon, how does their friendship exemplify each element of intimate knowledge she discusses?
3. In the meditation Bonhoeffer contrasts human and spiritual love. Apply this to the intimate knowledge that friends share.
4. “To know as we are known” alludes to the love-filled knowledge Paul commends in 1 Corinthians 13:12. How can friendship prepare us to see one another and God “face to face”?

Departing Hymn: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” (verses 1, 2, and 3)

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he’ll take and shield you, you will find a solace there.

Joseph M. Scriven, 1855

Tune: ERIE

† Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, translated by John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1954), 36.



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Literature and the Real
Meaning of Mentorship
(*Friendship*, pp. 76-83)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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The Real Meaning of Mentorship

Mentors give themselves over entirely to engendering in their chosen pupils essential qualities of character or skills that are crucial to the continuance of a practice or way of life. In our Christian churches we must recapture this original meaning of mentorship if for no others, then for our children.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: John 13:1-20

Meditation[†]

To speak of friendship with God can sound so cozy and consoling, as if we are all snuggling up to God; however, there is no riskier vulnerability than to live in friendship with God, because every friendship changes us, because friends have expectations of each other, and because friends are said to be committed to the same things.... Any friend of God is called to faithfully embody the ways of God in the world, even to the point of suffering on account of them. There may be grace and glory in being a friend of God, but there is also clearly a cost.

Paul J. Wadell

Reflection

Even though mentorship is an especially valuable form of friendship, it is increasingly scarce today. Our consumerist, individualist, and hyper-egalitarian ways frustrate and weaken mentorship relationships, Vigen Guroian notes. We continue to use the term "mentor" widely in education, business, and popular culture, but "our contemporary usage ignores, even contradicts...the defining characteristics of mentorship."

To understand why genuine mentorship is scarce today, consider how this relationship differs from ordinary friendship.

- ▶ *For reasons that are their own, mentors freely initiate the mentorship relationship with the persons they choose.* We see this clearly in the performing arts when a master selects a protégé for special instruction. Their relationship "is asymmetrical and discriminative. The mentor has a vital stake in choosing the right pupil. And she gives herself over entirely to engendering in the pupil essential qualities of character or skills that are not merely private or personal but ultimately crucial to the continuance of a practice, special art form, or way of life."
- ▶ *Mentors are superior in experience, knowledge, and skills to those whom they mentor.* While the intensely personal relationship makes a pupil feel special, he or she willingly acknowledges and submits to the master's authority. The learning is mostly one-way, as the pupil masters the wisdom, virtues, and practical skills that the mentor is so generously sharing.
- ▶ *Mentors introduce pupils to a world of life that previously was beyond their ken.* Since masters share ways of being, seeing, and acting their pupils could never gain on their own, masters are indispensable. They are not making up new ways of life, but are living and sharing mysterious disciplines and complex practices. "Mastery



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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of the art” the mentor shares “is equivalent to participation in a mystery much greater than the self or of any one generation.”

“Our forgetfulness of the true meaning of ‘mentor’ has a cost,” Guroian warns, since “true mentorship is vital to culture and the growth and flourishing of education and the arts, in particular.” This is why he favors teaching children at an early age the meaning of genuine mentorship “through reflection upon great literature, and especially literature for children, in which the mentorial relationship and its value are portrayed.”

Mentorship, of course, is also vital to Christian discipleship. Jesus mentored the Twelve – “his own who were in the world” (John 13:1) – to know him (and, through him, to know the Father) and to re-present God’s love in the world. Even as he reminded them “servants are not greater than their master,” he washed their feet. It was a sacramental act – for it enacted God’s grace that transcends his simple deed – and a mysterious one. To Peter he said, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand” (13:7). By his simple act Jesus exemplified God’s love for them and called them to love one another.

Study Questions

1. How is mentorship different from ordinary friendship?
2. As you review its defining features, discuss why genuine mentorship is growing scarce today in our consumerist, individualist, and hyper-egalitarian society.
3. In what ways is becoming a disciple of Christ a mentorial relationship? Who has mentored you in faithful discipleship?
4. “The office of teacher is inherently suited to the role of mentor,” Vigen Guroian writes, “but we have so democratized and bureaucratized it that genuine mentorial possibilities are nearly precluded.” Do you agree?
5. What great literature does Guroian commend for teaching our children the meaning and value of genuine mentorship?

Departing Hymn: “Savior, Teach Me Day by Day” (verses 1, 4, and 5)

Savior, teach me day by day
love’s sweet lesson to obey;
sweeter lesson cannot be,
loving him who first loved me.

Love in loving finds employ
in obedience all her joy;
ever new that joy will be,
loving him who first loved me.

Thus may I rejoice to show
that I feel the love I owe;
singing, till your face I see,
of his love who first loved me.

Jane E. Leeson (1842), alt.

Suggested Tunes: POSEN or ALETTA

† Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 10.

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

Moving Beyond Friendly to Friendship

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider the nature and value of true friendship based on virtue (or, a shared commitment to advance in goodness) in light of early Christian writings.
2. To examine how such friendship places practical demands on the friends.
3. To weigh the prospects for and barriers to true friendship today.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Friendship (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Rest of the Weary” locate the familiar tune ADELAIDE in your church’s hymnal or on the Web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

The fourth-century Desert Christians believed true friendship requires us to grow in humility, obedience, and renunciation of our willfulness. They told this story to illustrate the winsome gentleness of true friends: “One [monk] said to the other, ‘Let’s have a quarrel with each other, as other men do.’ The other answered, ‘I don’t know how a quarrel happens.’ The first said, ‘Look here, I put a brick between us, and I say, “That’s mine.” Then you say, “No, it’s mine.” That is how you begin a quarrel.’ So they put a brick between them, and one of them said, ‘That’s mine.’ The other said, ‘No; it’s mine.’ He answered, ‘Yes, it’s yours. Take it away.’ They were unable to argue with each other” (*The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks*, 17.22, translated by Benedicta Ward).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by thanking God for guiding us to true friends and leading us to mature spiritually with them.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Proverbs 18:24 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This discussion is the first in a series of study guides on the nature of true friendship and its role in Christian discipleship. In this study Carolinne White, a noted translator and interpreter of early Christian writings in Latin, explores the meaning of true friendship in two ways: after she reflects on how today we typically distinguish “being friendly” to strangers or acquaintances from “being a true friend” in a deep and lasting relationship, she throws light on our understanding of friendship by comparing it to a rich ideal of friendship developed by Christian writers in the fourth century.

In late antiquity when the empire was fading and the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome were in restless turmoil, Christians enjoyed new religious freedoms, access to education in ancient scholarship, and opportunities to network with one another and reflect on their heritage. During this formative period of Christian thinking, they wove a new theory of friendship from pre-Christian resources, reflection on Scripture, and their personal experiences in forming intentional communities to resist the corrosive power of the empire. Their account of true friendship is a good place for us to start our thinking together.

Study Questions

1. Carolinne White suggests that we can be friendly toward “each person we meet, whether or not we know him or her. Such behavior would involve showing a degree of kindness, concern, and cheerfulness in our interactions with others – in short, making other people feel that we were pleased to have dealings with them, however fleetingly.” Friendship, on the other hand, is a lasting “relationship between two or a few people who appreciate something special and different in each other, who enjoy each other’s company, and generally see eye-to-eye about a variety of matters.” Friendliness can be “a superficial kind of human solidarity,” she writes. “If, however, friendliness is open to God’s grace and does develop into friendship, it will be transformed into a relationship of continuity, stability, and trust. It will also be distinguished by the fact that it is a mutual relationship, and I suspect that this is a key feature of the special value of friendship, a feature that enriches the relationship immeasurably, miraculously.”
2. Rules two through four reflect Paul’s teaching that we live together “without selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility” (Philippians 2:3). The first rule extends the instruction to “look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (2:4). The sixth rule – that we should live as though each day were our last – is not drawn from Philippians 2:1-4, but is commonplace Christian thought in late antiquity. We are to measure persons and events by their eternal significance and to live in light of God’s judgment – as Christ (e.g., Matthew 25:1-13) and Paul (e.g., 1 Corinthians 5:9-10) teach us.

In our more individualist, rights-oriented era, what can we learn from Abba Joseph’s restatement of Paul’s teaching on humility? Is there value to living each day as if it were our last? Pastoral instruction must be tailored to the spiritual condition of hearers. How would you restate Joseph’s rules for Christians today?

3. Ask one group to brainstorm how true friendship is more difficult today than in the fourth century. We have a more consumerist, competitive, and envious stance toward colleagues. We desire independence from our families and communities, and so on. Many of us leave friends to pursue education, maintain a career, seek medical care, or live in a more desirable place. We dwell in more isolated houses and live in larger, more impersonal cities. Friendships based on virtue are more difficult because our religious, ideological, and ethnic differences push us toward different ideas about the common good.

Ask a second group to think about how true friendship is easier today. New technologies help us to meet people with a common vision and maintain friendship across the miles. We can afford to travel great distances to be with friends. Many of us work on common projects closely with other people who have similar interests.

4. We make friends for various reasons – to have a bridge partner, help us master new tasks at work, be our spouse, etc. Ancient writers thought friendships based on a shared striving for goodness were more lasting and enriching relationships. In each case we love our friends in themselves and not just because they help us, give us pleasure, or spur us to moral growth. Some friendships are more abounding in care for other people and a needful world. But can love and happiness emanate from every friendship to have a positive impact on the world?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

I Have Called You Friends

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (#1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (#2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	John 15:12-17	John 10:1-21; 13:1-20; and 18:1-14
Meditation	Meditation	Meditation	
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Discuss Jesus' definition of friendship	Discuss how Jesus' model of friendship in his life and death
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)	Questions 1, 3, and 4	Questions 2 and 5
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand Jesus' commandment and definition of love in John 15:12-15 in light of the ancient ideal of friendship.
2. To see how the Fourth Gospel portrays Jesus' entire life and death as an act of friendship.
3. To consider how Jesus' frank and open speech enables us to be honest and open with God and one another.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Friendship (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

Begin with a Comment

"Contemporary Christian piety tends to place words like 'sin,' 'redemption,' 'atonement,' 'justification,' 'repentance,' and 'born again' at the center of conversations about what it means to live out the offer of salvation made available through the life and death of Jesus Christ," observes Gail O'Day. "'Friendship' does not figure prominently in such a theological world, since friendship is normally relegated to the secular realm, as exemplified by the prominence of friends as the pivot of plots in television shows and movies. Yet as...the Gospel of John shows, nothing could be farther from the truth. For Jesus, friendship is the ultimate relationship with God and one another."

How is our appreciation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection transformed when we realize this is God's ultimate act of friendship on our behalf?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer printed in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read John 15:12-17 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This study guide—like the next one, "The Beloved Disciple"—explores Jesus' friendship with his disciples as portrayed in the Gospel of John. Here the focus is on Jesus' definition of his own love and friendship in John 15:12-15, where he commands us to love one another "as I have loved you." In the next study guide we will

discuss how the Fourth Gospel understands our response—our discipleship of Jesus and love for one another—as friendship with Jesus.

You might extend this discussion to two sessions. In one, review Jesus' definition of friendship in John 15:12-15. In the other session, review three passages in the Gospel of John that present Jesus' entire life and death as an act of friendship. You might enrich the second session with John Killinger's discussion of Harry Potter as a Christ-figure.

Study Questions

1. Gail O'Day notes that we already use other words like "sin," "redemption," "atonement," "justification," "repentance," and "born again" ...[to describe] what it means to live out the offer of salvation made available through the life and death of Jesus Christ." It is difficult for us to see how "friendship" fits into this list of biblical metaphors and theological concepts. One source of this difficulty is that we have emptied "friendship" of its classical meaning. In the ancient world friendship was a key social relationship that could define one's love for intimate companions who are striving for a common good (a life of virtue, or communion with God), as well as one's obligations to fellow citizens in a small community. Sacrificing one's life for one's friends and being completely transparent with them were part of the ideal of friendship. Today we have reduced friendship to relationships of pleasure ("We celebrate our friends, we eat and drink with friends, we take vacations with friends") or usefulness ("we are there when a friend is in need").
2. O'Day focuses on three key passages in the Gospel of John (10:1-21; 13:1-20; and 18:1-14) that show how Jesus' entire life and death is an act of friendship for his disciples. You might assign three groups to study these passages and summarize O'Day's commentary on them.
In John 10:1-21, Jesus tells the parable of the sheepfold and identifies himself with both the shepherd and the gate. "The contrast between the shepherd and the hireling is like that between the true and the false friend—the false friend will not be around in a time of crisis, but the true friend will be," O'Day writes. "But Jesus is not simply telling a story about shepherds and hirelings, about true and false friends. Jesus is talking about himself, about the love that animates everything he does." Next, she identifies interesting echoes of John 10 in the scene of Jesus' arrest in the garden in John 18:1-14. Finally, O'Day describes Jesus' washing the disciples' feet in John 13:1-20 as "a sacrament of friendship," an act of friendship that also points beyond itself to his laying down his life for them.
3. Benson relates Jesus' love command (John 15:12-17) to his washing the disciples' feet (13:1-20). Jesus' stripping himself to become a humble servant becomes an image of our being honest and open with Jesus about the most intimate aspects of our lives—our sinful disobedience. Jesus' friendship calls out our openness but does not coerce it.
4. Ambrose encourages ministers to love their congregants as Christ loves all men and women. The minister is to lead others by being vulnerable, open, and transparent, and by sharing his or her own pilgrimage with God. We might apply Ambrose's advice to all Christians who must guide others through their public roles, in their workplace, in their friendships, or in their own families. How would leaders be different if they modeled leadership on Christ's friendship rather than business, military, or professional models in our culture?
5. John Killinger focuses on the general theme—Harry laying down his life to evil Lord Voldemort in order to overcome the evil that threatens his friends and all humans—and several specific scenes in the final novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. He mentions that Harry is called "the Chosen One," he sees a vision of himself and his parents in Godric Hollow as the Holy Family, presents himself to Voldemort for execution, and sees a grand ceiling painting in the home of Xenophilus Lovegood of himself bound in friendship to his classmates/followers. Encourage (if you dare!) the Harry Potter aficionados in the group to brainstorm scenes in the first six novels that present Harry as a Christ-figure.

Departing Hymn

"Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine" is on pp. 37-39 of *Friendship*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

The Beloved Disciple

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the stories in the Gospel of John about the disciple whom Jesus loved.
2. To examine how the beloved disciple's life and ministry is a faithful response of friendship with Jesus.
3. To consider how Jesus' friendship inspires and shapes our discipleship and love for each other.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Friendship (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus articles before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" locate the tune I'M GONNA LIVE in your church's hymnal or on the Web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Comment

"To speak of friendship with God can sound so cozy and consoling, as if we are all snuggling up to God; however, there is no riskier vulnerability than to live in friendship with God, because every friendship changes us, because friends have expectations of each other, and because friends are said to be committed to the same things," Paul Wadell has written. "Any friend of God is called to faithfully embody the ways of God in the world, even to the point of suffering on account of them. There may be grace and glory in being a friend of God, but there is also clearly a cost" (Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship*, 10).

This warning is important to keep in mind as we consider how the Gospel of John portrays our discipleship as friendship with God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer printed in the study guide.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read John 21:1-25 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

This study guide—like the previous one, "I Have Called You Friends"—explores Jesus' friendship with his disciples as portrayed in the Gospel of John. That previous study focused on Jesus' definition of love and friendship in John 15:12-15, where he commands us to love one another "as I have loved you." Here the focus is on our response—our discipleship of Jesus and love for one another—as friendship with Jesus.

When Jesus defines his love for the disciples, he highlights two features of the ancient ideal of friendship: the gift of one's life for one's friend and the use of frank and open speech. He commands his followers to love one another in this way. The ministry of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" is a model for our faithful response of friendship with Jesus. This disciple's life is devoted to sharing with others all that the Father has revealed to him about the meaning of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Study Questions

1. The beloved disciple enacts Jesus' love in several ways. Scripture says that this disciple both cares for Jesus' friend and mother, Mary, after his death (John 21:27) and tells the stories on which the Gospel of John is based (21:24; see also 19:35). If, as Church tradition says, this disciple is the person who wrote the Gospel and Letters of John, then he became a leader of the Christian community (e.g., 1 John 1:1-4). Discuss how the beloved disciple gives his life for his friends, and speaks to them with frank and open speech. Consider how his faithful discipleship can be a model for our response of friendship with Jesus.
2. "We have been changed by Jesus' honest and plain speaking, and this transformation lies at the heart of Christian friendship," O'Day writes. She believes that Jesus replaces our tendency to "tell people what they need to hear" with a friendship model: "Both speaker and listener are transformed by the plain speaking of friendship, because in holding nothing back, the speaker acts in the intimacy and trust of transformative love. The speaker risks herself in the speaking; the listener risks himself in the hearing." Consider how this model might reshape how we interact with strangers, how we provide a faithful witness to the gospel, and how we care for others who are in need.
3. Aquinas is saying that Jesus' life and death call us into relationship with God and enable us to live as friends with God and one another. On the one hand, Jesus is *the winsome model for our self-giving friendship with one another*. His washing the disciples' feet, for instance, is a "sacrament of friendship" in which "Jesus offers himself completely to his disciples, assuming the social role of servant, in order to give a tangible shape to his love," O'Day writes. "Jesus has transformed the community through his love, so that they can continue his acts of love. Love and service are defined by what Jesus has done, and what Jesus has done is share himself completely with the disciples through the symbolic act of foot washing." On the other hand, Jesus' openness and frank speaking *creates space for us to live in intimacy with God*. Through Jesus' plain speaking, God acknowledges us as friends.
4. Invite members to study the four works of art in the *Friendship* issue: the Flemish sculpture *The Last Supper* (cover and p. 48), Ghirlandaio's *The Last Supper* (p. 50), Monaco's *The Crucified Christ between the Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist* (p. 52), and Terbrugghen's *The Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint John* (p. 54). In the iconographic tradition of the beloved disciple—the ways in which he has been portrayed in art—we see the how Christians over the centuries have interpreted the stories in John's Gospel. He is identified with the Apostle John, one of the sons of Zebedee. Usually he is prominently positioned on Jesus' left side (though he is not as significant as either Mary or Peter, who are placed on Jesus' right). He is portrayed as the youngest disciple (and the one without a beard), probably because of the tradition that he would not die before Jesus' return in glory.
5. The Flemish sculpture *The Last Supper* positions the disciples all around a circular table, but it places Judas (the one who holds a money bag in his hidden hand and stands up from his stool which is tipping precariously) on the viewer's side. Judas and Jesus are singled out by their dress—they are wearing first-century robes while the other figures are in sixteenth-century clerical garb. Jesus has just told his friends that "one of you will betray me" (John 13:21b) and most of them are reacting with questions. Peter, however, signals that he understands who the betrayer is. Yet at this very moment Jesus offers Judas the bread—a symbol of his sacrificed life. What must Peter be thinking?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

A School of Christian Love

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Responsive Scripture Reading	Responsive Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand how true friendship can be a school of Christian love.
2. To distinguish true friendship (which Aelred of Rievaulx named “spiritual friendship”) from immature, manipulative, and self-centered relationships we may call “friendship.”
3. To discuss how we can foster spiritual friendships in our lives and within congregations.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Friendship (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

Begin with a Story

“My high school years were a little different. And I don’t regret a minute of them,” Paul Wadell reports. “In the fall of 1965 I left my home in Louisville to join nearly two hundred other fellows at a high school seminary in a small Missouri town called Warrenton.... We were a ragtag bunch who clustered together in the most unlikely of settings to be initiated into a way of life designed to help us discover whether or not we ought to become Passionist priests....

“Although we did not realize it at the time, the pink stucco building that was our home for four years was a school of friendship; and friendship, at its best, is a school of Christian love. In a life ordered by prayer and worship, we learned there how turning our attention to God helped us to be more attentive to one another. In a place where none of us had very much, we learned how sharing and generosity build friendships, and why a life centered on Christ is the key to nurturing genuine friendship and intimacy among ourselves. We did not choose each other, but we were given one another and entrusted with one another. Each of us was the ‘neighbor’ all of us were called to love. And although we could not articulate it at the time, this meant helping one another grow in holiness by together moving closer to God” (*Friendship*, pp. 28-29).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by thanking God for the spiritual friends who have helped members grow in love for God and neighbors.

Responsive Scripture Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

As a form of love, friendship is very different from love of neighbor. Only a few special persons are our close friends, but each and every person (including our enemy) is our neighbor. We enjoy our friends and share time, interests, and values with them, but our neighbors may be unappealing strangers. Over the centuries some Christians have been suspicious of friendship as too particular, too insular, and too focused on people like us. Paul Wadell responds that true friendships can be schools of Christian love when “they deepen our awareness of the connections that exist between us and every other person—indeed, all of creation—and heighten our sense of responsibility towards them.”

Study Questions

1. Not all friendships are healthy. They are not schools of Christian love; they are spiritually toxic. One reason to classify friendships is to help us identify and avoid such dangerous liaisons. “It is important for us to reflect on—and to be honest about—the various relationships of our lives and what they might be doing to us,” Wadell writes. “Are they making us better persons? Are they helping us grow in goodness, sensitivity, and respect for others? Are they leading us closer to God? Or are they making it easier for us to gossip, to remain bitter and unforgiving, to be stingy and inconsiderate? If we took an inventory of the ‘friendships’ of our lives, would we recall any that brought out the worst in us? Have we known relationships that made us more strangers to God than friends of God?”
“One cannot accuse Aelred of being subtle!” says Wadell, stating the obvious. Yet I’ve come to admire this twelfth-century reformer for being brutally honest about the distorted and fallen relationships he found in the most religious communities. Do members know some other, less blunt distinctions that help us chart the spiritual effects of friendships?
2. Wadell describes three “good things good friends do for us.” We grow in Christian love when friendship “draws us out of ourselves and teaches us to care for others for their own sake.... None of us learns to love, to share, or to be kind and considerate single-handedly. We acquire these virtues in partnership with others who are seeking them with us.” Second, “Friends show us to ourselves. As they come to know us better they reveal certain aspects of our personality and character to us.” They help us identify and develop our virtues, and spot and correct our flaws. Third, friends “can school us in the rigors of Christian love is by continually challenging us to extend the boundaries of our world. Good friendships should always make our world bigger, not smaller, by calling us to expand the circle of love.”
3. The six pastors who gather twice a year in “the Neighborhood” not only relax together and prepare meals and share stories, they also share deeper conversations about God, their faith, and their crises and challenges as pastors. “We listen to one another’s expressions of exhaustion, frustration, and loneliness, and we have learned to trust one another to talk about our ambition and sense of rivalry with other clergy, even our sense of rivalry with one another,” Childress reports. They help one another grow spiritually in ways they could not grow alone. “Our health is connected with one another, and we sense that we are more ourselves when we are together than when we are separate. Biblically, the concepts of salvation and shalom describe a condition of community wholeness in which each individual is in good health only when he or she is an integrated member of God’s people.”
Do any of your group members meet with local (or distant) spiritual friends on a regular basis? Would such meetings be worthwhile? If so, how might they be arranged?
4. Members might mention specific church programs—e.g., study groups, youth groups, support groups, supper clubs, mission trips, ministry opportunities—that foster spiritual friendships. Some new curricula—e.g., the *Companions in Christ* series that Christy Morr reviews in “Sacred Companions” (*Friendship*, pp. 84-88) or the anthologies produced by Renovaré (www.Renovare.org)—are designed to foster spiritual friendships.
Consider how spiritual friendship can be discussed and valued more within your congregation. Do members form such friendships elsewhere—e.g., at home, or school, or work?

Departing Hymn

“Their Shoulders Bend as Low as Mine” is on pp. 37-39 of *Friendship*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Friendship's Role in Coming to Know as We Are Known

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To characterize the intimate knowledge that true friends share—i.e., of the individuals that they are meant to become before God.
2. To consider how this intimate knowledge that friends share can help them to mature as faithful disciples.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Friendship (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" locate the familiar tune ERIE in your church's hymnal or on the Web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Story

Caroline Simon believes friendship requires a kind of intimate knowledge: friends recognize one another's ideal selves—or, as Christians would say, the selves they are meant to be before God. She illustrates this with the story of friendship between comedian Tony Hendra and Dom Joseph Warrilow, which Hendra recounts in *Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul*.

Though Hendra's "life zigzags from a felt-call to monasticism, to loss of faith, through drug and alcohol dependence and failed relationships, and back to faith," writes Caroline Simon, "through all this, the still center of his turning and tilting world is Father Joe.... Part of the redemptive efficacy of the friendship is Father Joe's ability to see past Tony's fleeting enthusiasms, excesses, doubts, cynicism, and foibles to the warmhearted idealist who wants ultimately to make a difference for good in the world. The endorsement of a friend's self-conception need not be a wholesale endorsement. Friends can help each other see themselves more clearly" (*Friendship*, 69 and 71).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by thanking God for giving us true spiritual friends who know us intimately and help us to mature as faithful disciples.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read 1 Samuel 18:1-5 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This discussion continues a conversation that we began in the previous study guide, "A School of Christian Love," about the role of true friendship in Christian discipleship. The focus here is on the love and intimate knowledge that friends share. Precisely because they love and attend to one another, they come to know the

other in ways that allow them to be open and honest, to correct one other in love, and to guide each other toward their “true selves,” the selves they are destined but not fated to become as they discover and live out God’s intentions for their lives.

Study Questions

1. The central feature that Simon discusses is what she calls the friends’ “depth perception” of one another. “A true friend knows me well enough to see me as I am, warts and all, but also knows me well enough to see me as someone whose best self aspires to be much more,” she writes. “Friendship affirms that a friend’s view of his unfolding life story is substantially correct. Friendship commits itself to helping a person attain his vision of himself. Friendship involves not just endorsing someone’s self-concept, but caring deeply enough about her aspirations to go out of one’s way to help her achieve them. A friend is someone who is on your side, someone who is willing to see the world from your point of view – but not the point of view of your prodigal self, the point of view of your best and truest self.”

She says the friends’ intimate knowledge is mutual: the self-disclosure, caring, correction, and advice giving tend to be symmetrical and reciprocal. Her discussion of how friends deal with self-deception is insightful. “All of us engage in some degree of self-deception about ourselves. In some cases, one may think a friend has lost sight, for the present, of his better self. Cases in which we think our insight into our friends’ unfolding life stories outstrips their own vision of themselves call for patience, humility, and prayer, lest the equality and mutuality essential to friendship dwindle. Knowing when to speak and how to speak as a friend demands wisdom and skill. How can we correct without unduly wounding or being paternalistic? One wants to give one’s friend the benefit of the kind of insight only a friend can furnish; yet one wants the story that one’s friend lives out to be his own.”

The third salient feature is that friends know one another not only through the thoughts and feelings they disclose, but also through their sensing, or intimating, the other’s way of being and looking at life. Friends “communicate truths which could not and need not be uttered between them.”

2. Briefly review the relationship between Hendra and Father Joe. Simon admits it may be too asymmetrical to be called a friendship. Emphasize how Father Joe sees and encourages the best in Hendra, and how Hendra grows spiritually through the relationship. (Note the subtitle of Hendra’s memoir: *The Man Who Saved My Soul*.) Only as Father Joe is dying does Hendra become more aware of Father Joe’s life and needs and begin to give care to him.
3. Bonhoeffer thinks our knowledge of others is always grounded in how we love them. If we love someone with a purely “human love,” unmediated by Christ’s vision and love for the person, we must construct our own “image of the other person, of what he is and what he should become.” When our love is mediated by Christ’s love, we can see them in a richer way, as “the image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stamp upon all men.”

This raises a lot of interesting issues. Which passions and desires in us prevent us from loving (and seeing) our friends as God sees them? What tempts us to confuse what we want for a friend with what is best for them given God’s intentions for their lives? How do we develop spiritual love that overcomes such blindness?

4. Despite the way we often misuse Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13 in wedding services, the Apostle is not describing about the beauty and (potential) constancy of romantic love. He is explaining the relationship between true wisdom and love for one another. (The “proud” Corinthian church members, who think they are very wise, cannot be wise because they are woefully short on love.) Only a person whose heart is fully matured in faith, hope, and love – but especially in love – can see themselves or other people as God sees them. Then they will know – themselves, other persons, or God – as they have been known by God.

Only true friendships that call us out of ourselves and give us practice in loving another individual for who that person really is, for the better self that God intends for the person, train us in Christian love that sees ourselves and others “face to face.”

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

The Real Meaning of Mentorship

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand how mentorship is a distinctive form of friendship, and to consider why genuine mentorship is scarce today.
2. To consider how mentorship is essential in the Christian life.
3. To discuss how we might use literature to teach our children the meaning and value of genuine mentorship.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide.

Distribute copies of *Friendship (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Savior, Teach Me Day by Day” locate the familiar tune POSEN or ALETTA in your church’s hymnal or on the Web at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with a Comment

“Recently ‘mentor’ has become a much-used word in the popular culture,” notes Vigen Guroian. “Celebrities on radio and television urge us to join in community service by volunteering our time to be mentors to children who are in need of grown-up company and guidance. Businesses and schools institute mentoring programs in which experienced persons are assigned to instruct junior colleagues and coworkers in job skills.” Yet he notes that this “contemporary usage ignores, even contradicts...the defining characteristics of mentorship” (*Friendship*, 76).

What are we missing today about the true meaning and value of mentorship, and what does that lack reveal about our culture? More importantly, how can we recover this special kind of friendship in our lives?

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by seeking God’s blessing for mentoring relationships in members’ lives—to give thanks for masters who have mentored members as disciples, and to seek God’s enabling grace in guiding individuals whom members are called to mentor.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read John 13:1-20 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

Mentorship is a distinctive form of friendship linking people of unequal knowledge, virtue, and authority. It is characterized by the pupils’ obedience toward their master. In this study we trace Vigen Guroian’s exploration of the real meaning of mentorship, its continuing value for education and discipleship, and some reasons for the scarcity of mentorship relationships today.

In “Literature and the Real Meaning of Mentorship,” Guroian sketches the rich literary portrayals of mentoring in E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Books*, Felix Salten’s *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*, and William Faulkner’s “The Old People” in *Go Down, Moses*, because these winsome stories can help children grasp the significance of mentorship. If members are familiar with some of these original stories (rather than the cartoon versions), you can focus discussion on them. Encourage members to explore Jesus’ washing his disciples’ feet as a crucial mentorship experience for the Twelve.

Study Questions

1. Ordinary friendships differ from mentorship in regard to each of the defining features of mentorship outlined in the study guide. The central difference is that friends in an ordinary friendship are (approximately) equal in knowledge, virtue, and skills. Thus, they can mutually care for, instruct, correct, and assist one another. This mutuality is evident in other aspects of the relationship: ordinary friends discover or choose each other. Ordinary friends help one another grow in knowledge, goodness, and ability. They will respect and obey the other friend who has more expertise in a specific context, but over the course of their friendship this obedience and respect does not go (primarily) one way.

Guroian reminds us that Aristotle believed friendship may involve “‘an inequality between the parties, for example, that of the father to son and in general of elder to younger.’ In this kind of friendship, the love that the lesser party gives to the greater makes up for the difference. In other words, ‘when the love is in proportion to the [individual] merit of the parties, then in a real sense there arises equality which is certainly held to be characteristic of friendship.’” Guroian says mentorship is such a friendship between a master and pupil.

2. Mentorship may seem elitist from the perspective of contemporary culture. A mentor’s personal attention and instruction is not for sale to everyone who can afford the tuition. “Most anyone with the financial resources can purchase ballet or violin lessons,” Guroian notes, “but in the end the master still chooses the protégé for special attention and instruction.” Mentorship is not egalitarian: the mentor is not one’s equal. While a mentor may tailor her guidance to one’s knowledge and abilities, the pupil does not select or determine the course of instruction. This goes against the trend of thinking of students (in advanced courses of study, at least) as consumers who determine when and what they will study.

On the current usage of “mentor” in business and education, Guroian comments: “The institutionalized nature of mentoring programs in business and education disqualifies them as true mentorship. The relationships they establish are forced, rather than freely formed. In mentor programs for youth, the egalitarian bias of our democratic culture cuts against the characteristic of mentor as authority. Rather, the mentor is supposed to be a friend or buddy to the youth. It seems that everyone is a “guy” in our contemporary world.”

3. Christ, mediated through the lives and teachings of influential Christians, is our mentor. Let members name individuals who have instructed them in faithful discipleship. Apply the distinguishing features of mentorship to those relationships: someone, who was superior in Christian knowledge and practice, chose to teach us and to open our eyes to see ourselves, the world, and God in ways we previously could not see or appreciate.
4. Discuss how teachers’ roles are changing in primary and secondary schools, and in colleges and universities. Do these changes affect the teaching office in congregations? How does your congregation *mentor* young Christians? Or do you teach them in other ways?
5. Guroian refers to E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Books*, Felix Salten’s *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*, and William Faulkner’s “The Old People” in *Go Down, Moses*. Ask a few members to review the stories in advance and report on them to the group. Do members know other stories that introduce children to the real meaning of mentorship?

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.