

Discussion Guide

Week of 4.21.24

Sermon series: Relationships

Title: Friendship

How to use this guide: This discussion guide is designed to help you facilitate a conversation around the Bible text. Begin your discussion with prayer. Then, read this week's passage. Next, work through some of the questions together. The goal is not to ask every question, but to have a good, free-flowing discussion. Do your best to ask at least one question from each section (introduction, understanding, and application), but beyond that, let the Holy Spirit guide your conversation. Also, if you heard some point from the sermon that you'd like to discuss, feel free to add that to your group's discussion.

QUESTIONS FOR
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1. How do you typically describe yourself when you meet someone new?
2. What does your introduction reveal about your personality and your priorities?

Understanding

READ John 15:9-17

3. What was the motivation behind Jesus' words in these verses? What does it look like to love others the way Jesus loves us? (The word in Greek that is used here is agape.)
4. How are Christian friendships different than worldly friendships? Many people struggle to make deep friendships. What are some of the things that make friendship difficult? How can we overcome some of those barriers?
5. How is love the essential dynamic of the Christian life? How does your relationship with Jesus change once you start practicing His example of love?
6. Why do you find it difficult to be honest and transparent with people? What fears do you have about being open? How can we cultivate a culture of honesty within our friendships? Sometimes, honesty in a friendship requires us to "call out" our friends when we see them in sin. Share about a time when a friend has called you out.
7. How does a lack of open and honest relationships stunt our walk with Christ?
8. One of the goals of this small group is to create a space where friendships can grow. How are we doing, as a group, at growing our friendship?
9. When you look at your church, what kind of spiritual fruit do you see God developing? What about when you look at your small group?

QUESTIONS FOR
UNDERSTANDING

Application

10. Identify the truths and promises from this Scripture passage then apply them to your lives.
11. What benefits are produced in our lives when we love as Christ commands us?
12. What keeps you from obeying Jesus' commands in these verses?

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APPLICATION

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Commentary

The central command of verse 9 is to remain in Christ's love. Just as a branch draws life from the vine, the believer draws life from Christ. Believers can remain in Christ's love because Jesus doesn't change. He remains the eternal Son of God, the Word who became flesh and brought God's love to us. "Remain" also carries the urgent sense of "you must remain in my love," for there is no other way the Christian's life can be faithful and fruitful. The absolute necessity of continual connection to Christ harkens back to the image Jesus used earlier in this chapter, of Himself as the vine and believers as branches. The strength of a loving relationship makes a more abundant life possible on a human level. How much more will an abiding relationship with Christ empower the believer to live more faithfully.

In verse 10, Jesus highlighted the connection between love and obedience. Once again, He used His relationship with the Father as a model for our relationship with Jesus as He spelled out more specifically the results of a relationship of constant, trusting love. Jesus and the Father share a perfect and eternal love. His abiding love for the Father led Jesus to obey the Father's will completely. The word commands is plural **in verse 10**. Later, **in verse 12**, Jesus will speak of one central command—the command to love. The use of the plural here may help us understand another important truth about Jesus' obedience to the Father and ours to Christ. While the cross was Jesus' greatest moment of sacrificial obedience to God's saving will, it was by no means the first or the only.

Jesus obeyed the Father's commands every day in every relationship. In the same way, believers may face some climactic moment of decision in which we pay a great price for great faithfulness; but we, like Jesus, will keep the commands in a daily walk with Him and in a variety of ways as we encounter people with all kinds of needs who need God's love expressed in ways they can experience and understand.

In verse 11, Jesus took another step in describing a life of love. He had already taught that believers remain in a loving relationship with Jesus that is expressed as obedience to His commands. Next, He added His reasons for calling us to a life of loving obedience: so that we may experience joy.

Our culture often equates happiness with resisting and rejecting any costly commitment. Jesus' teaching corrects this misunderstanding by helping us see that deep joy comes only through deep commitment. Jesus' call might be compared to that of a music teacher who invites a young musician to become his or her student and then challenges the student to take on the daily discipline of study and practice. Only the student who obeys the teacher's instructions will know the joy of mastering the instrument and playing the most challenging and beautiful music. Only the disciple who, out of love for Jesus, is obedient to His commands will experience the kind of joy Jesus knew already. Jesus called it My joy, the joy of bringing salvation to a lost world.

When will the believer's joy be complete? When Jesus spoke these words to His disciples, the joy they experienced by obeying Christ's commands to express their love for Him was real and life-changing. Their joy, however, would become more complete when they witnessed Jesus' resurrection and saw another step in His saving work completed. The joy that comes to believers today by loving and obeying Christ is genuine but is only a foretaste of the joy we will share when Christ returns and completes His saving work by taking us to heaven.

The many commands of verse 10, the many ways we obey and serve Christ as an expression of our abiding love for Him, are all rooted in one central command that Jesus gave in verse 12: Love one another as I have loved you. He called it My command because it was His not only through the words He was about to speak, but through the life He now lives among His followers. Jesus embodied the power of keeping this commandment and gave His followers an example of a life fully dedicated to answering its call. He asked nothing of His disciples that He had not already given them by serving them and soon, by sacrificing His life for them. In giving His central commandment, Jesus restated the new commandment He gave in John 13:34, almost word-for-word.

Christians are called to love one another in the same way Jesus loves them. This means that a Christian loves not only those deserving of love, but all of those within the fellowship of believers, lovable or not. This command parallels Jesus' call to a "perfect" love—a love for all people—that imitates God's love for all humanity (Matt. 5:43-48). This commandment is simple to understand and incredibly difficult to carry out. We can only obey by abiding in Christ and depending on His presence and strength.

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Jesus connected His sacrificial love for sinners with the costly love believers must have for one another. Knowing what His love for us would demand of Him and wanting us to understand what the command to love might require of us, Jesus **gave in verse 13** a clear definition of the love He spoke of **in verse 12**. Love, said Jesus, is voluntarily laying down one's life for others.

Jesus had already spoken of and demonstrated this kind of love. He had told His disciples that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11,15-18). The word "for" means on behalf of, in place of, or as a substitute for. The picture is that of a criminal who is about to be punished when, just as the blow is about to fall, a friend throws his body over the criminal and takes the punishment in the guilty one's place. Knowing He soon would die on the cross, Jesus held up His own life as an example of the greatest sacrifice love can demand. Christ's followers, then and now, must be prepared to lay down life itself for the sake of the gospel.

In verse 14, Jesus' calling us His friends is a powerful revelation of the relationship He offers us, but it is a truth that is easily misunderstood. Some are tempted to confuse the friendship Jesus offers with an irreverent familiarity with Jesus that makes Him "one of us." A careful understanding of John's use of this word will keep us away from this error. The Gospel of John first uses the word friend to describe the special honor bestowed on the man chosen to be best man of a bridegroom (3:29). Though honored to be chosen and blessed to share the joy of the wedding, the best man is a servant who works hard to support the bridegroom and make the wedding as perfect as possible. He never sees himself as equally important as the bridegroom. Christians are blessed beyond measure that Jesus, through His saving work and His call to discipleship, has chosen us to be His friends—but this is not a friendship between equals. He remains the Lord. Our friendship with Him is found in our willingness to do what He commands, specifically to love one another in the way He has loved us.