

The Friend Factor

By Shari Miller

Leader's Notes and Bible Passages

Bible Passages in ESV

Close your eyes and imagine that you are a child again. What one face comes to mind when you remember someone who was important in your childhood and why? What quality did you value in that person? **Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group throughout the study. Perhaps the leader might want to give an example of her own.**

During this Bible study, we will look at friendship and what our Lord shares with us about being friends in Christ. We will also look at some of the characteristics of being a true friend — a sister or brother in Christ.

Opening Prayer: Dear Father, We thank and praise You for creating each one of us and giving us new life and faith in the waters of Holy Baptism. We confess the many times that we have sinned and have failed to be a true ambassador for You, as well as a true friend to our sisters and brothers in Christ. Thank You for sending Your Son to live a perfect life, suffer, and die on the cross for our sake. We praise You for your Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments. Thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit who enables us to boldly profess our faith in Jesus and live out lives of love, service, and friendship to Your glory. Bless our study of Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

My BEST Friend (Forever)! [BFF]

Perhaps you remember these simple phrases from an old children's song: "My best Friend is Jesus; Love Him, love Him! My best Friend is Jesus; Love (Thank, Praise) Him!" The song reminds us that Jesus is indeed our best Friend. When I sang it as a child (one who had moved numerous times), it would make me smile to imagine such a best (and constant) Friend.¹

According to our sinful nature, who or what is our natural friend? See **James 4:4**. **The world**. What is the result of that friendship? **We are naturally enemies of God.**

James 4:4

⁴You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Ephesians 2:1–3 gives a clue to the identity of our three worst enemies, who masquerade as friends. Who are they? **The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh.**

Ephesians 2:1–3

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Who is affected by these disastrous friendships? **All**. How? See **Romans 3:23** and **6:23a**. **The result of our sin is death — separation from God.**

Romans 3:23

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Romans 6:23a

²³For the wages of sin is death ...

God, our Creator, had pity on His own. He solved the sin-problem of the world by sending His Son Jesus to be the Savior of the world. Read and discuss God's salvation plan in **John 3:16**; **John 15:13**; and **1 Corinthians 15:57**. **Answers will vary, but should include Jesus perfect life, death, and resurrection for the world.**

John 3:16

¹⁶"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 15:13

¹³"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

1 Corinthians 15:57

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith Talk: Share with a partner or the small group what God's salvation plan — Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection — means for you personally. Be specific. **Answers will vary, but encourage all to participate. The leader might want to share first as an example for the rest.**

Read **Isaiah 41:8–10**; **John 14:26**; **John 15:15–16a**; and **Ephesians 2:4–9**. What reminders are given to all believers in Christ in these Scripture passages?

Isaiah 41:8–10 **God reminds us that He chose us; He will strengthen us; He will help us; He will uphold us; He saves us from the consequences of our sin.**

⁸But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; ⁹you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off"; ¹⁰fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

John 14:26 God sends His Spirit to give us faith and teach us through God's Word. The Spirit gives us the power to tell others of the great things Jesus has done.

²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 15:15-16a We are chosen by God!

¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you ...

Ephesians 2:4-10 God loved us even when we were unlovable. He gives us all the gifts of His grace through faith, and He even gives us that saving faith. It is all God's doing and plan!

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

My Friends (Sisters) in Christ

Faith Talk: Read again Jesus' words in **John 15:12-17**. Share with a partner or the small group why Jesus calls all believers His friends. **Answers will vary, but could include: He chose us; He gave His life for us; we follow His teachings; we serve one another in love.**

What does Jesus command His friends to do in this passage? **Love one another as Christ loved us; abide in Christ and bear fruits of love.**

John 15:12-17

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

How is friendship among sisters and brothers in Christ defined in the following passages?

Proverbs 7:1-5 Wisdom and insight into God's Word and His commands are to be desired above all. True Christian friends will also be in the Word and will not try to pull you away from its teachings.

Proverbs 7:1-5

¹ My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; ² keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; ³ bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend, ⁵ to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.

Proverbs 17:17 Christian friends love, even in adversity. Loving includes such things listening, caring, serving, defending, and protecting.

Proverbs 17:17

A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24 The NIV translates this passage:

²⁴ "One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Some, perhaps many, will call themselves "friend," but can then destroy us and not be faithful – they are unreliable. Jesus is our true Friend and a model for true Christian friendship – the kind that "sticks" close and remains faithful.

Proverbs 18:24

A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

2 Corinthians 13:11 Brothers and sisters in Christ aim for restoration, comfort, agreement, and peace. They rejoice that God blesses and is a part of their Christian friendships.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

An acronym of the word SISTERS (Sisters in Christ) might help to identify some characteristics of true friends in Christ. Look up the Scripture reference and then fill in the quality (see "answers" in Leader's Guide online): **(An additional page of qualities is included at the end of these Notes.)**

S upport

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

I nspire

Hebrews 12:1-2

Hebrews 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Serve

1 Peter 4:8–10

1 Peter 4:8–10

⁸Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

Teach

Colossians 3:16

Colossians 3:16

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Encourage

1 Thessalonians 5:11

1 Thessalonians 5:11

¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Respect

Philippians 2:3–4

Philippians 2:3–4

³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Share

1 Thessalonians 2:8

1 Thessalonians 2:8

⁸So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

If time permits, answer the following questions:

- How can friends in Christ inspire one another? **Answers will vary, but could include:**
 - **Read the Bible daily using the same daily reading guide — talk about what you've read.**
 - **Participate in group Bible study together.**
 - **Talk about your faith in Jesus ... daily.**
 - **Be intentional! Invite your sister in Christ to study the Bible with you.**
 - **Share the JOY of Jesus with your sister in Christ at the first opportunity!**
- What words and phrases have other people used to encourage you? Which were most effective? **Answers will vary, but encourage participation from all. The leader might want to give examples from her life as an example.**
- An old Persian proverb states: "He who wants a rose must respect the thorn." How can friends in Christ show respect for one another? **Showing respect for others means showing care for another person. It can involve: listening to others, playing fair, using good manners and complimenting someone.**

What can be some of the rewards of a sister (or brother) in Christ relationship? **Answers will vary, but encourage participation from all. Answers could include such things as fellowship, someone to confide in, someone who is a sounding board, mentoring advice, shared grief, Christian love and care, and so on.**

Faith Talk: Share your faith story or your LWML story with a partner or with the small group. Take just a few minutes. Be concise and share your contagious joy! **Be intentional — encourage each member of the group to try this with a partner and perhaps step out of her comfort zone!**

Faith Walk:

1. Thank and praise God for His Son Jesus — your Best Friend Forever (BFF)!
2. Rejoice that you have been given true friends in Christ (sisters and brothers) who care for you.
3. By the power of the Spirit, share the joy of being a child of God with a friend this week.
4. Intentionally share the love of Jesus with those you meet daily by word and action.
5. Become part of a group Bible study.

Closing Prayer (from Psalm 25)

Leader: To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
Group: O my God, in You I trust.
Leader: Make me to know Your ways, O LORD;
Group: Teach me Your paths.
Leader: Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
Group: For You are the God of my salvation.
Leader: For Your name's sake, O LORD,
Group: Pardon my guilt for it is great.
Leader: The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear Him,
Group: And He makes known to them His covenant.
Leader: Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!
Group: Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in You.
Leader: To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
Group: O my God, in You I trust. Amen!

Closing Song (sing or speak together): "Brothers and Sisters in Christ" (*Sing!* #78) or "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (*LSB* #770; *LW* #516; *TLH* #457).

¹"My Best Friend Is Jesus" by Mildred Adair Stagg. Copyrights: 1939. Renewed 1967 Broadman Press (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.) Published in 4

hymnals, including *Sabbath Songs for Tiny Tots* and *Little Voices Praise Him* CCLI SongSearch: #22951

[The last page of the Notes could be a possible "handout" if you wish. (FYI: That material was passed through LCMS DR.) Or the other possibility would be to direct the readers to the website where the "SISTERS in Christ" handout (also LCMS DR approved) is posted on The Time is NOW page.]

SISTERS IN CHRIST QUALITIES

Spiritually Mature: By the grace of God, a sister in Christ is spiritually mature and is faithful to God's Word and Sacraments. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, she finds time for God and others in her busy life. She has the love of Jesus within her and it shows.

Recognizes Needs: A sister in Christ has a desire within her heart that compels her to reach out to another who is hurting and listen to her needs. She offers support and comfort.

Commitment: A sister in Christ has a true desire to invest herself into a relationship as Christ's ambassador and commits to the relationship.

Openness: A sister in Christ is willing to share her life in an open way to allow another to also feel comfortable in sharing.

Acceptance: A sister in Christ accepts others and helps another sister look beyond a present failure.

Honesty: A sister in Christ will tell her sister the truth, even when the truth may not be what she wants to hear.

Listening: A sister in Christ listens to a friend's thoughts and feelings. Listening can be a greater service than speaking.

Encouraging: A sister in Christ must have the ability to see people not for what they are, but for what they can become.

Trustworthy: A sister in Christ can be trusted in confidence. She is like-minded and understanding. There is a special bond between sisters in Christ.

Prayer Warrior: A sister in Christ daily lifts her sister(s) up in prayer.

*Sisters in Christ are like pillars on a porch.
Sometimes they lean on you, and sometimes
you hold them up. But it is good to know
that they are always standing by!*