



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE:

Firstly, you will notice that at the start of each lesson there are three important bits of information. These will be the basic tools you need to lead the study.

All Scripture will appear in this BLUE colour. All Scripture references are taken from the NIV version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.

All discussion questions are in this GREEN colour. These discussion questions are meant to help open up times of sharing in your group.

Occasionally you will see text in RED. Red text are some ideas and thoughts that you may want to use for your group.

The bulk of the text will be in BLACK. This is the script and information for your lesson. However, please do not stick to the script word for word. The information is there just to serve as a guideline. Please feel free to lead or facilitate the discussion in the way which GOD is leading you.

Spiritual Friendships: Vine examples
Pastor Andrew Gardener
11 November 2018

Open in prayer.

Getting-to-Know-You: In groups of two's & three's.

- Share a story of your best friend/s and why you love and appreciate him/her.

Pastor Andrew shared how God highlighted the need for spiritual friendship/s in his life. God used John 15: 9 – 17 to frame what our spiritual friendships are to be for one another.

Read **John 15:9-17**.

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: love each other.

Our spiritual friendships are first and foremost formed out of a God-designed eco-system of love. Verse 9 illustrates the flow of this love for us. Firstly, from the Father as its source, into His son Jesus, and then through Jesus into us. Jesus calls us to 'remain' in His love. This however, does not make us static receivers, but in return makes us conduits of His love, by giving this love back to Jesus and also the friendships and community where God has placed us.

Thus, we remain in Jesus' love by loving Him back, and we remain in a loving relationship with our spiritual friends and community by exchanging love. The kind of love that flows from the Father into the Son into us is an *active* kind of love, a love that can only be defined as divine love if it gives as well as receives. **This is what it is to 'remain' in the love of Jesus – to give His love as much as we receive His love.**

Ps Andrew reflected on an African proverb that says **"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together"** and shared that it is vital to do this journey of the Christian life with other people, we can't do this on our own.

We must have people in and around our lives that know us, love us, hold us accountable as Derek spoke of last week, and who are committed to journeying with us in our good, bad,

and ugly moments of life. If we want to go far, we need friends, and not just people we hang out with and be social with. We need friends in our lives that we truly love and who truly love us. Indeed, this need for spiritual friendship and a love for one another is the central teaching of Jesus to his disciples in the last few weeks before his death.

For God has designed it that it is within your spiritual friendships where you will discover the fullness of joy in your life. Look how Jesus puts it in verse 12: **My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.** There it is – plain and simple.

John further elaborated by saying ‘If I fail to love others I can’t claim to remain in the love of Jesus’

(1 John 4:19-21).

How shall we live knowing that Jesus has given us this love? It is through laying down our lives for each other. It is through putting you ahead of me. It is for me to voluntarily put to death my own agenda and my own desires and my own selfishness and to be there for you, arms open wide, looking up at you and telling you to jump because I am here completely for you and together we will journey to the other side. That is true friendship, biblical friendship, spiritual friendship. It is the kind of friendship Jesus offers us. It is the kind of friendship we are invited to offer others.

When we learn to enter into true loving spiritual community with each other, we not only gain the joy of friendship with one another, we also gain the joy of friendship with Christ.

Ps Andrew recalls that as he had confessed his sins to his spiritual friends, he encountered Jesus’ forgiveness in their lack of judgment and their unaffected love. As he admitted his fears and shared his anxieties, he encountered Jesus’ freedom in their prayers and their comfort. As he shared his successes and achievements in life, he encountered Jesus’ delight in their words of affirmation, celebration and joy.

Ps Andrew stated that “My spiritual friends have been a major way that I have encountered the intimacy of friendship with Jesus in my life.” **This is why spiritual friendships are the seedbed of such deep personal spiritual growth – for they not only provide support and encouragement in our journey of faith, they actually become the places in which we encounter Jesus most.**

What do Spiritual Friends do?

- Spiritual Friends take the time to pause in their own busy life and reach out.
- They encourage you to be honest.
- They brave the hard questions.
- They reach out and are there with you in your darkest moments.
- They listen to understand, and not to fix you.

- They are real in the way that they love you. There is no space for superficial friends in Spiritual Friendships.
- Their friendship will enable you to see Jesus in the midst of what you are going through.
- They help you to find hope again.

Below is an activity that you might want to do with your group.

In groups of two's or three's discuss the following:

1. Do you have a Spiritual Friendship?
 - a. If yes, why?
 - b. If no, are you thinking about engaging in Spiritual Friendship?
2. Can you give me an overview of the kinds of spiritual friendships you have had in your life?
3. Why has having spiritual friendships been so important to you? What has the value been to your own personal growth? Can you share some examples?
4. What motivates you to want to keep meeting?
5. What have been some of the challenges with your spiritual friendships? Have you experienced conflict or tension during your relationship? How do you overcome this and continue to build trust together?
6. In your experience, what are some of the core elements needed for good spiritual friendship?
7. How are your spiritual friendships different to your other types of friendships?
8. How do you feel you have grown as a person and as a Christian due to these friendships?
9. What advice would you give someone who is about to start out on these kinds of friendships?

Pray

Matthew 6:9-13 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

‘This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,^[a]
but deliver us from the evil one.^[b]”

End