



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: Introduction
Pastor Jim McInnes
28 October 2018

Getting-to-Know-One-Another Questions:

- Share with each other about a significant friendship that you have.

Opening Discussion Question:

- When you hear the phrase “spiritual friendships” what comes to mind?

Pastor Jim McInnes gave the first message in our four-week mini-series on Spiritual Friendships. There is a sense of the call of God on The Vine to go deeper in its expressions of rich, relational community. Whereas our Call to Community message series focused on six key characteristics of life-giving Christian community, this mini-series focuses on the importance of spiritual friendships for growing in Christ-likeness.

Ps Jim started his message off by raising the following questions: “Who knows you? Who knows your life story, your faith journey, your failings, your dreams, your unique gifts, your temptations, your hopes and prayers?” He challenged us to not respond to this question by saying “God knows me!” As he so eloquently pointed out, “If you only needed God to know you He wouldn’t call you to community; He wouldn’t bother placing you in relationship with other believers.”

- Who knows you? Who truly knows you?

He went on to encourage us, “Someone must know you if you are to walk the Christian journey with support, with wisdom beyond your own, with comfort when you need it, with confession when you’ve fallen, and with the kind of encouragement that can only come from someone who knows you; one who sees both the light and shadow of your life, but also the mercy that God has for you.”

- How do you envision a spiritual friendship?
- Please share what your journey has been like regarding spiritual friendship
- Who are your spiritual friends?
- What challenges are there to having a spiritual friendship?

Ps Jim pointed out that having a spiritual friendship is not a secondary matter in growing in our journey with Jesus. It’s not a ‘nice to have but not necessary’ option. It is essential to our lives as followers of Jesus. We need spiritual friendship to build one another up.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11:

‘Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.’

Read Hebrews 10:24:

‘And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds,’

Both the apostle Paul and the author of Hebrews encourage the Christian community to ‘encourage one another and to build each other up’ and to ‘spur one another towards love and good deeds.’ Ps Jim raised the question, “How do we do that if we don’t know one another? I want to say today that we can’t.”

Info box

The authorship of the book of Hebrews is unknown. Throughout history various possibilities have been suggested: The Apostle Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, and Luke. The majority of current scholars agree that Paul was not the author of Hebrews. In all of his other letters in the Bible, he identifies himself as the author. Current scholarship is still divided over authorship. One group of scholars argues that a second-generation Jewish Christian wrote the book. Hebrews 2:3 points to this possibility when the author of Hebrew writes, ‘...how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.’ which seems to imply that the author's faith community learned about all these things from primary witnesses and was thus a second-generation believer.

- Does anyone know what has happened in your life in the last two weeks? Do you know what has happened in your friend’s life in the last two weeks?
- How has someone encouraged you recently? How have you been able to encourage someone recently?
- Ps Jim said, “We have a role to play in each other’s spiritual lives that goes beyond the safety of singing songs together on Sunday, attending a bible study together, serving in a ministry together, or participating together in a bunch of church activities.” What do you think Ps Jim is getting at with this statement?
- What does it mean in practice to ‘encourage one another and build each other up’?
- How can we move from talking about encouraging one another and build each other up to practically living this out on a regular basis?

Ps Jim told a story of a church member of his previous church who told him “I’ve been active in this church for decades, but I feel like leaving because no one really knows me. No one could tell you where I am with God.” This was in a church that had between 100-150 people.

- Do you think this is a common experience for people? Why or why not?
- What can we do about this as a Community Group?

Of course we cannot know everyone deeply, let alone 2,500 people. But two or three people can know the “ins and outs” of their life and faith journeys, and offer each other real encouragement out of a deep knowledge of each other, an authentic vulnerability, and a shared trust that God is at work in each other’s lives. Three people can do that. And, those who have such consistent, committed spiritual friends will tell you that it’s life changing.”

Jesus promised, ‘For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them’ (Matt. 18:20). The most basic form of Christian community is the coming together of any number of believers who meet with the purpose of offering each other encouragement in their faith. Jesus promises to be present anywhere, anytime, you and a fellow believer sit down and say to each other: “How’s it going in your journey with Jesus? Tell me about the ups and downs of the past week?”

There is a passage near the end of the Old Testament that paints a beautiful picture of the joy that God has when those who love Him get together to talk about Him.

Read Malachi 3:16-17:

¹⁶Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name.

¹⁷'On the day when I act,' says the Lord Almighty, 'they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.'

- List out what the Lord does in this passage and talk about why you think this is significant.

Ps Jim pointed out that God delights in our conversations about Him and is present in those conversations. He said, "It's as if God is content to sit quietly in the corner of a room listening to two or three people share their desire to walk in His ways; and their longing for God to act on behalf of His people. God is an attentive observer of spiritual conversations. He takes notes. A book of remembrance records the fact that you and two friends spent an hour last week talking faith."

- What does it mean to you that God is delights, is present, and takes note when we get together and talk about Him?

Ps Jim also highlighted that "God lays claim to those who speak with one another about Him. He says, **'they will be my treasured possession.'** He explicitly identifies Himself with them and promises them his protection. On the day when he acts in mercy and judgment, they will be known to Him by name and belong to Him because they placed their faith in Him. And one of the manifestations of that faith was conversation with other believers for mutual edification."

- Why do you think it is so important for us to talk with each other about God?
- What are we missing out on when we don't have these kinds of conversations?

The Bible passage in Malachi gives us a beautiful picture of what a spiritual friendship looks like. Ps. Jim said, "If God is listening quietly and saying to Himself, "They shall be mine...my special possession," because we choose to build one another up in faith through speaking about our love for the Lord, then let's talk! Let's meet. Let's be quietly caught by God spurring one another on in our faith. Let's be found intentionally sharing our faith struggles with one another and celebrating together our answers to prayer. Let's form spiritual friendships and give God something to write about."

Paul Stevens, a theologian writing on the value of spiritual friendship says: "True friendship is mutual equality and intimacy reaching towards God. It is both a gift of grace and an accomplishment. True friendship is not playing God, not encouraging co-dependence, not giving advice, not controlling, not directing another, not counselling and not an alternative to counselling. It is listening to the heart, getting in touch with the movement of God in another's life, prizing the unique spirituality of one's friend, exploring the full meaning of another's life in God, nurturing a friend's spiritual life and on occasion confronting a friend with hard issues."

- What part of Paul Stevens description of spiritual friendship do you resonate with and why?

Closing Challenge:

Ps Jim said “We believe that the next move in the strengthening of community at the Vine is for some of you to ask one or two people to enter committed, consistent, spiritual friendship with you, and for you to open up to those people in a brave way that let’s God speak through them to you and you to them.”

- Ask one or two people to enter into spiritual friendship with you.
- If you don’t know who to ask, ask God to help you find people to enter into spiritual friendship with.

Pray

End