



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: Biblical examples

Pastor Derek Ma

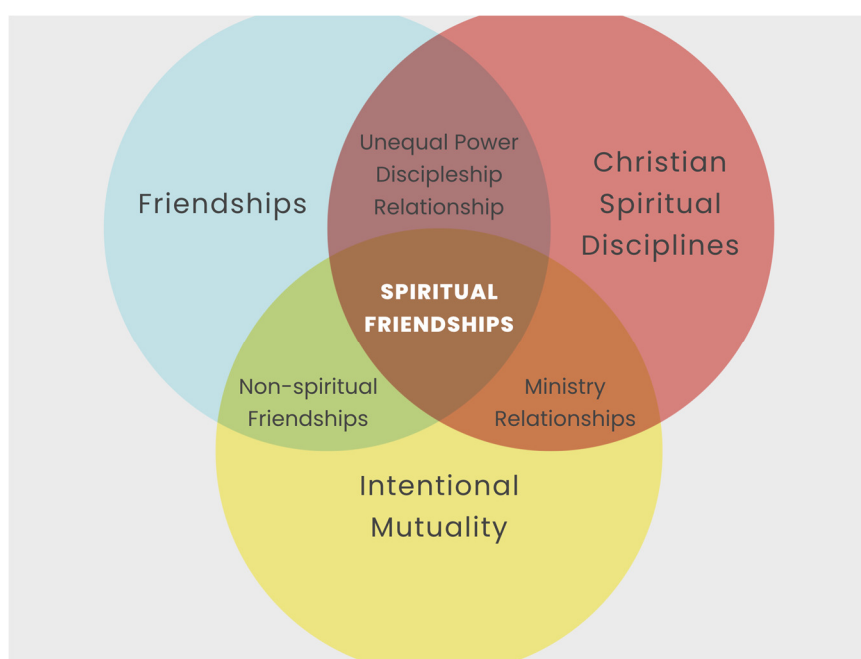
4 November 2018

Getting-to-Know-One-Another Questions:

- Who is one your best friends? How did you meet? Why do you think your friendship keeps growing? How do you keep in touch? Describe a recent time you spent together.

What is spiritual friendship?

Pastor Derek Ma described three aspects of spiritual friendships: (1) friendship, (2) spiritual disciplines, and (3) intentional mutuality or equality.



Where they overlap gives us this definition of spiritual friendship:

A friendship that intentionally engages spiritual disciplines so that together we grow in Christ.

- What changes an ordinary friendship into a spiritual friendship?
- What are spiritual disciplines? Give some examples.
- How easy or hard is it to bring spiritual disciplines into a friendship?
- Can you give an example of how you've included a spiritual discipline in one of your friendships?

Ps Derek reminded us that we don't need to go to church to 'engage God.' We have access to every major preacher through listening to podcasts, or live streaming. We can put on headphones and have our own worship experience with any worship band from around the world. We can download hundreds of Bible studies in mere seconds. We can 'engage Christ' in hundreds of ways through the internet, but what we can't get through our laptops or phones is human connection. **There is no substitute for human connection.**

Our goal at The Vine is to build relationships in which we “**spend unhurried, Christ-focused, mutually encouraging time with friends in order to spur on another to become more like Christ.**”

- How do we go about finding or making unhurried, Christ-focused, mutually encouraging time in Hong Kong?

Here are some biblical examples of spiritual friendships.

- David & Jonathan: Deep sacrificial covenantal friendship (1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:41-42)
- Moses & Aaron: Strong partnership and shared mission (Exodus 4:13-17; 27-31)
- Elijah & Elisha: Devotion and commitment (2 Kings 2:9-15)
- Naomi & Ruth: Loyalty and unconditional love (Ruth 1:14-18)
- Paul & Timothy: Support and encouragement (Phil 2:22-24; 2 Tim 1:3-4)

You may wish to spend time exploring one of these spiritual friendships with your group.

- What impresses you about this spiritual friendship?
- What do you see in this biblical friendship that could apply to us today?

Jesus ministered to large groups of people, often numbering in the hundreds or thousands (the crowd), to his followers (perhaps a hundred), to a small group (the twelve disciples) and to his close friends (the three): Peter, James and John. Ps Derek used Jesus’ relationship with the three as an example of spiritual friendships, and explored three occasions when Jesus related to His spiritual friends.

1. Raising Jairus’s daughter: account of our ability (read Luke 8:50-55)

⁵⁰ Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed.’ ⁵¹ When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child’s father and mother. ⁵² Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. ‘Stop wailing,’ Jesus said. ‘She is not dead but asleep.’ ⁵³ They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴ But he took her by the hand and said, ‘My child, get up!’ ⁵⁵ Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat.

Jesus took the hand of this dead girl. To touch a dead person would have made Jesus ceremonially unclean and he would have to go through a time of cleansing. But by raising her to life, the requirement of the law no longer applied. This miracle was a declaration to the believers that Jesus was the fulfilment of the law of Moses, not a law breaker. Jesus had power over life and death, and He validated His message and His Messianic mission with this demonstration of His power.

Jesus takes His close friends—Peter, James and John— inside the house so they can witness Him doing an amazing miracle: raising a 12-year-old child from the dead. He wants them to see what He is about. He wants them to see Him at His best—even while the crowd outside is still ridiculing Jesus for saying that the little girl is merely asleep.

In spiritual friendships we talk about accountability, and sometimes we find it easy to focus on what's going wrong, on sin. But accountability is giving an 'account of your ability,' your God-given ability and identity—who you are becoming through the life of Jesus and the power of his Spirit in you. Spiritual friendship is sharing strength as well as weakness, good times as well as tough times.

Discuss:

- Why does accountability sometimes focus more on the negative than the positive?
- Why do we find it difficult to talk about our strengths and successes?
- How can we bring balance into our spiritual friendships so they focus on the positive as well as the negative?
- One accountability question is this: When did I feel close to Christ during the past week, and when did I feel distant? Take some time in your group to reflect on this question. (You may want to break into pairs to share.)

2. Transfiguration: mountain of transformation (read Matt 17:1-5)

¹ After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. ² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. ³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. ⁴ Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' ⁵ While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!'

On the mountain with Peter, James and John, Jesus brilliantly, stunningly confirmed His true identity as Messiah, God's son. "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light." Any remaining doubts that the three spiritual friends may have been harbouring were now gone. They wanted to capture the moment: "Let's build a memorial!" But Jesus had a far different intention. He wanted them to join Him in building a new community of faith that would transform the world. These three disciples came down from the mountain to become key leaders in a movement that turned the world upside down. This moment of glory reshaped their own identities and their careers. From this moment they would never be the same again. Just as Jesus was transfigured before their eyes, so their own identities were transfigured and transformed. The mountain of transfiguration became a mountain of transformation.

Our spiritual friendships give us the opportunity to help each other discover our true identity as Jesus followers. We help each other see who we are in Christ. Not who we were but who we are becoming. "Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look.... Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!" (2 Cor 5:16-17 The Message). We are new people. All things are new!

In spiritual friendship my identity is transfigured and transformed. "It is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Discuss:

- How can I help my spiritual friend to be "transfigured," to see herself in a new way—to see himself as God does? Give an example of unlocking or unveiling the potential in another person.

- A spiritual friend can help me see what I cannot see in myself. Have you experienced that kind of transfiguration or revelation? Share your experience with the group.
- What can I do this week to help a friend to discover God-given potential they don't yet see? Make a note of three people you will thank or affirm or bless during the coming week.

3. Gethsemane: friendship in crisis (read Matt 26:36-41)

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, 'Sit here while I go over there and pray.' ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.' ³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.' ⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. 'Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?' he asked Peter. ⁴¹ 'Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.'

If Jairus's daughter showed his power, and the transfiguration showed his true identity, then the Garden showed Jesus' ultimate mission—to overcome death on a cross for the salvation of all. In these final, excruciating hours, Jesus took his three closest friends to be with him, to pray with him, at this moment of agony and grief. The Messiah, God's son, needed the support of spiritual friends. He needed someone to lean on. If Jesus needed a spiritual friend, how can we rationalize that we don't?

And the garden also showed the very human side of spiritual friendship. "When Jesus came back to his disciples, he found them sound asleep. He said to Peter, 'Can't you stick it out with me a single hour?'" (Matt 26:40 *The Message*). Pastor Derek noted that if we find ourselves getting sleepy when our spiritual friend is sharing, it's...well...biblical!

This is real life. This could have been a perfect picture of his close friends getting on their knees and covering Jesus in prayer in his darkest hour. But it wasn't. Yet the beautiful picture here is Jesus gently chiding his friends and then asking again for them to pray. Jesus shows us a loving rebuke—with a commitment to build a stronger friendship.

Sometimes your spiritual friends will let you down. And you will do the same. Sometimes they'll drop the ball and forget to pray—or you will forget your appointment. You may need to have some hard conversations. You may need to confront your spiritual friend and share how they disappointed you—or hear them describe their disappointment with you. But you'll follow Jesus and do it in love, and with the purpose of deepening your friendship. Not easy, but this is the quality of spiritual friendship we want to cultivate at The Vine.

Discuss:

- How does Jesus in the garden help you understand and appreciate Jesus' love for you?
- Share a crisis or difficult experience you've had, and how a friend was there for you.
- Talk about a time when you experienced disappointment in a friendship, and how you responded.
- Share some challenges or crises that you, your family or friends may be experiencing right now, and how the group can pray with you, (you may want to break into pairs for this sharing and prayer time).

Pray and End