

BELONGING & RELATING TO ONE ANOTHER  
IN THE FAMILY OF FAITH

*Friends  
&  
Sisters*

LIFEWAY WOMEN

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Brentwood, Tennessee

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# HOW TO USE *This Study*

**WELCOME!** We're so glad you've picked up this book. *Friends and Sisters* is a 5-week Bible study on the beautiful sisterhood we get to be a part of as women in the family of God. Over the course of the study, you'll learn why God values friendship, the blessings and expectations that come along with sisterhood, why caring for one another is a non-negotiable, how the Bible speaks to navigating challenging friendships, what it looks like to pursue Christ together day in and day out, and so much more.



## PERSONAL STUDY

Each week of this study is divided into five days, but we encourage you to take it at your own pace. As you study, you'll encounter guided reading of Bible passages, insights to help you understand what you've read, and questions that encourage you to engage with the Bible and apply its truths to your life.



## REFLECTION PAGES

At the end of each week, you'll find a place for you to reflect on what you've experienced in the previous days of study. This is a space for you to journal, gather your thoughts, note lingering questions, and take notes from your group time.

## FLOURISHING COMMUNITY

Because we believe discipleship happens best in community, we encourage you to do this study together in a group setting. If you're not able to be part of a group, consider enlisting a friend or two to go through it at the same time. We want you to have someone to connect with over coffee, text, or email so you can chat about what you're learning, pray for one another, and hold one another accountable to press on in your study of God's Word.

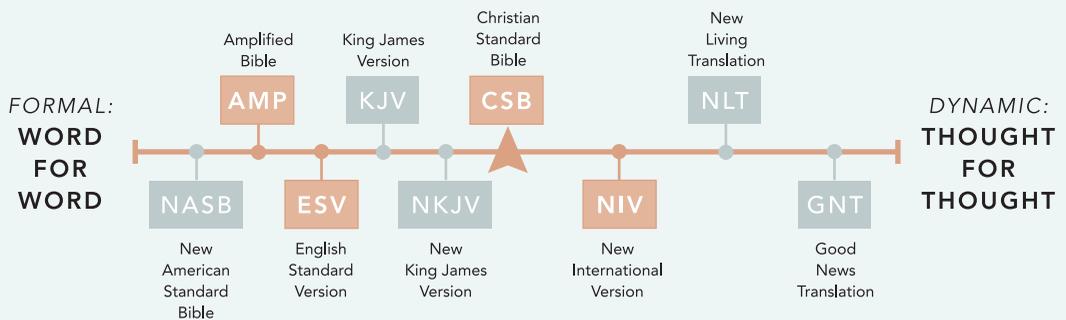


Throughout the study, you'll see questions marked with  that will be especially meaningful to talk through in your Bible study group or with a friend.

## A NOTE ON BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

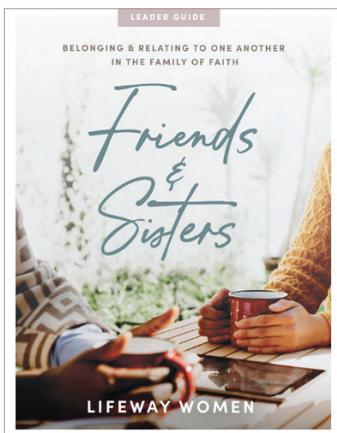
In this Bible study book we will primarily use the Christian Standard Bible. The Bible translation continuum below shows where each translation fits between word-for-word style (prioritizes word usage and sentence structure accuracy over readability) and thought-for-thought style (prioritizes readability and accessibility over strict word order). Paraphrases of the Bible, like *The Message* and *The Living Bible*, should be considered commentary rather than a translation. Other translations used are highlighted in brown below.

### BIBLE TRANSLATION CONTINUUM



# LEADING A GROUP

Thank you for investing your time in leading a group of women through this study. Whether you're new to leading a Bible study or have been facilitating groups for years, we've prepared some resources and insights to help you serve your group well.



## FREE LEADER GUIDE

A free leader guide PDF is available for download at [lifeway.com/friendsandsisters](https://lifeway.com/friendsandsisters). The leader guide includes tips for hosting a small group gathering, conversation starters, and a discussion guide for each session of this study. You'll also find alternative schedules to expand the study into a 6- or 10-week group experience to help you meet your group's needs.

## GET THE WORD OUT

Don't miss the free *Friends and Sisters* downloads to help you promote the study in your church or neighborhood!

Promo Video • Invitation Card • Promotional Poster  
Bulletin Insert • PowerPoint® Template • Social Media Assets

[lifeway.com/friendsandsisters](https://lifeway.com/friendsandsisters)

*Listen  
with us!*



## **FRIENDS & SISTERS PODCAST**

HOSTED BY TINA BOESCH & PAIGE CLAYTON KEETON

Join your podcast hosts and special guests for this 6-episode series where they chat, laugh, and learn more about being the friend God wants you to be and finding true belonging in His family.





*Introduction*

**N**ever before has our world been more connected. Wherever we are, we have access to people and information from around the globe (or next door) faster than our fingers can type. From the phones in our hands, to the watches on our wrists and the glasses on our faces, we can WhatsApp, Viber, Marco Polo, and FaceTime . . . not to mention send a text message or (gasp!) make a phone call.

We have hundreds (or even thousands!) of friends on social media, but despite the hours we spend online and the countless tools for connectivity, we find ourselves in the midst of what has been declared an “epidemic of loneliness and isolation.”<sup>1</sup> The ramifications of this epidemic are staggering. Consider the following:

Loneliness is far more than just a bad feeling—it harms both individual and societal health. It is associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day, and even greater than that associated with obesity

and physical inactivity. And the harmful consequences of a society that lacks social connection can be felt in our schools, workplaces, and civic organizations, where performance, productivity, and engagement are diminished.<sup>2</sup>

Should we be so surprised, though? Belonging—the opposite of isolation—is “a fundamental human need,”<sup>3</sup> woven into the fabric of how God designed humanity. “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone’” (Gen. 2:18). Relationships are at the heart of God’s good design for women and men.

In the moments when you feel lonely and disconnected, you may wonder why it’s so difficult to make and keep friends these days. You may ask, *Why are so many of my friendships only surface deep? How can I cultivate friendships that will last?*

We get it, and those are some of the questions that inspired this Bible study. I’m so glad you’ve joined us. God’s Word is a treasure trove of stories and teachings that can help us fight back against the loneliness we feel and the loneliness we see in the lives of others.

MEMBERS OF GOD'S HOUSEHOLD.  
FRIENDS *and* SISTERS.

YOU BELONG IN GOD'S FAMILY.

Over the next five weeks, we'll mine the depths of God's Word as we learn to love, care for, honor, support, and spiritually invest in one another. We'll be stretched to more deeply invest in friendships, and we'll be challenged to do the hard and vulnerable work of looking beyond ourselves to truly see the people around us. Ultimately, we'll look to Jesus, who calls us His friends, shows us what the perfect friend looks like, and knits the family of God together.

The belonging we so desperately long for isn't elusive, despite how much it may feel that way for you today. Our hope and prayer is that, as you learn more about God's heart for relationship, your eyes will be opened to the possibilities for belonging that are all around you, and you'll be empowered to step into these opportunities as they show up, fix them when they break, and delight in every sister you have in Christ.

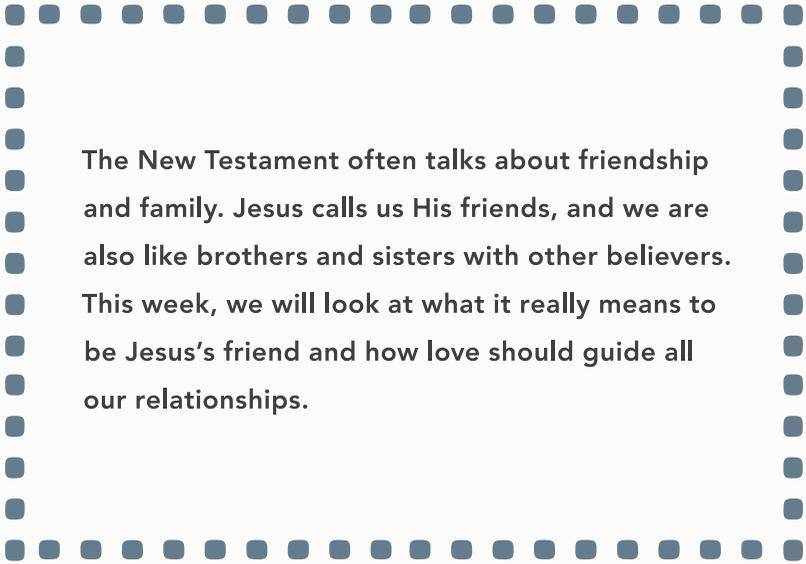
*Laura Magness*



WEEK ONE

WE ARE

*Friends  
and Sisters*



The New Testament often talks about friendship and family. Jesus calls us His friends, and we are also like brothers and sisters with other believers. This week, we will look at what it really means to be Jesus's friend and how love should guide all our relationships.



DAY  
01

*Friendship*  
& THE HEART  
OF GOD

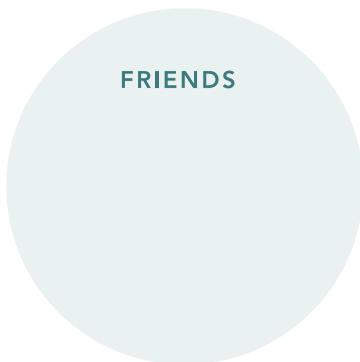
by Tina Boesch

One summer our family moved to a neighborhood in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where ancient live oaks loom over suburban streets and Spanish moss filters the sun's punishing rays. The landscape was foreign to me, and other than my husband's family, I didn't know a soul. I felt displaced and lonely. While looking into a preschool program for my littlest, I met the school's director, a woman named Chris. Knowing I was new to town, she invited me to bring my kids to swim at her home, which happened to be a short two-block walk from where we were living. "The gate is always unlocked," she offered. That open-pool policy was the first hint that her invitation was genuine and generous.

Chris's home, from her front yard firepit to her kitchen, became a haven for me during a season in my life that I can only describe as tumultuous. At a time when there were many unknowns regarding our family's future and I was grieving the loss of our former life, Chris became a steadying presence. I understood her friendship not as chance or serendipity, but as a gift from God. Ours was a friendship grounded in a deep spiritual reality—we were sisters in Christ.

Friends. Sisters. Two evocative words that define relationships—relationships that can be the source of immense joy and security or a tender point of pain or longing.

Before we begin our study, pause to reflect on what these words mean to you today. Inside the circles below, note the names of people you consider friends and those you think of as sisters. Around the circles, write words you associate with each type of relationship.



The number of names you came up with may be many or few depending on the expectations you have for those you'd call friends and those you'd call sisters. And you may find that some names fall in both circles. Perhaps you have fewer names listed than you would have a decade ago. Or maybe the opposite is true. My circles surprised me. Some of the names in my friend circle are people I miss seeing, women I was close to once but with whom I've lost touch. In the sister circle, I noted my biological sisters but also a handful of women who have loved our family so well for so long that they've been adopted as sisters—the sort of people who embrace me when my world is crumbling and cheer with me in times of great celebration.

Friends. Sisters. These are titles of value and worth, and you may be surprised by how often they show up in the New Testament. Today, we'll look closely at two passages in the Bible that reveal the foundation of relationships in the family of faith. John, the author of this book of the Bible, was among Jesus's closest friends. John was one of the first disciples Jesus called to follow Him (Matt. 4:18-22), and throughout the Gospels it becomes evident John was an especially dear friend to Jesus.

### **READ 1 JOHN 4:7-11.**

This passage is known as a chiasm, a literary structure often found in Scripture that uses parallel statements to frame a point of emphasis.

*Use the following prompts and the printed text on the next page to better understand John's meaning. (I know this exercise may seem technical, but stick with me! The work will help us better understand the meaning of these verses!)*

- 1. First, circle the two words John uses in verses 7 and 11 to address the recipients of his letter. (The printed text is from the CSB translation of the Bible.)*
- 2. Now underline the parallel phrases in verses 7 and 11 that describe how John wants his friends to relate to one another.*
- 3. Highlight the name of the source of love in verses 8 and 10.*
- 4. Write in the missing verse 9.*
- 5. Draw a box around the phrase that describes what we will do through the Son in verse 9.*

**A: VERSE 7—**“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”

**B: VERSE 8—**“The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

**C: VERSE 9—**

**B': VERSE 10—**“Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

**A': VERSE 11—**“Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.”

Did you notice how verses 7 and 11 mirror each other, and verses 8 and 10 affirm that God is the origin and source of love? These two sets of parallel statements pull our attention to verse 9, the center of the chiasm.



**READ VERSE 9 AGAIN.** Why do you think John wanted to highlight this specific point?

In this set of verses about the importance of loving one another, John centered the truth of the gospel. He highlighted the reality that God’s plan for our salvation originated in His great love for us. God ultimately showed us His love by sending the Son He loved—Jesus—to forgive and cover our sins on the cross and invite us into eternal, abundant life in Him through His resurrection.

Life with Christ is the beautiful promise at the heart of verse 9, and John understood that cultivating healthy, loving relationships is an essential aspect of that spiritual blessing. There is no such thing as an isolated, independent Christian life. We are called to share life, be friends, and love one another. You belong as a sister in the family Jesus created and called together.

Notice the words you circled in verses 7 and 11: “Dear friends.” These words express deep affection. Sometimes we use the word *friend* as a synonym for an acquaintance, but from the rest of John’s letter it becomes clear that is not the sort of relationship John had in mind. He cherished these friends,

was deeply concerned for them, and wanted them to mature spiritually and to experience fullness of joy. John's friendships with those reading his letter were grounded in their shared friendship with God through Jesus. Their faith was the most important thing they had in common.

While all our friendships are important and valuable, the ones we cultivate with those who do walk with Jesus are special because they are eternal. These women are our sisters in the family of God, and our friendships with them will literally last forever. These friendships are the subject of this study.

When you take a step back and look at the big picture, terms like sisters, brothers, and friends are used with surprising frequency throughout the New Testament to describe the relationships among people who follow Jesus. Sisterhood may feel like a modern fixation, but it's beautiful to see how it has always been an important aspect of the Christian life.

*As you read the following verses, highlight the words **sister** and **friend**.*

Jesus said to his disciples, "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' because you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters."

**MATTHEW 23:8**

I [Jesus] do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father.

**JOHN 15:15**

So then, my dearly loved and longed for brothers and sisters, my joy and crown, in this manner stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

**PHILIPPIANS 4:1**

Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is. **1 JOHN 3:2**

Then I fell at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "Don't do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers and sisters who hold firmly to the testimony of Jesus." **REVELATION 19:10**

In Christ, our friendships have a spiritual dimension that transcends our natural tendencies, preferences, and affinities. Christian friendship is supernatural. We are part of a community joined by more than shared interests or shared history. We have embraced a shared gospel; we worship the same Lord; we have the same hope; we are committed to the same mission; we share a common inheritance. By grace through faith, we have been given to one another as friends and as sisters, forever.

Look back at the descriptive words you wrote around the “Sisters” circle. For women who follow Christ, what expectations and responsibilities does this reality imply for Christian friendship?

I know this is a spiritual reality I should embrace wholeheartedly, but I’ll be the first to admit it’s hard. There have been long seasons in my life when I felt lonely in the presence of other believers. I struggled to be vulnerable and relate beyond a surface level, revealing hardness in my own heart. I missed the history I had with friends from other seasons in my life and felt too tired to put the energy into making new friends. I showed up for worship and small group Bible study week after week but didn’t feel seen or known. You may have felt this way too. Maybe you feel that way right now. Rather than feeling cared for, loved, and encouraged by other believers, you feel distance, indifference, or even subtle competition. I’m so glad you’re here.

## PRAY

**Close your time today by writing a short prayer, asking the Lord to open your heart to receive what He wants to teach you through this study and to give you the strength to put it into practice. Be honest with Him about your insecurities or struggles in relationships. Highlight one of the verses we studied today that encouraged your heart and remember it throughout your day.**

A photograph of two women laughing together. The woman on the left has long, wavy brown hair and is wearing a light-colored sweater. The woman on the right has curly dark hair and is wearing a tan, textured knit sweater. They are both smiling broadly, showing their teeth. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with brick walls.

DAY  
02

*Jesus*  
CLOSER THAN  
A BROTHER

*by Andrea Lennon*

I am unashamedly a people person. Bring me all the friends and sisters! At certain times in my life, though, my desire for friendships has crossed over into unhealthy territory because I've looked to those relationships to find my value, worth, and acceptance. This desire has led me on cycles of trying to find and collect "my people." Even though friendships are a beautiful gift from the Lord, we can't forget that Jesus must be the first and most valued relationship in our lives. Without Him, other relationships, no matter how strong, will never be enough.

Today we'll consider what the Bible says about Jesus's role as our friend and brother. John 14–17 is a passage of Scripture known as Jesus's Farewell Discourse. This lengthy teaching directed at Jesus's disciples happened toward the end of His earthly ministry. Among the lessons Jesus shared was the value of remaining in relationship with Him—how that brings glory to God and leads to fruit that lasts.

**READ JOHN 15:9-17.** For each occurrence of "love" or "loved" in these verses, record the truth that Jesus teaches. (Your answers may repeat!)

VERSE	TRUTH
Verse 9	God the Father loves Jesus the Son
Verse 9	
Verse 9	
Verse 10	
Verse 12	
Verse 12	
Verse 13	
Verse 17	

In this exercise we see nine occurrences of “love” and “loved” in just a few short verses. Jesus shared about the Father’s love for Him, His love for us, and our love for one another. From His teaching, we learn about the power, position, and privilege of our relationship with Jesus and the central role love plays in all of it.

## THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIP

### REREAD AND SUMMARIZE JOHN 15:9-11.

Jesus’s love for us is rooted in God’s love for Him. Yesterday, we read from 1 John 4:7-8, where John challenged his readers to “love one another, because love is from God.” God’s love is beyond what we can imagine. Very few things in life are certain, but God’s love fits into this category. We can’t outrun, out-sin, or exhaust the love of God. His love is available to us in endless supply. Scripture says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued to extend faithful love to you” (Jer. 31:3). This is a powerful truth that is foundational to our relationship with God through Jesus. Each day, we need to remember, “God loves me.”

Is it hard for you to believe that God loves you? Why or why not?



In our relationships with God, we can be tempted to try and earn God’s love or work hard to maintain it. Why do you think this is such a tempting trap to fall into?

What is a way you can guard against this mentality, or a passage of Scripture that combats it?

John 15:9 tells us to remain in Jesus’s love. To remain means “to permanently exist in or to be inseparably united to.”<sup>1</sup> The obedience Jesus describes in this verse is to be the natural byproduct of our relationship with Him. If we

love Him, we obey Him and we remain “inseparably united” to Him. So, our job is not to earn love. Rather, our opportunity is to accept love. Sometimes, this is hard. We allow our past experiences, struggles, and pride to stand in the way of humbling ourselves and accepting God’s lavish love that is available through a relationship with Jesus.

What does it mean to remain in Jesus’s love? Check all that apply.

- Abide in it every moment of every day.*
- Try to earn it with good behavior.*
- Reject it because we don’t want or need it.*
- Dwell in it and know that it is a gift.*

Today, you can receive Jesus’s love by accepting it, no matter your background or story. John 15:11 states that as we remain in Jesus’s love, we will have the joy of Jesus living within us. This joy will lead to a life that is complete or satisfied in Christ. Now, that is powerful!

## THE POSITION OF RELATIONSHIP

**REREAD JOHN 15:12-13.** From what you know about Jesus’s time with His disciples, list some words that describe the way Jesus loved them (and therefore the way He challenged them to love others).

The call to love others is rooted in the love Christ has for us. Romans 5:8 says, “But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus came to this earth, lived a perfect life, bore our sins on the cross, paid our sin penalty in full, died a death we deserved, and rose again, conquering sin and death. He laid down His life, and He called us friends every step of the way. The moment you receive Christ, He becomes your friend and brother. Your position in Christ is safe and secure forever!

Look back at the circle diagram from yesterday and the positive words you associated with friend. What does the fact that you are Jesus's friend—with all the characteristics you noted—mean to you? How does that truth change you?



If we are to “love one another as I [Jesus] have loved you,” then what is Jesus implying? How does Jesus's example change the way you view friendships?

## THE PRIVILEGE OF RELATIONSHIP

Through Christ, we are no longer separated from God but united with Him. No longer on the outside, no longer slaves to sin and self. Instead, we are coheirs with Christ. This leads to a deep and meaningful friendship with Christ that changes who we are and how we live.

**REREAD JOHN 15:14-17.** Jesus shares several ways we can know and experience a deep and meaningful friendship with Him. What are they?

Here, Jesus gets down to the nitty-gritty truth. We can experience a deep and meaningful friendship as we follow Jesus's command to love one another. You might be thinking, “I can't do that!” Thankfully, we don't have to find the ability within ourselves. That is the beautiful privilege of our relationship with Christ. As we receive the love of Christ, He does the work in and through us. When we know and experience the love of Jesus, we can

love others in a way that honors God. We no longer need others to complete something in us that only Christ can complete. We discover that our worth, value, and acceptance are secure in Jesus. This leads to a life of joy that grants us the ability to love others well.

Knowing that Jesus chose and appointed you to bear fruit, how would following this command affect your friendships?

I am thankful Jesus taught me that His love is the ultimate love that sets me free. One of my regular prayers is that I will never grow tired of this truth. I am completely loved by my Savior and fully known by Him. Jesus sees my sin and struggles, yet He does not withhold Himself from me. He stands with open arms and invites me to fully experience His love, mercy, and grace. In response, I can love others.

Jesus. He really is closer than a brother to us, the perfect example of friendship.

## PRAY

**Jesus, the Son of God, calls you His friend. Close today's study in reflection and prayer. Journal about what you learned today from Jesus's words, and how it changes (or challenges) your understanding of being called His friend.**



DAY  
03

*Love*  
IN ACTION

*by Corinne Allen*

**G**rowing up in the church and as part of a Christian family, we often discussed the difference between claiming to have a relationship with Jesus and truly living out our faith. “You have to walk the walk, not just talk the talk,” and “Practice what you preach,” were phrases I heard on repeat. Statements like these are so familiar we can easily brush them off as clichés, but what if we slowed down long enough to think about the gospel implications of these statements for our relationships?

As we study today about God’s great love for us and our call to love others sincerely and sacrificially because of His love, we have the opportunity to take an honest look at our own hearts and habits. We’ll let God reveal to us where loving others may be more of a theory we agree with than a practice we implement in our everyday lives. Love is the heart of godly friendship and sisterhood, so it’s critical we get this right!

**LET’S RETURN TO THE LETTER OF 1 JOHN AND READ 1 JOHN 3:11-24.** What stands out to you from these verses about who God is and what He wants our Christian friendships to look like?

John says in verse 11 that there is one message you have heard from the beginning. What is that message?

One Bible commentator describes the message of love as one “believers have heard from the beginning of their Christian lives.” He goes on to say,

The original apostolic message affirmed that believers should love one another, a practice that is foundational to the Christian message. Although the demand for obedience to love certainly applies to the world in general, this command to love is directed primarily to the community of faith. . . . Having established that believers are characterized by righteousness and abstinence from a life of continual sin, John now adds that they are also persons who love one another as a normal and consistent habit of life.<sup>2</sup>

As we read on in 1 John 3, the apostle has some strong things to say about those who hate their brothers or sisters in Christ. In fact, he says that to hate a brother or sister is to be equal to a murderer (v. 15). It's not the only time in this letter that John addresses hating fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

**READ 1 JOHN 4:19-21**, then complete the phrases below.

*Verse 19: We love because . . .*

*Verse 20: If anyone says, "I love God," and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a . . .*

*Verse 21: And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also . . .*

You may be thinking something along the lines of, *I would never say that I actually hate someone*, or, *I don't have hate in my heart, just frustration toward her*, (or fill in the blank with whatever word helps downplay what might be hateful/sinful). We come up with clever ways to clear our consciences and minimize our guilty feelings. I will be the first to admit that "hate" is an uncomfortable word to sit with or own up to. But I can think of many times I have not loved people sacrificially and sincerely like Jesus does or times I have harbored bitterness, jealousy, and unforgiveness in my heart. Maybe you can, too.



**READ MATTHEW 5:21-22 AND EPHESIANS 4:31-32.**

How do these verses help you reframe what hatred (or the opposite of love) looks like in Christian relationships? What are some of the words or phrases that stand out to you?

Because of God's abundant grace and mercy, we are invited into a better way. You and I can confess to God where we have gotten it wrong when it comes to failing to love others, accept His shame-free forgiveness, turn from that sin, and walk forward in loving others well.

Where in your life do you see evidence of indifference, jealousy, hate, bitterness, or unforgiveness? Write out a prayer of confession and repentance, then consider if you need to seek reconciliation with your sister (Matt. 5:23-24).

**READ 1 JOHN 3:16-20, A PASSAGE THAT ECHOES WHAT WE LEARNED FROM JOHN 15 YESTERDAY.** What do these verses add to your understanding of what it looks like to love like Jesus?

Let's talk theology for a moment. We all have a formal theology and a functional theology at play in our lives. Our *formal theology* is the set of beliefs and doctrines we know or claim to be true about God and His Word. On the other hand, our *functional theology* is the actual practice of our lives based on what we believe. Many times, we find a gap between what we say we believe (formal theology) and what we actually live out (functional theology). This gap is where hypocrisy lives. (It's the reason we have phrases like, "Practice what you preach.") As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, the gap between our formal and functional theologies should shrink. A goal of Christlikeness is to live in such a way that what we proclaim to believe and what we practice are aligned.

**READ AND SUMMARIZE 1 JOHN 3:21-24.** What are the two parts of God's command to us in verse 23?

In these final verses of the passage, there is an emphasis on keeping God's commandments—not just knowing what He asks of us but obeying His Word and habitually practicing His ways. How can we keep that which we do not consistently treasure? We are called to love others, and this love is much more than a feeling or sentiment. This command to love is the command to "[unselfishly] love and seek the best for one another" (1 John 3:23, AMP).

Give yourself an honest assessment of how you're doing at unselfishly loving your sisters. How does Jesus's model of unselfish love compel you to grow in this area?

Verse 24 tells us that when we keep God's commands, we remain in Him, and He remains in us. The Greek word for *remain* (or abide) in these verses is the same word we saw yesterday in John 15. So, let's review:

How do we remain in God? By keeping His commands.

How do we keep His commands? By obeying His Word.

How do we know that He remains in us? Because the Holy Spirit He gave to us lives in us and through us. (This is very good news!)

May we be daughters of God and sisters in Christ who love in action and in truth, who practice what we preach, and who move from theory to the practice of sacrificial love. May the gap between our formal and functional theologies continue to close as we walk with God, who IS love (1 John 4:8).

## REFLECT

**What would it look like for you to "not love in word or speech, but in action and in truth" this week?**

**Which friend(s) can you show up for and serve this week? Note at least one idea and make a plan for how you will execute it.**

**End by praying for the courage to rest in God's love for you, the discernment to confess where you have fallen short in loving others, and the awareness to see who God is leading you to serve sacrificially with unselfish love.**

# 7 WAYS TO MAKE FRIENDS

## *Who Become Sisters*

- 1. PRAY FOR FRIENDSHIPS.** Ask God to open your eyes to people around you who may also be seeking connection and to give you courage to reach out.
- 2. GET INVOLVED IN CHURCH LIFE BEYOND SUNDAY.** Join a Bible study group (if you aren't already in one!), volunteer regularly, and attend events hosted by your church.
- 3. BE THE ONE WHO REACHES OUT.** You may need an extra bit of courage for this one, but invite someone for coffee or a walk, host a small group gathering, and don't wait for others to include you.
- 4. CONNECT THROUGH SHARED INTERESTS.** Do you love crafts, cooking, hiking, or reading? Find a group that integrates your hobby with fellowship or start the group yourself. Or try something new as a way to do things that matter to others.
- 5. PRACTICE HOSPITALITY.** Whether your home is a house, an apartment, a dorm, a senior living facility, or the basement of your parents' home, you can make it a place where others feel like they belong and where casual acquaintances can become sisters.
- 6. UNINVITE JUDGMENT AND PERFECTIONISM.** They say comparison is the thief of joy, and it's the thief of friendships, too. Be a woman of integrity who can be trusted and who looks for ways to build up her sisters.
- 7. REMEMBER AND FOLLOW UP.** Life as adults is busy, and keeping others in mind can quickly fall to the wayside. Put your phone to use and set calendar reminders to check in, follow up, and pray. You'll be amazed at the difference this level of care makes in your relationships.



DAY  
04

*Snapshots*  
OF FRIENDSHIP

by Andrea Lennon

**A** picture is worth a thousand words. The older I get, the more I believe this saying is true. I love how a picture tells a story. We can look at a picture and learn details such as who was involved, what happened, when it occurred, where it took place, and why it's memorable. The same principle applies to the people in our lives. Each person tells a story (some hard, others wonderful) and holds an important place in the larger story of our lives.

Early on in His earthly ministry, Jesus called a group of twelve men from different backgrounds and occupations and invited them to be a part of His life (Mark 3:13-19). Most likely, these are men who would not have been friends apart from their relationship with Jesus. Jesus invited these twelve men, as friends and ministry partners, to link arms for the sake of God's kingdom coming on earth. Today, we will get to know Jesus's disciples through three Gospel snapshots, each giving us insight into Jesus's close circle of friends, a group that started with twelve, narrowed down to three, and always made time for the one.

## SNAPSHOT 1: THEIR FAITH

**READ MARK 4:35-41.** Draw a picture of this snapshot (yes, even if you don't love to draw!).

By this point in Jesus's public ministry, the disciples had witnessed and heard many things. Their faith in the Lord developed as they watched Jesus interact with others and listened to the truths He taught. In this scene following a day of teaching, Jesus invited the disciples into a boat to cross to the other side of the sea. Little did the disciples know that Jesus had a real-time faith lesson in store for them.

What one word or phrase would you use to describe the disciples' response when the storm hit? On the other hand, what one word or phrase would you use to describe Jesus's response after the disciples woke Him up?

A storm came, and the disciples panicked. Meanwhile, Jesus napped at the bottom of the boat. Let's put ourselves in the disciples' position. This storm had more than a little wind and rain. It was a great windstorm, and the boat was taking on water. I'm sure I would have panicked too! Not knowing what to do, the disciples ran to Jesus with an interesting question. "Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to die?" (v. 38). The disciples did not hold back from sharing their perspective on the situation.

In response to the disciples' fear, Jesus asked, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (v. 40). What do you think Jesus was trying to teach them here—both through His actions and this question? Read Psalm 65:5-8 to help in your response.

Jesus cared about the faith of His friends. Jesus wanted His friends to know who He was and what He could do. If we zoom out and consider the broader picture of Jesus and His interactions with the disciples, we will see this as an ongoing pattern. Jesus wanted the disciples to know Him, believe Him, and trust Him. He never wanted the disciples to settle for a surface-level faith. He always wanted them to experience more of His presence and power. I love the heart of Jesus for His friends. Jesus met them in the storm, and then He calmed the storm around them. Then, He asked a question that led to a decision: Would they have faith or fear?

What is one truth about friendship you can apply from this Gospel snapshot?

## SNAPSHOT 2: THEIR FUTURE

Peter, James, and John made up Jesus's inner circle. They later became key leaders in the development of the early church. These three men were present for some of the most impactful moments of Jesus's ministry, including the mountaintop transfiguration, where they saw Jesus in His divine glory (Mark 9:2-13), and the garden of Gethsemane, where He grieved on the eve of the crucifixion. Through the highs and lows, Peter, James, and John were equipped for the days ahead.

**READ THE ACCOUNT OF JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE IN MARK 14:32-41.** List the feelings Jesus experienced, those that are stated and those that are implied.

Jesus was deeply distressed, troubled, and grieved, so He prayed to the Father. Jesus asked for the cup of God's wrath to be taken from Him. In short, Jesus asked if His going to the cross was necessary (or the only way). Yet, Jesus surrendered to God's plan: "Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will" (v. 36).

Record the instructions Jesus gave Peter, James, and John.

Verse 34:

Verse 38:

Jesus knew that in the face of His crucifixion and the wake of His ascension back to heaven, Peter, James, and John would face intense spiritual testing. While the cross was waiting for Jesus, the temptation to compromise and abandon hope was waiting for the disciples. The future leaders of the early church needed to know how to prepare for spiritual battles. Prayer was the way Jesus prepared for the cross. And prayer was the way He encouraged the disciples to strengthen their faith for the season ahead.

Jesus prepared His friends for the future. Peter, James, and John had specific calls on their lives. Peter became known as the rock (Matt. 16:18). He preached on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came (Acts 2). James and John were known as the Sons of Thunder because of their boldness for the Lord (Mark 3:17). Historically, James was the first disciple to be martyred for his faith. John was the last of the disciples to die, but not before writing several books of the Bible, which we've been studying! None of their lives were easy, but their time with Jesus prepared them for the mission.

**FAST FORWARD AND READ ACTS 1:12-14.** The disciples were no longer sleeping on the job. They were spiritually awake!

What is one truth about friendship you can apply from this Gospel snapshot?

## SNAPSHOT 3: THEIR NEEDS

Jesus had a heart for the one. Whether it was washing feet, entrusting His mother to John, or restoring Peter after he sinned, Jesus met His friends at their greatest points of need. He saw them individually and loved them completely.

**READ JOHN 20:24-29.** In your own words, summarize Thomas's doubt. Include how emphatic Thomas was about his unbelief.

The word “never” communicates Thomas's resolve. Apart from Jesus moving in his life, Thomas would never believe the resurrection happened. Thomas needed to see and touch Jesus's nail-scarred hands. He had to see it to believe it!

Thomas's struggle did not deter Jesus. Jesus stepped into the questions and doubts. Paraphrase what Jesus said to Thomas in John 20:27 and Thomas's response in John 20:28?

Verse 27:

Verse 28:

“My Lord and my God” (v. 28). Thomas knew Jesus was alive, and he knew Jesus was the Savior. He knew that everything Jesus ever said was true. And while we will always know Thomas as “Doubting Thomas,” at that moment, he became “Believing Thomas”—placing his trust in his risen Savior and Friend, Jesus.

Jesus met the needs of His friends. Thomas needed to see it to believe it. Your deepest need may be forgiveness, faith to believe, strength to begin again, or healing from shame or guilt. No matter your need, bring it to Jesus. Don't miss the fact that as Jesus was healing Thomas, He was also thinking of you and me. I love that about this snapshot—we are in the picture, too! John 20:29 says, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” Jesus came for the one, and that includes you and me.

**What is one truth about friendship you can apply from this Gospel snapshot?**

Jesus wanted friends and took the necessary steps to have friends. His disciples were ministry partners who enjoyed life with Him—the miraculous moments, the mundane moments, and everything in between. As I think about my friendships, I want to do the same. I want friendships that are real. I want to encourage others to develop their faith so they are prepared for the mission. I also want to meet needs as I point others to Jesus, who alone can meet the deepest needs in our lives.

## REFLECT

**Jesus modeled concentric circles of friendships that poured into twelve, narrowed down to three, and always made time for the one. What a great model that will lead to meaningful snapshots in our lives! Look back over the applications you wrote for each Gospel snapshot. Write them on a notecard or save them to a note in your phone so you can be reminded of them often.**

# PRACTICE & *Pray*

*by Paige Clayton Keeton*

In your study this week, you've considered what it means to be a friend and sister who loves others the way Jesus loves you. Now it's time to reflect on what you've learned and consider what action steps you can incorporate into your life based on the type of friend and sister you're called to be. Let's get introspective.

List three qualities of a good friend you noted on page 15.

1.

2.

3.

Now open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 13, a chapter famously called "The Love Chapter," and read verses 4-6.

*What is love?*

*What is not love?*

☆ Put a star next to any words that overlap with your list of friendship characteristics.

✓ Put a checkmark next to any negative characteristics you've seen creep into your friendships.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13 act as a filter, sifting out what love should look like in action and helping us identify what should not be part of Christlike love. Does your belief about love line up with what you read in 1 Corinthians 13? If your view of love differs from how God describes love in His Word, soak up the following Bible verses. Meditate on their truth and highlight one you want to memorize this week.

Little children,  
let us not love in  
word or speech,  
but in action and  
in truth.

**1 JOHN 3:18**

Above all, maintain  
constant love for  
one another, since  
love covers a  
multitude of sins.

**1 PETER 4:8**

Hatred stirs up  
conflicts, but love  
covers all offenses.

**PROVERBS 10:12**

Write a few sentences that put into words your personal belief system around what love is and what love is not.

Who do you need to love differently in light of what you just wrote? Write down two names (or nicknames).

In your group meeting this week, plan to share one action step you have taken or are committed to taking to apply the type of love God describes in 1 Corinthians 13 to one of these relationships.

*Pray* Spend a few minutes in prayer, asking God to help you and give you opportunities this week to be a friend and sister who loves with 1 Corinthians 13, Jesus-like love.





As you reflect on the Bible passages you read this week,  
what stands out to you about the character of God?

Blank white space for reflection.

How have you been challenged and encouraged in your  
relationship with Jesus through what you've learned?

Blank white space for reflection.

Write down one way you want to show your love  
for a sister in Christ this week.

Blank white space for reflection.