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AMANDA MEJIAS
& CORINNE ALLEN

THIS IS
FRIENDSHIP

God's Very Good Gift of Community

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& CORINNE ALLEN

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God's Very Good Gift of Community

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Amanda Mejias serves as the Lifeway Girls Brand Specialist, which is just a super fun way of saying that she serves the parents and leaders of teen girls. After serving on church staff for many years, she is passionate about building relationships and creating resources that equip the local church. Amanda is wife to her wonderful husband, Brandon, and lives out her dream of being a working mom. If you ever want to find a way to her heart, ask to meet for coffee or send her a TikTok of a golden retriever.

Corinne Allen is a follower of Jesus, wife to Grant, mom to Merritt, sister, daughter, and friend who is wildly in love with Jesus and passionate about sharing the beautiful story of the whole gospel. She loves bright colors, sunshine, words, flowers, deep chats with old and new friends, volleyball, and iced coffee. Corinne and her husband have the joy of serving in full-time student ministry at Long Hollow Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

Hiiiiii!

We're two friends who deeply love Jesus above all else, seriously love being friends, and have experienced firsthand the true gift of community. As we have studied God's Word and spent time in prayer to write this study, God has continued to reveal to us so many powerful truths and promises about friendship. We are convinced that community is not just a good idea but God's very good design for all of us!

We've experienced the simple but sacred joys of friendship in the everyday moments, such as random dance parties, baking cookies, laughing until we cry, going on trips, sharing life, and making memories that will last forever with people we dearly love.

But here's the thing, we have also experienced a lot of messy moments when it comes to the challenges of living in community with others in the midst of our brokenness and sin. We'll be the first to admit that we have gotten it very wrong at times in our friendships—hurting people that we love and needing to confess where we have fallen short and ask for forgiveness. We have also been on the receiving end of hurtful words, rejection, and betrayal.

Sooo, if we have faced all of that in our friendships, why do we keep pursuing this gift of community and encouraging you to do the same? Because it's worth it. We absolutely believe that living in biblical community with others is God's very good design for us, and just because something may not be easy does not mean that it's not worth it.

Our prayer is that you would spend time in God's presence and in His Word, first encountering friendship with Him in new and deeper ways. Then, from an overflow of awe and gratitude for God's perfect love for you, that you would seek to love the people around you well. Jesus is the perfect friend who loves you unconditionally and will never leave you. He cares so deeply about you, and He is present and active—in your joy and your grief, in your celebration and your heartbreak. He has made you for relationship with Himself and with others.

With our eyes fixed on Jesus as our greatest friend and guide for how to be a good friend, let's be friends!!!

xoxo,

Amanda & Corinne

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

WELCOME!

We're so glad you've chosen to do this study. *This Is Friendship* is a four-session study in which authors Amanda Mejias and Corinne Allen walk through the promises of friendship. We'll see how to find good friends and, more importantly, how to be a good friend.

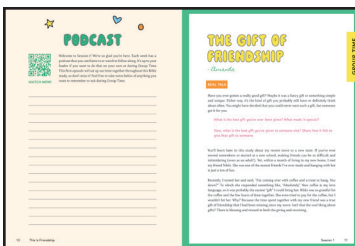
GETTING STARTED

Because we believe discipleship happens best in community, we encourage you to do this study together in a group setting. Or, if you're doing this alone, consider enlisting a friend or two to go through it at the same time. This will give you friends to pray and connect with over coffee or through text so you can chat about what you're learning.



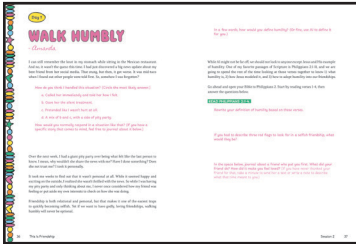
ICE BREAKERS

You can find optional ice breaker activities on page 90 to begin each week of Group Time. These are a great way to ease into the teaching and start the conversation.



GROUP TIME

Each session begins with a Group Time that allows you to start your week together. You can use the questions and prompts provided to help apply what you've read. If you're doing this alone, maybe ask a friend or your mom to do this part with you.



PERSONAL STUDY

Each week features three days of personal study. You'll find questions to help you understand and apply the text, plus insightful commentary to clarify your study.



LEADING A GROUP?

You can find a Leader Guide on page 88. The Leader Guide offers several tips and helps. To find additional resources for leaders, visit lifestyle.com/thisisfriendship.



PODCAST & VIDEO ACCESS


You'll find detailed information for how to access the podcast videos that accompany this study in the back of your Bible study book.



Session 1

FRIENDSHIP IS A RESPONSE





God's call for us
to love others
is a call to
love everyone.

THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP

- Amanda

REAL TALK

Have you ever gotten a really good gift? Maybe it was a fancy gift or something simple and unique. Either way, it's the kind of gift you probably still have or definitely think about often. You might have decided that you could never earn such a gift, but someone got it for you.

What is the best gift you've ever been given? What made it special?

Now, what is the best gift you've given to someone else? Share how it felt to give that gift to someone.

You'll learn later in this study about my recent move to a new state. If you've ever moved somewhere or started at a new school, making friends can be so difficult and intimidating (even as an adult!). Yet, within a month of living in my new home, I met my friend Nikki. She was one of the easiest friends I've ever made and hanging with her is just a ton of fun.

Recently, I texted her and said, "I'm coming over with coffee and a treat to hang. You down?" To which she responded something like, "Absolutely." Now coffee is my love language, so it was probably the easiest "gift" I could bring her. Nikki was so grateful for the coffee and the few hours of time together. She even tried to pay for the coffee, but I wouldn't let her. Why? Because the time spent together with my new friend was a true gift of friendship that I had been missing since my move. Isn't that the cool thing about gifts? There is blessing and reward in both the giving and receiving.

Before we dive into our main discussion today, I want you to read Matthew 7:11, then answer the question below:

READ MATTHEW 7:11.

What kind of gift giver is God?

Whether you're the best or worst gift giver, nothing compares to the way God gives us good gifts. And we see in Scripture that the two greatest gifts He gave us started at the very beginning.

READ GENESIS 1:26-31; 2:4-8.

Look at Genesis 1:26 again, and fill in the blanks below:

“Let _____ make man in our image, according to _____ likeness.”

It might be weird to see “us” and “our” in that verse, because it seemed like only God was there! Yet, the “us” and “our” represents the Trinity of God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Spirit (Holy Spirit). It's important to understand that God Himself was in relationship before the creation of the world. There was no need to create humans, yet He did. Why? To give us the gift of a relationship with Him.

That's the first and best gift we could ever have! A relationship with God.

What did God call His creation of Adam in verse 31?

How did this set humans apart from the other things God created (sky, birds, animals, etc.)?

How does it feel to know that the Creator of the world wants a relationship with you?

Describe what a relationship with God should look like.

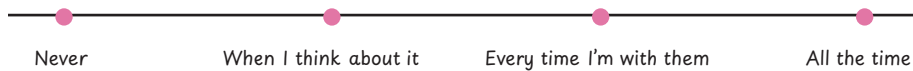
READ GENESIS 2:18-22.

Why did God create Eve?

God could've just created Adam, because Adam's relationship with God would've been sufficient (aka all that Adam needed). Yet God saw it right to give us a second gift—each other.

Who comes to mind when you think of someone who is a gift to have in your life? Why?

How often do you thank God for the friendships that He's given you?



God gave us two incredible gifts right from the beginning. I have a feeling you could tell me even more reasons why those gifts are good. However, it's probably easier for you to tell me why those gifts can be challenging. Like why is it difficult to make friends? How do I trust people to not hurt me? Can that friend stop being so needy already?

LET'S READ GENESIS 3:1-24 to see why these gifts often don't feel quite like good gifts.

What happened to bring sin into the world? Describe these verses in your own words.

How did sin immediately impact the gifts God gave Adam and Eve?

Adam and Eve were given incredible gifts from God, yet they chose sin. So instead of enjoying the fruit and blessing of those gifts, they experienced shame, hiding, blame, hostility, and pain. Not only were they separated from God, but their relationship with each other was broken by their sin.

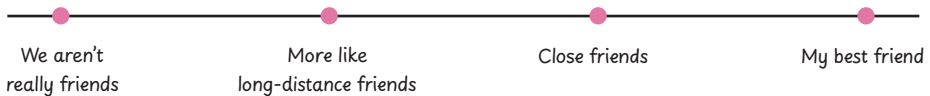
How have you seen sin cause brokenness in friendships with other people?

Why has sin made it challenging to be a good friend?

Have you ever gotten a gift that you didn't quite understand the meaning or purpose behind? Maybe you didn't know the cost of the gift or how to use it. Maybe you got so focused on what you didn't have that you didn't realize the beauty of what was in your hands. The hope of this study is for you to not only experience the many good gifts you can receive from others, but to also learn how to give the gift of being a good friend.

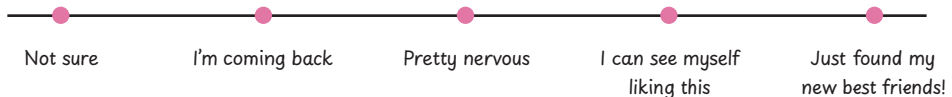
PROCESS AND PRAY

How would you define your friendship with Jesus?



What are you hoping to see change in your friendship with Jesus over the next four weeks?

Take a look around the table, the circle, or the room. How do you feel as you end this first time together?



What's one way you can help make someone else feel more welcome or comfortable in this group?

LIVE IT OUT

Here's one thing we hope you complete this week to put what you learned into practice.

What's a gift you can give to a friend this week? While it can be a physical gift, it doesn't have to cost money. Maybe your friend needs you to sit with her at lunch, listen to her while she talks about something difficult, or send her a long text to tell her why you're thankful for her friendship.



HE LOVED US FIRST

- Corinne

As a little girl, I remember singing a song that may be familiar to you as well: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” While it may be a song taught to little children, the truth of this song is far from childish. In fact, it’s literally life-changing and the very basis of our faith. Jesus loves YOU. Jesus loves ME. Jesus loves the WHOLE WORLD. It’s a love that God gives freely as a gift to us.

Now, while I fully believe that God loves you perfectly and deeply, I don’t want you to just take my word for it. I want you to discover these truths for yourself directly from God and His Word, so today, we’re going to look at 1 John 4.

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-21, and circle the words “love” and “loved” every time you see them. (Hint: It’s a lot!)

As you read these verses, what stands out to you about God and His love?

This is a longer passage with a lot of verses to unpack, so let’s break it up as we study.

READ 1 JOHN 4:7-10 AGAIN, and fill in the blanks below for verse 10:

_____ consists in this: not that we loved God, but that _____ loved _____ and sent his Son to be the atoning _____ for our sins.

In these first few verses, we already see some powerful truths:

- ♥ Love is from God (v. 7).
- ♥ Not only is love from God, but God is love (v. 8).
- ♥ God showed us this love by sending His only Son Jesus to the world (v. 9).
- ♥ God sent Jesus to die for our sins (v. 10). That’s how much He loves us!

Read those four truths again. What does it mean to you that God is love, and He loved you enough to send His Son Jesus to die for you and your sins?

The fact that God loves you is a promise and a command. First, it's a beautiful promise that God's love for you is perfect, complete, and sacrificial. There is nothing you could do to earn His love in the first place, which also means there is nothing that you could do to lose His love. His love for you is unchanging and eternal, and that is very good news!

Stop and really reflect on your life. Why is it good news that you could never earn or lose God's love?

Maybe you read these words and think, *Yeah, I know Jesus loves me.* Maybe you even have "Jesus Loves You" on a hoodie or a sticker. None of this is bad, but it can be easy to know this truth in our heads and still miss just how good this news really is. If we're not careful, we might take for granted this love from God.

God's love is a promise, but it also comes with a command and a responsibility for those of us who follow Jesus.

READ 1 JOHN 4:11.

Dear friends, if God loves us in this way, we also must love one another.

Jesus restored our relationship with Him by dying on the cross for us, and that is such good news. Even better, it doesn't stop there! Not only did Jesus restore our relationship with Him, but He also made a way for us to have flourishing relationships with others. Loving others and living in community with them isn't just a good idea or one option. It's a command that requires action on our part.

READ 1 JOHN 4:19-21, and note the key truths in these verses.

- ♥ We love others because God first loved us (v. 19).
- ♥ To say “I love God” but hate others is to be a liar (v. 20).
- ♥ God gives this command to us: If you love God, you must also love your brother and sister (v. 21).

Note: While you may or may not have a brother or sister (and you are absolutely commanded to love them if you do), “brother and sister” in this passage refers to any believer or follower of Jesus.

These verses hit us with some uncomfortable but important truths. First John 4:20 tells us that it’s impossible to say “I love God” and mean it if we also hate our brother or sister. John emphasizes this point when he says that the one who does not love his brother cannot love God. If you are like me, it might be easy to say, “Hold up, I would never say that I actually hate someone, so am I in the clear?”

This is so much more about the condition of our hearts and how we live than just the words we say out loud. Hating a brother or sister in Christ happens any time we do not love someone with the sacrificial love that God first showed us. I don’t know about you, but with that understanding of hate, I can think of many examples when I have sadly gotten it wrong and not loved others with the love of God.

While we may be tempted to feel shame for our sins, Jesus invites us into a better way—a way of being convicted of our sin when we have gotten it wrong but not living in shame. Because of God’s great love and mercy, if you are a follower of Jesus, you are forgiven! You have the opportunity to confess to God where you have gotten it wrong when it comes to loving others, turn from that sin, and walk in His forgiveness to keep loving others well.

God commands us to love everyone—those who are easy for us to love but also those who are more difficult to love or who have hurt us. What makes it challenging for you to love everyone in your life?

Pause and ask God for forgiveness for where you have not loved brothers and sisters in Christ with the same love that He has shown you.

In case you need more convincing or are ready to study further, 1 John 4 is not the only place we see this command to love others. Jesus talks about the importance of loving our brothers and sisters in Christ in John 15:9-12.

READ JOHN 15:9-12. *In your Bible, highlight or underline a verse that stands out to you.*

In these verses, we again see how God's love for us is both a promise to cling to and a command to obey. First, Jesus reminds the disciples that He has loved them as God has loved Him and that His love for them will remain. Then, Jesus commands them to respond to His love for them by loving others.

How can Jesus's love help you love others even when it's difficult or you just don't feel like it?

Here's the thing: God loves you. He really, truly, deeply, and perfectly loves you. Find rest and comfort in that promise. But don't let it stop there. From the overflow of understanding that God loves you, I encourage you to do the brave thing and obey His command to love all people all of the time. Even when it's inconvenient. Even when it's challenging. Even when you've been hurt. Look to Jesus's example for help in how to love others well because He loved us first.

If friendship is so difficult, is it even worth it? Explain.

How will you share God's love with others this week?

God loves YOU. Let that sink in. Take a moment to write out a prayer thanking God for His love and asking Him to help you love others well.



Day 2

FRIENDS WITH BELIEVERS

- Amanda

“Do we have to go?” I mumbled to my husband early one Sunday morning as we scrambled to get our two kids ready to go visit another church. Our hunt for a new church after our big move to Florida was not one for the weary. And let’s be real, I was feeling weary.

It would have been so much easier to stay in my pajamas, watch the live stream from our church in Tennessee, and make my favorite gluten-free waffles than to step awkwardly into a new church lobby surrounded by strangers.

Do you remember the first time you went to church? What was the experience like?

Searching for a church and community with Christian friends wasn’t a challenge I had wrestled with until recently. For my entire childhood and all of my teen years, I only went to one church and attended a Christian school, so I essentially had a built-in Christian community. I had no idea what a gift that was until I no longer had it.

Some of you may be thinking, *A gift? My Christian friends are some of the hardest to get along with. I am much more comfortable with friends outside of church.* And while you’re probably right that there are a lot of difficult people inside the church, I want to help you understand the reason why God created us to have friends who are Christ followers.

Have you ever heard of the “body of Christ?” What comes to mind when you hear that phrase?

A body might seem like a weird way for Scripture to define how a church should function, but it actually creates a clear picture of the way we need one another. The body of Christ is an extension of Jesus through our brothers and sisters in Christ in order to walk faithfully after Him.

Let's take a closer look at this concept.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-24, then answer the questions below:

Even though there are Christians and churches all over the world, how many bodies did God create?

Why didn't God make us all exactly the same?

Why do we need the body of Christ?

It's pretty cool to think that God created unique individuals with totally different gifts to create ONE beautiful community to reflect the image of Himself. And you don't just need that community of believers, that community needs you!

Who are your close friends who follow Jesus? What do you see in their lives that makes you love God more?

How can you intentionally point those friends to Jesus?

As long as you have breath in your lungs, you will need Christian friends who love you, love Jesus, and point you to Him. Don't try to follow Jesus without those kind of people in your life. (Spoiler alert: It's way more boring.)

While I write this, I am still on the hunt for a church to find a new community of believers for my family because I know that God has commanded us as believers to “not [neglect] to gather together” (Heb. 10:25). But as we read in 1 Corinthians 12, Christian friends don't just exist in a single church. Therefore, I will be equally intentional with those friends He has already given me, while continuing to seek out a church community to become involved in. It will forever be a both/and, not an either/or.

Let's close today by reading John 17. This is a small part of a prayer that Jesus prayed for the future community of believers—that includes you!

READ JOHN 17:20-23.

According to these verses, what happens when you love and are unified with other believers?

Now based on those verses, write your own prayer in the space below asking God for three things:

- 1. That He would provide you friends who help you to be more like Jesus.*
- 2. That He would help you be a friend who is an example of faithful obedience to Him.*
- 3. That He would give you a pure love for the church and your Christian friends.*

FRIENDS WITH NON-BELIEVERS

- Corinne

God's call for us to love others is a call to love everyone—those who follow Jesus and those who don't. We absolutely need the community and accountability of other believers who are also following Jesus, but we also need to be in community with those who do not know Jesus (yet).

But this can get tricky depending on where you find yourself.

- ♥ **Your circle of friends only includes those who don't follow Jesus (or say that they do but don't live it out).** Little to none of your time is spent with believers, which means you are rarely if ever being encouraged and held accountable to live differently from the rest of the world.
- ♥ **Your circle of friends only includes those who follow Jesus.** Little to none of your time is spent with non-believers, which means you are rarely if ever sharing the gospel with people who need to hear it.

Think about your circle of friends and who you spend the most time with. Is it easier for you to spend the majority of your time with only non-believers or believers?

Why do you think that's the case for you?



Jesus invites all of us into a better way, where we are in deep community with believers but still intentionally pursuing friendship with non-believers. Being friends with those who do not follow Jesus is not a problem. A problem occurs when they are either our only friends or never our friends at all.

As always, let's look to God's Word for guidance in how to pursue friendship with non-believers well. Throughout our time in God's Word today, we will address three key truths:

TRUTH #1: WE CAN STILL LOVE AND SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW JESUS.

How do I know this? It's exactly what Jesus did. Let's look at some examples of Jesus loving and spending time with sinners and crowds who did not believe in His holiness.

READ MATTHEW 9:9-13.

⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me," and he got up and followed him. ¹⁰ While he was reclining at the table in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came to eat with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² Now when he heard this, he said, "It is not those who are well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners."

What stands out to you about how Jesus responds in verses 12-13?

READ MARK 1:39-42.

In your own words, how would you define compassion?

READ MARK 6:34, and fill in the blanks below:

When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd and had _____ on them, because they were like _____ without a _____. Then he began to teach them many things.

These examples from the Gospel of Mark show us different pictures of Jesus being moved with compassion—once for a specific crowd and also for an entire crowd. Merriam Webster defines compassion as a “sympathetic consciousness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.”¹ If I were putting it into my own words, compassion is both an intentional awareness of the needs of others and a response that moves us to action to actually care for others.

Describe a time when God showed compassion and care for you.

From these examples, I pray that you can see how Jesus genuinely cares for people and even spent time with those who did not follow Him. BUT! It is also important to note that just because Jesus spent meaningful time with sinners and non-believers, it does NOT mean that Jesus ever ignores sin or engages in sinful activities alongside others. The same should be true for us.

Whenever we love God first and most, we are then compelled to love others like 1 John 4 describes. But while we get to love people who do not know God, it is never an excuse to love sinful things or engage in sin.

Where in your life do you struggle to be friends with non-believers without engaging in sinful activities? (Do you fear rejection? Being left out? Or something else?)

TRUTH #2: OUR GOAL SHOULD BE TO POINT NON-BELIEVERS TO THE LOVE OF GOD ON DISPLAY IN OUR LIVES.

READ MATTHEW 5:14-16.

God can and will use us to point people to Himself, but He is the One who actually does the work of transforming hearts. In our friendships with believers, we have the opportunity to surround ourselves with those who can point us to Jesus, hold us accountable, pray for us, and encourage us in truth. They might be your primary friends but are never your only friends. On the other hand, in our friendships with non-believers, we have the opportunity to obey God's command and follow Jesus's example to love those who are far from Him.

TRUTH #3: WE NEED WISDOM FROM GOD TO CHOOSE OUR FRIENDS WISELY AND RECOGNIZE WHO IS INFLUENCING US THE MOST.

READ PROVERBS 13:20, and fill in the blanks below:

The one who walks with the _____ will become _____, but a companion of _____ will suffer _____.

Another translation of this verse says, "Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble" (NLT).

Those who are "wise" are those who follow God and obey His Word. Those who are "fools" are those who do not follow God and ignore His Word. This verse is not teaching us that we can't be friends with non-believers, but it is reminding us that we need to remember God's wisdom when we spend time with non-believers and how our friendships with believers need to influence us most.

I know it might sound silly, but hang in here with me. Did you ever play with play-dough growing up? If we really think about it, we are a lot like play-dough, constantly being shaped by something or someone. Those we spend the most time with are usually the ones who end up shaping us the most, which means we need to be aware of who or what is shaping us. Ultimately, the goal for all believers is to be shaped by God and His Word, but we are also shaped by our relationships with others.

