

Fostering Faith-Shaping Friendships

Why we need transformational spiritual friendships

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Our friendships can have a deep impact on our faith. This study explores the friendships of people in the Bible: Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, Paul and Philemon, and more. Discover what it takes to form and strengthen spiritual friendships, what spiritual friendship looks like, how friendships can transform our lives, and how they witness to others.

Session One - The Journey of Spiritual Friendships

A tale of two women

Ruth 1:1-22

From the beginning God said that it's not good for a man to be alone, and he wasn't just talking about marriage. "Two are better than one," the Bible tells us. "If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up" (Eccl. 4:9-10). Jesus had a friend named Lazarus, and when Lazarus died Jesus wept. Paul wrote to his friends in Thessalonica, "You are our glory and joy."

When we go through life without friends, it's not just our experience of life that's diminished; we are diminished. We are less than we could be, and that's especially true for Christ followers, because God uses friends and friendships to shape us into the people he created us to be.

Session Two - The Pace and Pull of Spiritual Friendships

Finding a drafting buddy

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:1-17; 23:15-18

Do you have the kind of friend who will find you in a dark place and remind you of who you are and what you're about? Someone who will speak courage into your life and get you going again? We all need friends like that. Spiritual friends help each other find and follow God in all the seasons of life. Your friendships are as important to your spiritual development as your daily devotions and your weekly worship.

Session Three - The Transformational Power of Spiritual Friendships

Discovering how friends keep us on track

Philemon

Spiritual friendships are significant because they form the deepest parts of who we are. Most friendships do their work over time—moment by moment, encounter after encounter, conversation after conversation. But it doesn't always work that way.

Sometimes God uses a friend to transform us seemingly overnight. A friend speaks a word of challenge that, if responded to favorably, has the potential to help us grow exponentially. The tricky part is that a challenge like this also has the potential to test the limits of the friendship. It often comes as an intervention, a conversation, a letter, an interaction that challenges us to move beyond our comfort zone and step into an area of living that we're not accustomed to. It tests us and it tries our patience or our selflessness.

Session Four - The Common Causes of Spiritual Friendships

Friends serve one another and side by side.

Philippians 1-2

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; For he today that sheds his blood with me. Shall be my brother.

Those words come from a famous speech, given the night before an epic battle in Shakespeare's play Henry V. They live on these many centuries later because they speak so eloquently of the bond that is formed between people when they are enlisted together in a common cause.

It was that phrase, "band of brothers," that inspired a World War II book and then mini-series. The story follows the soldiers of Easy Company from their jump training in Georgia to the landing at Normandy to the Battle of Bastogne and then to the defeat of Hitler's army. Those soldiers enjoyed intensity in their relationships, an intimacy and camaraderie that civilians can never fully understand. Something happens when people serve together. When they struggle side by side, when they make some shared sacrifice in pursuit of some worthy goal, they form a special bond and are shaped forever by that experience. And what's true of soldiers on the field of battle is true of Christ followers in the service of our King.

Session Five - The Life-Changing Impact of Spiritual Friendships

Reflecting on true friendship

Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-27; 12:1-8

Where are you on your spiritual journey? Are you exploring Christianity? Are you beginning to grow in your relationship with Christ? Would you consider yourself close to Christ? Are you spiritually mature? Research has shown that these are the four discernible stages of our journey of faith. Wherever you are on the spiritual

journey, spiritual friendships will take you farther and deeper than you could ever go alone.

Session Six - The Witness of Spiritual Friendships

Interfaith friendships can be powerful.

John 1:43-51

For the past five sessions, we've been talking about how God uses spiritual friendships to form our faith, to shape us spiritually. We've talked about the things spiritual friends do for each other: we pray for and with each other; we speak God's Word into each other's lives; we serve alongside one another; we hold each other accountable. Those are wonderful things, but they sound like things that Christians do for one another. What about all the people in our lives who aren't Christians—people of other faiths or no faith at all? Is it possible to be spiritual friends with them?