



Jesus on relationships

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

week 1

Friendship

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor. 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. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

ECCLESIASTES 4:9–12 (NIV)

"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone'" (Genesis 2:19 NIV). That truth echoes throughout Scripture. From the opening chapters of Genesis to the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, God makes it clear that human beings were created for relationship.

Today's passage paints a compelling picture of friendship: two people laboring together, lifting one another up when they fall, keeping each other warm, standing together against opposition, and forming a bond that's not easily broken. Friendship cannot be dismissed as something secondary in the Christian life. It's a precious gift from God that helps us flourish. Ultimately, Christian friendship is a treasure because it helps us cling to our greatest treasure—Jesus.

One of the beautiful insights of the New Testament is that friendship is closely connected to love. While a neighbor may simply be someone who is near to us, a friend is someone who loves. Proverbs 17:17 (NIV) reminds us that "a friend loves at all times," and the New Testament carries this same idea forward.

Friendship is more than just proximity; it's affection, commitment, and a shared life. A true friend offers encouragement when we're discouraged, wise counsel when we're confused, honest correction when we're drifting, and a faithful presence in both our joyful and difficult seasons. St. John Chrysostom writes, "Better to live in darkness, than to be without friends. And I will tell you why. Because many who see the sun are in darkness, but those who have many faithful friends can endure even the hardest trials."

Friendship also serves a greater purpose than personal happiness. God often uses friendships to strengthen His people for ministry and mission. Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. The apostle Paul rarely ministered alone; he surrounded himself with trusted companions who shared his vision and labored alongside him in the gospel. Friendship is one of God's primary means of sustaining us as we follow Christ.

The early church modeled this kind of friendship beautifully. Believers were united in heart and mind, caring for one another's needs and sharing life together. Their relationships reflected the love of Christ and became a powerful witness to the world around them.

In a culture that's increasingly isolated and disconnected, the call of Scripture remains the same: Do not walk alone, invest in meaningful friendships, and be the kind of friend who loves faithfully, speaks truth graciously, and remains present consistently. God never intended us to carry life's burdens by ourselves. Friendship is one of His gracious provisions, reminding us that we're stronger, healthier, and more fruitful together than we could ever be alone.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

1 Thessalonians 2:7–8; Hebrews 10:24–25;
John 15:12–15

application challenge

Invite a friend out for coffee or a meal and then have a conversation where you both can move beyond small talk and share what's really happening in your lives. Try some of these questions!

- How are you really doing?
- What's something you're looking forward to right now?
- What's God been teaching you lately?
- Who has had the biggest influence on your life?
- What's something most people don't know about you?
- When do you feel the most known or understood?
- How can I support you?
- How can I pray for you?

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

1. Who has been a friend who made a significant difference in your life? What did they do that was so meaningful?
2. Think about a friendship that has strengthened your faith. How did God use that person to encourage, correct, support, or challenge you to follow Jesus more faithfully?
3. In a culture where many people feel isolated and disconnected, what are some obstacles that keep us from developing deep, Christ-centered friendships? How can we overcome them?
4. According to Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, what are some of the ways friends help one another? Which image in the passage (helping someone up, keeping warm, standing together, etc.) resonates most with you and why?
5. Why do you think Jesus and Paul chose to do ministry with others rather than alone?
6. What's one practical step you can take this week to be a better friend? Is there someone God might be prompting you to encourage, reconnect with, or invest in this week?

week 2

Family

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.' Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

EPHESIANS 6:1-4 (NIV)

Family is formative. For most people, the first place we learn about love, authority, conflict, forgiveness, responsibility, joy, pain, and belonging is from our family. We spend the first part of our lives being shaped by our households, and then, if we're honest, we spend a lot of our lives processing what was formed in us there.

That's why all throughout its pages, the Word of God speaks directly to the family. Because the home is meant to be the primary place where hearts are shaped and discipleship happens . . . not the only place, but the primary place. Before a child sits in a classroom, joins a small group, attends a church service, or hears a sermon, they're already being formed by the rhythms, conversations, priorities, habits, and relationships in their home.

Deuteronomy 6 gives us this picture clearly. God's command here isn't for the temple; it's for the home. The truth of who God is, what He's done, His purposes, His plans, His Word, and His will are to be impressed on the next generation and talked about in the everyday flow of life: sitting at home, walking along the road, lying down, and getting up. In other words, discipleship was never meant to be reduced to a church program. It was meant to be woven into the very fabric of family life.

But here's the thing: that kind of family dynamic requires intentionality. That's why, before entering the Promised Land, Joshua called the people of Israel to choose who they'd worship, who they'd follow, and what kind of people they'd become. And he says, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15 NIV).

Friends, that statement is a declaration of spiritual direction. It doesn't mean you'll do everything perfectly or always have it all together. It simply means that your family's desire is to keep Jesus at the center.

But, the truth is not every family looks like this. For some, family is a place of love, safety, and encouragement. For others, it's complicated. Maybe your home has been marked by conflict, distance, divorce, loss, addiction, abuse, or disappointment. Maybe the word "family" brings up more pain than joy. And if that's your story, Scripture doesn't ask you to pretend it didn't hurt or act like everything was okay. But it does remind us that Jesus meets us in the broken places and brings us into the family of God with brothers and sisters and spiritual parents.

So, whether you're part of a healthy family, trying to repair a strained one, grieving what you didn't receive, raising children, caring for aging parents, honoring parents from a distance, or learning how to be a spiritual mother or father to someone else, the invitation is the same: Let Jesus form you. Choose this day to serve the Lord in whatever family you find yourself.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Matthew 12:48–50;
Luke 2:51–52; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 68:5–6;
1 Timothy 4:12

application challenge

This week, take one step toward strengthening or repairing a family relationship. This may mean apologizing without defending yourself, forgiving without keeping score, encouraging a parent, blessing a child, checking in on a sibling, serving an aging family member, or inviting someone into the family of God through prayer, conversation, or church community.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

1. How has your family shaped the way you understand love, authority, conflict, or forgiveness?
2. Why do you think the home is such an important place for spiritual formation?
3. What's the difference between a "perfect family" and a Christ-centered family?
4. Where do you see the temptation in families to avoid conflict instead of seeking to reconcile and restore what's broken?
5. How does Jesus expanding the definition of family in Matthew 12 encourage people with painful or complicated family stories?
6. What's one practical way you can help make your family, household, or church community more centered on Jesus this week?



week 3

Singleness

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord."

1 CORINTHIANS 7:32–35 (NIV)

Throughout 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives very practical and realistic wisdom concerning marriage and singleness. He gives equal value to both situations because he knows we all have equal callings in the body of Christ. No relationship status is greater than being a child of God and an ambassador for Christ. As a single person himself, Paul speaks to the perks of single living as well.

While it may be frustrating to hear this for those who desire marriage, there's truth here. The unique gift of singleness is the freedom to individually discover who God has made you to be as His child. You can adventure with Jesus and say yes to opportunities to serve, grow, and learn as He leads you. While that beauty may be easily forgotten, mainly by the constant comparison and "the-grass-is-greener" mentality that poisons all of our minds, the gift is real. It's a gift you'll miss if you don't admire and embrace it.

Ultimately, both singleness and marriage are simply modes in which we get to live out our God-given purpose. If we believe God's our good and true creator, then we must believe that abundant life comes from obeying Him. So what did the creator make us for?

- God made us to **image Him** (Genesis 1:26–27; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:1–3).
- God made us to **worship Him** (Isaiah 43:7; Matthew 22:37–38; John 4:23–24).
- God made us to **enjoy Him and His creation** (Psalm 16:11; Ecclesiastes 3:12–13; John 10:10).

Singleness **does not** prevent you from experiencing the good life God created you to live! These purposes for you aren't dependent on your relationship status. Your role in the church, your contribution to your community, your enjoyment of life, your depth of relationships, your joy, peace, purpose, and value, and your intimacy with God are not dependent on or measured by your relationship status.

For the single person who desires marriage, God sees you. You can long for something while still choosing contentment and gratitude. You can be honest with God, persistent in prayer, and intentional with dating, all at the same time. Just remember, you were made for God. Your deepest longings and affections will only be satisfied in Him. And He's worthy of your trust, your worship, your surrender, and your love.

For the single person who's mourning the loss of a relationship, God sees you. He knows the grief of losing someone you love. He came to earth to experience that for you, but also to give you an eternal hope that will sustain you. Come to Him in all your pain and questions, and let Him comfort you. Let Him remind you of how He's always been the One who will never change, never fail, and never leave.

For the single person who feels alone, God sees you. He wants you to experience His abundant life, which comes from trusting Him, walking in an intimate relationship with Him, and others. Singles belong in the family of God, too. Your relationship status doesn't disqualify you from being in relationship with Your creator and His family.

For everyone who's chosen to follow Jesus, instead of measuring any part of your life by the romantic relationships you have or don't have, measure it by your devotion to Jesus, investment in the people He's placed in your life, and enjoyment of His gifts. Your mission and God-given purpose are the same: Reflect Him, be transformed by Him, make disciples of Him, and worship and enjoy Him forever.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

1 Corinthians 7:25–38; Genesis 1:26–27; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:1–3; Matthew 22:37–38; Psalm 16:11; John 10:10

application challenge

If you're single, take time this week to have fun 1:1 time with God. Whether it's grabbing lunch or coffee, going on a prayer walk, or taking a drive with no agenda besides talking to and worshiping God, enjoy the gift of singleness. If you're not single, consider how you can pray for single friends to live life fully with Jesus, right where they're at.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

1. Your identity and purpose aren't determined by your relationship status. Do you believe this is easy or difficult to live out? Why?
2. What cultural messages about relationships have impacted you most? What truth do you need to believe to counter any lies you've been told?
3. How can comparison keep you from embracing the season God has you in? What steps can you take to stop comparing yourself?
4. Based on these Scriptures, what does "the good life" look like, specifically as followers of Jesus?
5. Everyone experiences longing and waiting. Regardless of your current relationship status, there's probably something you desire that you don't have. How can you honestly bring your desires—whether for marriage, healing, or companionship—to God while also cultivating contentment in Him?
6. What are some practical ways you can enjoy God and His gifts without making those gifts your ultimate source of fulfillment?
7. Whether you're single, dating, engaged, or married, what would it look like to pursue "undivided devotion to the Lord" this week?

week 4

Marriage

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

MATTHEW 19:5-6 (NIV)

Marriage is a gift from God, established as a lifelong covenant that reflects His faithful love and points to the relationship between Christ and His church (Genesis 2:24; Ephesians 5:31-32). While it brings companionship, joy, and intimacy, its deepest purpose isn't simply personal happiness but mutual growth as both a husband and wife become more like Jesus, learning to love with grace, humility, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

As Tim Keller often observes, marriage is designed to make us holy more than merely happy, and as C.S. Lewis reminds us, lasting love is rooted not only in emotion but in faithful commitment that seeks another's good. Dr. Juli Slattery highlights that even marital intimacy is meant to reflect God's holy design rather than merely satisfy personal desires.

But the reality of the human condition is that we all suffer from a selfishness problem. And marriage, in fact, is the great revealer of our selfishness. You actually don't realize how selfish you are until you're in a serious relationship. Once you think you've solved your selfishness problem and things are running smoothly, you get married and then realize just how selfish you **really** are. And then, you start having kids, and you guessed it, you realize just how selfish you **really, really** are.

One of the truths about marriage is that each day is an ongoing discovery of our own selfishness. And if you think about it, it makes sense. Before you entered into a relationship with your spouse, you spent almost every moment thinking about yourself. All the decisions about your life, for the most part, had you at the center—your budgeting, calendar, daily schedule, and more. Then, as you progressed in your relationship, you reached a point where you brought your spouse into decision making and dreamed together about what life and family could look like together. **Together** is the key word. Now in marriage, you serve, lead, dream, and live together. No longer is life centered around you, but now it features someone else. As Jesus says, you are "no longer two, but one."

And "becoming one" is actually one of the most beautiful parts about marriage. You and your spouse are building something new together. In marriage, you have an opportunity to get right everything your parents got right, and get right everything your parents got wrong. You get to choose what you bring into your marriage and pave a new way, a **third way** together. And in doing that, you aren't losing your individuality, but taking what's unique about you and what's unique about your spouse, and then becoming one together.

Self-Centered Marriage: My preferences, my schedule, my comfort, my family patterns.

Gospel-Centered Marriage: Our life, our calling, our home, our shared formation under Christ.

A gospel-centered marriage requires deep humility. Gospel humility is the kind of humility that looks and sounds like Jesus, rather than what popular leadership or pop-psychology books might say. As Paul writes about humility, so should marriages seek to live in their relationship: doing "nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit" (Philippians 2:3 NIV), but instead, valuing your spouse above yourself and looking to their interests.

Because ultimately, marriage is a partnership for God's mission—a relationship that displays the gospel, serves others, and points beyond itself to the greater hope of our eternal union with Christ. It's a beautiful gift, but not the ultimate one; only Jesus can fulfill the deepest longings of the human heart.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Genesis 2:18–25; Ephesians 5:21–33;
Colossians 3:12–14; Philippians 2:1–3

application challenge

What's one way you could inconvenience yourself to serve someone in your life? Whether it's your spouse, your children, your parents, or friends, choose a way to serve them this week.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

1. Where does marriage, or a close relationship, most clearly reveal your selfishness?
2. How has this week's Scripture and teaching challenged, supported, or encouraged your view of marriage?
3. Whether married or not, what family patterns did you inherit that you want to carry forward, and what patterns do you need Jesus to help you leave behind?
4. When your comfort, preference, or pride is threatened, what usually comes out of you?
5. What part of your life do you instinctively treat as "mine," instead of as "ours"? If you're married, consider this in relation to your spouse. If you're not, consider this in relation to God.
6. What would it look like this week to practice Philippians 2 humility toward your spouse or close friend: not looking only to your own interests, but also to theirs?

week 5

Neighbors

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE:

"And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

MATTHEW 22:39 (NIV)

Have you ever felt like you're doing pretty well spiritually until someone makes your life difficult? Maybe it's the coworker who constantly complains, the family member who knows exactly how to push your buttons, the driver who cuts you off in traffic, or perhaps it's the neighbor who seems determined to be unpleasant every time you cross paths. Then you read Jesus' words: "Love your neighbor as yourself," and suddenly the command doesn't feel quite as simple as it sounded.

Let me be totally transparent. Before I became a Christian, I lived next door to a woman who was incredibly grumpy. She had a permanent scowl etched across her face. No matter how polite you were, she looked like she was smelling onions every time she saw you. I'm embarrassed to admit it now, but we gave her a nickname—we called her "Bitter."

We'd say things like, "Did you see the way Bitter parked her car?" or "I don't want to go to the mailbox right now because Bitter is outside." Looking back from a much more mature place in my life, I can't help but wonder what that woman had endured. Like all of us, she probably carried wounds, disappointments, grief, and heartache. The truth is, had I experienced her circumstances, I might have become just like her. Any of us can become bitter if we don't allow God to heal the painful places in our hearts.

When I consider the full context of Jesus' command, it becomes even more powerful. Jesus said: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all

your soul and with all your mind." He also said, **"Love your neighbor as yourself"** (Matthew 22:37–39 NIV, emphasis added).

Yet that raises an important question: What does biblical love actually look like? It's easy to love people who love us. Jesus Himself said, "For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (Matthew 5:46 ESV).

Biblical love is beautiful, but it can also be incredibly challenging to practice consistently. That's why I love 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. It gives us a practical picture of love in action. Early in my walk with the Lord, the pastor challenged our congregation to read those verses and replace the word "love" with our own name. Are you patient and kind? Are you not easily angered and keep no record of wrongs?

It's one thing to understand these qualities intellectually. It's a whole other thing entirely to live them out when dealing with difficult people. When I think back to my neighbor, I wonder how differently I might have responded if I had looked at her through the lens of compassion rather than irritation. Perhaps the command to love my neighbor would have felt less overwhelming if I had first paused to consider her pain.

Love doesn't begin by evaluating whether someone deserves our kindness. Love begins by seeing people the way God sees them—broken, valuable, and in need of grace.

supporting scripture

Read this week's Scripture in addition to these supporting Scriptures:

Matthew 22:37–40; Matthew 5:46; Luke 6:32–36; Luke 10:25–37; John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 13:1–8

application challenge

Are you willing to love people who may never appreciate, acknowledge, or repay your kindness? The next time a difficult person crosses your path, resist the urge to focus on their behavior. Instead, ask God to help you see beyond the surface. You may never know their story, but you can choose to reflect Christ's love anyway.

group discussion guide

Pick your favorites to discuss with your group, family, or friends.

1. Have you ever experienced unexpected kindness from someone when you didn't deserve it? How did that affect you, and what does it teach you about God's grace?
2. Jesus said it's easy to love people who love us back (Matthew 5:46). Why do you think God calls us to love people who may never appreciate, acknowledge, or return our kindness?
3. How does the Parable of the Good Samaritan challenge your assumptions about who your "neighbor" is?
4. Which characteristic of biblical love do you find most challenging to practice with difficult people? Why? (Consider the description from 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.)
5. Luke 6:32–36 teaches us to love, do good, and show mercy even when others don't deserve it. What practical steps can you take to show Christlike love without becoming a doormat or ignoring healthy boundaries?
6. What's one specific person God may be asking you to love differently this week, and what practical action could you take to demonstrate that love?

