

## FRIEND REQUEST

“Unfriend”

September 27, 2015

*“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.”*

Proverbs 17:17 (NLT)

It is critical to regularly assess and redefine certain relationships, especially those most likely to influence who you are becoming.

Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.

*“The righteous choose their friends carefully.”*

Proverbs 12:26 (NIV)

We meet people by chance, but we make friends by choice.  
And we invest in the right friendships on purpose.

*“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples...”*

Matthew 16:13 (NIV)

*“You can’t change the people around you, but you can change the people you are around.”*

-Patty Munley

*“Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven...”*

Matthew 16:13-19 (NIV)

*“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”*

Matthew 16:21-23 (NIV)

### **Notable Exceptions:**

- What do you do when you are married to a non-believer? (2 Corinthians 6:14; 1 Corinthians 7:12-14)
- What about being friends with people who are far from God? (Matthew 11:19; John 17:15-16)

**Leadership Tip!**

**Successful leadership is based on building strong relationships.**

Work at building strong relationships inside and outside of your life group.  
Spend energy on your group members, other life group leaders and your encourager  
to foster strong healthy relationships.

## Friend Request – Unfriended

**STARTER QUESTIONS:**

**Why are friends so important in our lives? What ways has it been a challenge to build and maintain healthy friendships?**

**MAIN IDEA:**

This series is helping us learn how to build relationships. Last week we looked at spiritual friendships and how hard it is to maintain and grow healthy lasting spiritual relationships. This week we discussed how important it is to work on maintaining healthy friendships.

**Why are relationships important to your health?**

Pastor Hank mentioned “build relationships or be depressed.” We all know what happens when depression begins to set in. It effects our overall health and well-being.

Research shows that when we don't have time for family or friends, or when we push people away, it will effect us. But it is also emotionally and spiritually healthy to foster these strong relationships. So when we lose emotional satisfaction and don't work on building strong relationships, we begin to decay physically, mentally and spiritually.

What are some of the obstacles to strong friendships? Barriers such as spiritual belief, attitude, age, time, personality differences, and geographical separation all influence our ability to grow relationships. Some of these are easily to overcome. Some are really hard.

**Have you ever “unfriended anyone”? Why?**

Let's look at a scripture that really is the golden rule of choosing friends...

***Proverbs 12:26 (NIV)***  
***The righteous choose their friends carefully.***

It is important to constantly nurture relationships that we have, especially those friends that influence us the most. Friends and relationships have a lot to do with who we become as a person.

“Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.”

**Other than family, who is the most influential person in your life? Why?**

We have heard the term “family” used in marketing ads. There is a lot of truth in that term. We have friends and we have family and we have friends that are like family. These “family” members play a huge role in our life and are usually the friends that we hold very close to our heart. They are also the ones that have the most influence on us and impact who we are.

The reality is that we categorize all our friends in different circles, or groups. These circles establish how we interact with the groups and how much we let them into our lives. Most of us have “inner” circles and “outer” circles of relationships. You may use a different term but the effect is the same. We categorize our friends into groups and we engage with those groups differently.

**How many circles of friends do you have? How do you treat those circles differently?**

**What are some of the emotions involved in moving friends in and out of the different groups?**

Jesus is a great example of how these groups can be defined. He loved everybody, spoke to the masses, healed strangers, but had a closer group of 12 friends (disciples). Inside that group of 12, he had an even closer group of 3 that he entrusted more and with whom he spent more time. He even had one (Judas) that would eventually betray him. Jesus fasted and prayed over who would be in those 12 seats and who would be in the inner circle of friends.

**How much time in prayer have you spent thinking about your seats?  
Do you have a Judas in your circle of friends?**

Jesus eventually settled on one friend that he would count on that would take over his ministry, Peter.

**Matt. 16:13-19 (NIV)**

***13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”***

***14 They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”***

***15 “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”***

***16 Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”***

***17 Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.***

**18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**

**19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”**

Peter was the guy that did his best to try and take care of Jesus, protecting him from the mission he was sent on earth for. He even rebuked Jesus in trying to give him good advice. And Jesus said some pretty harsh words to Peter on several occasions. As we see in Matthew 16:21-23...

**Matt. 16:21-23 (NIV)**

**21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**

**22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”**

**23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.**

**What stands out about the relationship that Peter and Jesus had that Jesus could call Peter out and yet it did not destroy their mutual respect and care for each other. Peter was comfortable speaking his mind to Jesus.**

**Who is your “Peter”?**

Any friendship that is as close as family is bound to have disputes or differences, but the strength of that relationship prevents the friendship from being shattered. It is important that the inner most circle of friends is built of a strong spiritual foundation. Shared spiritual strength will make any relationship stand up to adversity.

Of course a friendship that strong can also lead to misdirection if we don't set boundaries. Jesus had to set boundaries for Peter as his nearest friend. We need to ensure, that while we build these much needed strong relationships, we are aware of the overall impact they have in our life.

We have all had a friend that can influence us so much that it starts to take away from other areas. The most common is when a best friend becomes such a huge part of our life that it influences our other relationships such as spouse, kids, parents, etc. Our strongest friendship begins to weaken our other friendships. It creates an imbalance in our life and we must establish those boundaries to ensure that it does not begin to erode our spiritual relationship with God and other healthy relationships.

Pastor Hank mentioned 2 exceptions to spiritual friends in his message. Believers married to non-believers and friends that are far from God. Jesus befriended sinners. Jesus hung out with sinners for sure but he also made sure that he did not let them influence his standards. He loved them and used that love to influence them to want to follow the way to righteousness. We should model the example that Jesus set for us when we are dealing with un-believers.

**Matthew 11:19 (ESV)**

***19 the son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' yet wisdom is justified by her deeds***

**FINAL THOUGHTS:**

**Where do I need to assess my friendships and relationships?**

How do we set relationship boundaries? Well, we start by re-focusing our trust in God.

There are times that we have to be reminded that our nearest friend can also cause us to drift from God. We have to make a conscious effort to make sure that our friends are not distracting us from our relationship with God.

We likely all have friendships that need to be re-defined. We need to start with prayer and ask our Lord to give us wisdom and courage to address these relationships.

**Based on our discussion today, how can we help each other with building strong spiritual relationships founded on God?**

**Additional Scripture resources:**

Proverbs 13:20

Proverbs 22:24-25

Proverbs 24:5

Job 2:11

Romans 12:10

**FAMILY FOCUS**

**Idea:**

Friends can have a profound impact on our lives. The people we choose to spend our time with contribute to molding our character. L. Tom Perry, in the February 1993 New Era said,

"The friends we choose to associate with are main contributing factors in the formation of our character. We form social habits by association with our friends.

These habits can be useful when directed towards the formation of a wholesome personality.”

Having the right friends have a powerful influence on your life. Choose your friends wisely. Make certain they will help build within you the right standards with which to govern your life.” Let’s impress upon our kids’ minds how vital choosing good friends would be in their lives.

**Lesson:**

Use 4 bowls of water that will represent different interests people may have. Have the kids name a few interests that different people may have. Ideas for groups: a group that likes video games and movies, a group that likes racing cars, a group that likes sports and a group that liked board games.

Fill each bowl with pre-cooked pasta. The noodles represent different people, or friends. Talk about how usually we make friends based on having similar interests. Talk about how it is good to be kind and friendly to everyone, not just those that we spend the most time with, because of our similar interests.

Start talking about what happens when a person or two in your group of friends start to make bad choices. Drop a few drops of blue food coloring in one bowl as you talk about how one of the friends in this group started using cuss words to express himself. Little by little, others started making this same choice. Before long these choices start to affect, or change the character of each of the friends in the group. Talk about how perhaps because the boy was surrounded by these words all of the time, they were the words that came to mind when he got upset



and before he knew it a few of them had made their way into his vocabulary.

The green group was our video game & movie group. These guys got caught up in playing video games that were violent and movies that were filled with inappropriate language, violence, etc.

Our red guys were getting caught up in drugs, smoking & alcohol. (You can, of course, adjust each groups "sins" based on your feelings and your kids age. Remember, kids are exposed to things MUCH younger. Go bold with this. Bold, but appropriate. If your kids don't hear this from you first, where would you like them to hear it from? Their peers?)

The "colorless" group is our group of friends that have committed to each other to not allow these sort of bad choices to define them. They lovingly encourage each other to stay clean. They have found that life is MUCH more fun without the cussing, drugs & inappropriate games and movies.

Take one of the noodles from the "good" bowl. Tell how he decided he wanted to hang out with the blue group. They had similar interests and he was certain he could spend time with them without getting trapped in the same bad habits. In fact, he thought that he could actually become good friends with them, hang out with them all of the time and maybe they would choose to follow his example and stop making the choices they were making. Little by little their choices started to define his character. As he was in the center of it, the things they were doing didn't seem so bad and little by little he started making similar choices. Before long, those choices became a central part of the definition of his character. He was blue.

This is a great opportunity to talk about helping others and setting a good example. It is SO important to do these things. So how do we do it without getting caught in it ourselves. I asked the kids if they thought it would be easier to help a friend out of a deep pit from down in the pit with them, or from the ground above. They chose the ground above. We talked about throwing them a rope, a ladder, etc. There were so many options, but from inside the pit, our only option was being stuck and needing to be rescued ourselves.

Give each kid a noodle and tell them that it represents them. They get to pick the group of friends they want to be with.

Discuss how sometimes in our lives it will feel like we are alone. Maybe all of our friends are making bad choices and we feel like we don't have any friends. Talk about how no matter what, we always have our family and we always have the Lord. Those are the important relationships that last forever.

Talk about how we can always repent and have these sins washed clean from us. Read:

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

-Isaiah 1:18

Spray bleach on the red noodle to represent the Atonement cleansing our sins. (It won't work on the green or blue, but totally worked on the red! It goes with the scripture perfectly!)

The Atonement is the most important part of all of this lesson. We all make choices that we wish we wouldn't have, at one time or another. Some more severe than others. The important thing for our kids to understand is that there is ALWAYS a way out and a way to be washed clean and it is only through the power of our Saviors Atonement.