

FRIEND REQUEST
"Spiritual Friendships"
September 20, 2015

"The godly give good advice to their friends; the wicked lead them astray."
Proverbs 12:26 (NLT)

"Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm."
Proverbs 13:20 (NLT)

"Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul."
Proverbs 22:24–25 (NLT)

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity."
Proverbs 17:17 (NLT)

Relationships - incredibly satisfying/but hard to want to put in the effort:

- Increased mobility.
- Modern conveniences.
- Social media.

"Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others."
Romans 12:4 (TLB)

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."
1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

"A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."
Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NLT)

Developing Spiritual Friendships:

1. I'm learning to point people towards God

"After Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples. But everyone was afraid of him. They wouldn't believe that he was a disciple. Then Barnabas took an interest in Saul and brought him to the apostles."
Acts 9:26-27 (GW)

“Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, “We have found the Messiah” (which means “Christ”). Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus.”
John 1:41-42 (NLT)

2. I'm learning to be open to my spiritual blindspots.

“When Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.” Galatians 2:11-13 (NLT)

“Look on our Lord's patience as the opportunity he is giving you to be saved, just as our dear friend Paul wrote to you, using the wisdom that God gave him.”
2 Peter 3:15 (GNT)

“The slap of a friend can be trusted to help you, but the kisses of an enemy are nothing but lies.”
Proverbs 27:6 (NCV)

3. I'm learning to be more deliberate about developing my spiritual friendships.

“So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest. Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God.”
1 Samuel 23:15-16 (NJKV)

Leadership Tip!

Leadership and Friendship are not incompatible! Just like any other type of relationship, it takes healthy boundaries in order for it to work the way God intended.

FRIEND REQUEST - "Spiritual Friendships"

STARTER QUESTION:

Last week we were challenged to be more present and transparent. Is it harder than you thought it would be? Why?

MAIN IDEA:

In this series we see that we are made to be in relationships; with God and with each other. We also see the true relationships take work in order for them to grow. The world has lots of distractions that can prevent us from growing deeper in our relationships. We need help to keep us focused on what is truly important.

Romans 12:4 (TLB)

"Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others."

Pastor Hank talks about three challenges to relationships in this age; increased mobility, modern conveniences and social media.

Which one of these do you think is the most challenging to you and why?

How can these things lead us to become more and more isolated?

1 Peter 5:8 (NIV)

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

The two terms "self-control" and "alert" as it was written in Greek has military meaning. Self-control here means "sober" as in clear minded, being able to correctly discern what is happening around you. This discernment comes from knowledge of your enemy. "Be alert" means being ready to respond to an enemy's action— have all the right equipment on and ready for battle. Used together these terms denote a warrior that is on the front line with the knowhow and equipment needed to defeat the enemy.

A companion verse to 1 Peter 5:8 is Ephesians 6:10-18. Read what it says, then answer the question below.

Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”

Why is a Life Group the perfect place to learn and be equipped?

Ecc. 4:12 (NLT)

“A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”

There are a lot of people around us that would call themselves “Christian” whose qualifications as a “spiritual friend” would be less than desirable. Pastor Hank defines three things that would help us discern who our spiritual friends are.

1. Is this person(s) influencing me to point people towards God or away from Him?
2. Is this person(s) influencing me to be open to my spiritual blind-spots?
3. Is this person(s) influencing me to be more deliberate about developing my spiritual friendships?

Of these three, which one would you say that you need the most work on and what is your plan to improve in this area?

FINAL THOUGHTS:

We are not starving towards spiritual perfection – just connection. Just like the early church, together we can continuously build each other up, help each other over the difficulties of life and impact of our community in a major way. A Life Group is a great place to start building those connections that we need in order to be effective in our daily battles. Isolation denies the body of Christ a vital part in which you play by either being built up or by helping to build up someone else. Read **Romans 12:4 and 1 Peter 5:8** one more time and take those messages to heart.

There is a battle to be waged for our family, friends and community. What are you going to use to fight with and who will have your back?

What is a next step for you based on what God has spoken to you?

FAMILY FOCUS:

Choose two children who are friends to come up and compete in a race. (It is important that they are close friends.) Explain that they are going to compete in a three legged race. Have them stand beside each other and use Velcro strips, a pair of sweat pants that they each put a leg through, or a large, strong belt. Have them link arms as well. Then, have each child race in the opposite direction (perhaps toward two beanbags on opposite sides of the stage). Tell them that the first person back to you will receive a big candy bar. Don't allow time for questions or further explanation. Just say "GO!"—play recorded game music, and start cheering them on! The friends will either start going in opposite directions, or they may stand there baffled and confused. Or, they may start arguing with you because they thought they were going to race together. Allow some time for confusion and chaos—until the game breaks down and does not work—that is the point you want the kids to make. Either they will never play the game, or one will end up winning and the other losing. Either way, they cannot both win. Finally, have the music stop, and get out another candy bar and reward them both for helping you illustrate your point. Or, have the two children go together in one direction or the other. Allow them to share the prize. Then have the children sit down.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. What does it mean to be “yoked”? In our game, two friends were “yoked” together but had different goals—and it didn't work. There were only two possible outcomes: neither person could win, or one person had to lose. Christians have different goals in life than non-believers do. We can, and should, be friends with nonbelievers so we can be a witness to them, but our close friends should be those who share our life goals.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. When it comes to our close friendships, we are to be separate from non-believers. Why? Let's see what Proverbs has to say about selecting friends. Proverbs is a Bible book that is filled with wise advice.

Read Proverbs 22:24-25 and Proverbs 12:26. Why is making a judgment about potential friends so important? (Friends have a large influence.) Think about the friends you have right now. Tell me some phrase, style, or mannerism that you have learned from them. What have they learned from you? Can you see any positive influence you have had on those around you? Think about a negative influence maybe?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33. Who can tell me what this verse means? (If you choose your friends poorly, they will have a negative effect on you. You will slowly become a bad person.) The good news is—the opposite is also true! Who can tell me 1 Corinthians 15:33 in reverse? (Good company creates/improves good character.) If you choose good friends, you will slowly become a better and better person because your good friends will rub off on you and influence you—making you a better person!