

LINC

LIVING IN CHRIST

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YOUTH CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

FRIENDS FOREVER

The new Netflix series *The Baby-Sitters Club* follows a group of girls from Stoneybrook, Connecticut, as they run a successful babysitting service. Based on the book series by Ann M. Martin, each episode tackles issues adolescents face—such as divorce, family problems, and friend drama, as well as greater societal issues such as racism, same-sex marriages, mental health, and wealth inequality. While each character deals with her own unique situations, their friendship holds them together through thick and thin.

We're All in This Together

God created humans to be in relationship with one another from the beginning. In the Creation narrative, God acknowledged that Adam needed a helper (Genesis 2:20), but the other animals were unable to fulfill this role. So, God created a woman to help Adam with his responsibilities on earth (Genesis 2:22). Even though we are created to be in relationship, we live in an individualistic society that tells us we do not need others. When we face difficult circumstances, we do all we can to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and improve the situations by our individual efforts. However, we were never meant to do life on our own. We were created to help one another.

Keep Good Company

Whether we want to admit it or not, our friends influence us. While having non-Christian friends provides us with ample opportunity to witness and draw others to the faith, it is also important to have strong Christian friendships. Christian friends help us stay true to our beliefs and hold us accountable when we go astray. They also bring a deeper sense of comfort and strength in troubled times, praying on our behalf and reminding us to trust in God. Proverbs 13:20 says, "Walk with wise people and become wise; befriend fools and get in trouble." We should be mindful of this truth when we choose our closest friends, making sure we spend time with people we want to be like and that provide a godly example.

We were created to help one another.



TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

Adolescence is a self-conscious stage of life. Sometimes the anxiety over identity and acceptance is so high that teens find it difficult to make friends. It is easier to be alone than to be rejected by others, so some teens prefer to keep to themselves. As youth leaders, we need to boost the confidence of the young people we serve so they will feel confident in themselves when interacting with peers. Be supportive as your teens hone their social skills and learn to accept who God created them to be.

TEACHER BIBLE PREP

YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND IN ME

Question of the Day: What is the #1 quality you look for in a friend?

Purpose: To help teens identify traits of Christian friendship.

Cultural Connection: National Friendship Day

Topic: Friendship

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

Deuteronomy 13:6-11

Similarly, if one of your relatives—even one of your own siblings—or your own son or daughter or your dear spouse or best friend entices you secretly, if someone like that says: “Come on! We should follow and worship other gods” . . . don't give in to them! —Deuteronomy 13:6, 8

Commentary:

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses calls Israel to remember who God is and God's mighty acts in the Israelites' history. When we recall God's involvement in our lives in the past, we have hope for what God is going to do in the present moment and in the future. After their brief history lesson, Moses reminds the Israelites about the principles for godly living that were part of the agreement God made with them as they entered the Promised Land. Part of these commands warn the people against listening to false prophets or to anyone else who asks them to worship other gods, even if they are a relative or close friend. The temptation to abandon God's rules often sneaks up on us, especially when it comes from a friend. Do not let loyalty to your friends take precedence over your relationship with God.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ What mighty act has God done in your life? How can this memory give you hope today?
- ▶ Do you have any friends who lead you astray from God's path?

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

Job 2:11-13

They sat with Job on the ground seven days and seven nights, not speaking a word to him, for they saw that he was in excruciating pain. —Job 2:13



Commentary:

When Job's friends heard about all the troubles he had experienced, they traveled to his house to comfort him. When they arrived, they sat with Job for seven days and nights without saying a word. According to Jewish tradition, people who come to console a person who is grieving should not talk until the mourner talks. This tradition is a good one for us to honor today also. Often when we know someone is upset, we attempt to fill the awkward silence with words in an effort to make the situation seem normal and happy. However, the best response to another's suffering is often stillness and quiet. The pain may be too deep to be healed with words, but we can express our friendship by simply being present and showing that we care.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ What brings you comfort when you are upset?
- ▶ How have you experienced the power of presence in your personal life?
- ▶ Who needs to know you are emotionally present for them, even if you cannot be with them physically as they grieve?

GO FOR THE . . . BRONZE?

Luke 14:7-14

Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. And you will be blessed because they can't repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected. —Luke 14:13-14

Commentary:

Our culture tells us to go for what is ours by right and to always go for the gold. The greater our accomplishments

TEACHER BIBLE PREP

and our prestige, the better our friends and social circles will be. In one of Jesus' parables, he teaches us to disregard status and fame because it makes community impossible to build. When we are selfless and humble, seeking to invite the outcasts into our social circles, then we truly are caring for the other as Jesus taught. Instead of going for the gold, let's instead go for the bronze . . . or perhaps we should seek no medal at all as we work to foster community instead of competition.

Questions to think about:

- ▶ In your workplace, is there a culture of competition and rivalry or cooperation and humility?
- ▶ Is your home the same way or different?
- ▶ How can you be intentional about spending time with people who are in need and becoming their friend?



How can you be the kind of true friend the Bible describes?

DEVOTION: YOU HAVE A FRIEND REQUEST

With the rise of social media, the word *friend* has taken on a broader meaning. A friend on Facebook can be a business acquaintance, a celebrity, or someone who attended your high school but you never met. There is a considerable difference between knowing someone based on their daily social-media posts and being a true friend.

Proverbs 17:17 says,

"Friends love all the time, and kinsfolk are born for times of trouble."

The greatest sign of authentic friendship is loyalty, being available to help in times of distress and misfortune. Loyalty means more than offering a "praying for you!" comment on social media or a praying hands emoji sent in a text message. Friends call one another in times of hardship, offer to help with everyday tasks that may be more difficult or overlooked now, or simply drop by the house to sit and listen as a grieving friend talks or cries. Think about your friends and consider your loyalty to them. How can you work at being the kind of true friend the Bible describes?



NEXT WEEK: Recently a coffee-chain employee was fired and then arrested for allegedly spitting into a cup of coffee served to a police officer. Tensions still run high regarding police accountability for use of force, but this intentional act of disrespect for a single officer did nothing to move the conversation forward. Next week in LINC we'll talk about respect, disrespect, and the responsibility of authority.

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THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND

Getting Ready: You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, Bibles, a balloon, a small towel, scissors, and paper for cutting.

Before the Session: E-mail copies of Youth Page 6 to teens if necessary. Cut a piece of paper into small pieces until you have a small handful of confetti. Blow up the balloon and tie it off with a knot.

OPEN

Scattergories: Friendship Edition (10 minutes)

Begin the session by playing a game of Scattergories. Ask teens to refer to Youth Page 6, then choose and call out a letter of the alphabet. Give students one minute to think of a word that fits in each category and starts with the chosen letter, then write in the space provided. After one minute, ask students to call out their answers from the first category. Students score one point for an answer the same as someone else's and two points for a unique answer. Repeat the process for the remaining categories.

After the game, ask if anyone has watched the new series on Netflix, *The Baby-Sitters Club*. Pause for response, then say, "In honor of this new series about a group of friends and their baby-sitting sagas, we're going to talk about friendship."

EXPLORE

Talk Topic 1: The Influence of Peers (20 minutes)

Combined Middle School and High School Option

Lead students in completing part one of the "Caution: Peer Pressure" activity on Youth Page 6, using the directions provided there. After a few minutes, invite teens to share their ideas. Say: "It can be difficult as Christians

when we have friends who lead us away from following God's path. Let's read what the Book of Deuteronomy has to say about this." Call on a teen to read aloud Deuteronomy 13:6-11, then discuss the following questions:

- ▶ Obviously, the moral of this story is not to stone your friends. What was Moses' warning to the Israelites in this passage?
- ▶ What are the benefits of having friends with different religious beliefs? Are there any challenges?
- ▶ How can family and friends be a source of temptation?
- ▶ When you realize that your friends are leading you astray, how should you respond?

Now, ask teens to complete part two of the "Caution: Peer Pressure" activity by writing examples of ways friends help them grow in their faith and follow God's ways. Call on students to share examples when finished.

BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Show the video "Bedtime Bible Stories with the Skit Guys: David and Jonathan" at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8rZDh2WXSqQ>. This video was streamed live during the quarantine on March 29. Begin the clip at 6:45. After showing, ask and talk about the following questions:

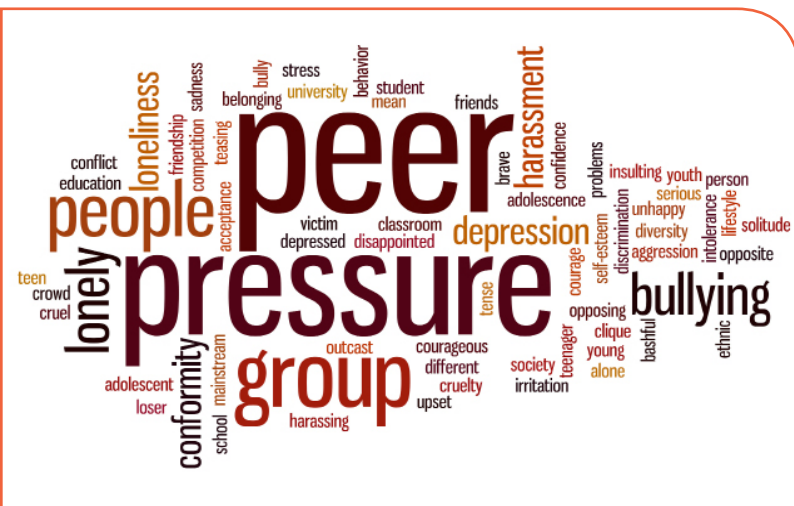
- ▶ Do you have a friend you "love like you love yourself"?
- ▶ How long have you been friends with this person? Why are you so committed to him or her?
- ▶ How has this time of quarantine and social distancing affected your friendships?
- ▶ What are you most looking forward to doing with your friends when the social restrictions are lifted?
- ▶ Do you have any friends you have been unable to spend time with since the pandemic? How can you reach out to them this week and reconnect?

Talk Topic 2: Friends Stick Together (15 minutes)

Middle School Option

Say: "Proverbs 18:24 says, 'One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother' (NIV). Let me demonstrate how friends stick together." Sprinkle the confetti (prepared earlier) on a flat surface, explaining that it represents peers at school.

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THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND



- ▶ How does walking through challenging circumstances with a friend affect your relationship?

Talk Topic 3: One Word at a Time (20 minutes)

Middle School Option

Foster some creativity and fun by creating a one-word story. Explain that students will tell a group story about throwing a birthday party, but each person will contribute only one word at a time. Establish an order for telling the story and begin.

Once the story is complete, say, “Now that we’ve created our party story, let’s read a parable Jesus told about hosting a party and who should be invited as guests.” Call on a volunteer to read aloud Luke 14:7-14, then ask the following questions:

- ▶ What is your impression of popular kids at your school? How do their actions affect your interactions with them?
- ▶ What groups of kids are considered unpopular? How do you interact with them?
- ▶ How did distance learning affect the social status of you and your peers?
- ▶ As school begins, how can you work to spend time with students outside your group of friends?

High School Option

Ask students to tell about their favorite birthday party memory. After a time of sharing, say, “Today’s Gospel reading is a parable about the seating arrangements and guest list for a party. Jesus’ story will help us think about who is in our circle of friends and who is not.” Call on a teen to read aloud Luke 14:7-14. After the Scripture reading, discuss the following questions:

- ▶ Why did Jesus recommend not inviting your friends and relatives to a social gathering?
- ▶ What groups of students are typically left out of the social scene at your school?
- ▶ When school starts, how can you deliberately expand your social circle to help those who consider themselves outcasts feel included?

TAKE AWAY

“Friendship is not something you learn in school, but if you haven’t learned the meaning of friendship, you really haven’t learned anything.”

—Muhammad Ali **5**

Rub the balloon, which represents you, with a small towel to generate static electricity. As you hold the balloon over the confetti, the paper will stick to the balloon. Say: “Notice that all of the paper did not stick, just like everyone at school is not your friend. Some people are simply acquaintances, and some people you probably do not even know. However, the people who do stick with you, no matter what’s going on in life—they are your true friends.”

Read aloud Job 2:11-13 or ask a student to do so. Share the information from Teacher Bible Prep about the Jewish tradition of sitting in silence with those who are grieving. Lead a conversation around the following questions:

- ▶ When you are experiencing difficult times, do you want people around or do you prefer to be alone? Why?
- ▶ Do you find it difficult or easy to be silent?
- ▶ Do you have at least one friend who would sit with you in silence if that’s what you wanted? How can you show appreciation for this friend in the coming week?
- ▶ Is there someone you know who is going through a rough time? How can we pray for him or her?

High School Option

Invite teens to sit in complete silence for one minute. Then ask:

- ▶ Were you comfortable or uncomfortable sitting in silence?
- ▶ Are there situations in which you are more comfortable with silence than others?
- ▶ Where do you go if you want some peace and quiet?
- ▶ When you are working, do you prefer background noise or silence?

Present information from Teacher Bible Prep about how Job’s friends observed Jewish tradition and sat in silence with him during his time of grief. Invite a teen to read aloud Job 2:11-13, then ask and discuss the following questions:

- ▶ Could you handle seven days and nights of silence with a friend in need? Why or why not?
- ▶ When have you experienced the power of silence over words?
- ▶ When a friend tells you he or she is facing a difficult situation, how do you respond?

WORKING IT OUT

SCATTERGORIES

Characteristic of a good friend:

Food to eat with friends:

Place to go with friends:

Something to do with friends:

Movie to watch with friends:



CAUTION: PEER PRESSURE

Our friends rub off on us for sure. While they primarily influence us in good ways, sometimes they cause us to stray from God's path. (1) On the thumbs-down symbol, write ways friends may cause you to act in ungodly ways. (2) Then, on the thumbs-up symbol, write ways friends encourage you in your faith and help you grow in your relationship with God.



Inherit the Mirth



In the Bible: Readings for the Week

MONDAY: Read Psalm 15.

How have you harmed a friend recently?
How can you restore your friendship?

TUESDAY: Read John 15:9-17.

How does it make you feel when Jesus calls you "friend"?

WEDNESDAY: Read James 2:18-26.

How can you put your faith into action today?

THURSDAY: Read 1 Samuel 20.

When have you stood up for a friend, even when it was risky?

FRIDAY: Read Proverbs 27:6-17.

What is the best advice a friend ever gave you?

SATURDAY: Read Matthew 26:47-56.

Have you ever been betrayed by a friend?