

Adult Teaching Resources

May 6, 2018



Easter: Keeping Close (April 1-May 20)

John 15:9-17 – “Real Love”

John 17:6-19 – “Questions of Belonging”

John 15:26-16:15 (RCL 15:26-27, 16:4b-15) – “Goodbye,
and Hello”

Season After Pentecost: The Perils of Pauline ... Thinking (May 27-July 8)

Romans 8:12-17 – “In the Flesh, of the Spirit”

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FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” John 15:12

It is not good for man or woman to be alone. We like to have friends around us. We like to share experiences with others. We like to have someone to talk to and to confide in. We like to be our friends.

We desire others to be with us and support us in our best moments and in our not-so-good moments. We want others to love us and we want to love others. We want friends.

Opening

Ask everyone to find a partner for some questions and conversations. After everyone has a partner, ask these questions to prime the pump for a discussion on friends and friendship:

Who are your friends in “high places” that you can turn to in time of need? Who are those friends who can help you get ahead, get a little more, push you further than where you are right now? How often do you turn to those friends?

Who are your friends in “low places” who meet you exactly where you are and expect nothing out of you other than presence and friendship? How often do you lean on each other for that friendship?

What do you learn about friendship from the “high place” friends?

What do you learn about friendship from the “low place” friends?

Reading the Bible

Who loves who according to verse 9? (God loves Jesus, Jesus loves us)

What happens when we keep God's commandments? (we abide in love)

What is Jesus' commandment? (that you love one another as I have loved you)

What is the greatest act of love? (to lay down one's life for one's friends)

What does Jesus call his disciples? (friends) Why does he call them that? (because he made known to them everything that he heard from his Father)

What are we appointed to do? (go and bear fruit that will last)

Why did Jesus give us those commands? (so that we may love one another)

Making Connections

What does it mean to be a friend? How are you a friend to others?

Who do you know who needs God's love? How can you show God's love to that person?

What does it mean to abide? How do we abide in Jesus' love?

Our Lesson Writer makes the statement and asks the question, "Let's get this straight: We become friends of Jesus by following his commands, and his main command is to love each other the way he loved us, and the measure of true love is the willingness to die for someone else?" What do you say to this?

What do you think is the sign of a true friend?

How is it possible for a friendship to turn into servant hood? How is it possible for servant hood to turn into friendship? What is the difference between relating to someone as a servant vs. relating to someone as a friend?

Our Lesson Writer says, "True friendships are mutual." Do you agree or disagree with that statement? Why do you say that? What do you think is necessary for friendships to thrive?

How do we fulfill the command of Christ by loving each other?

So What?

Ask everyone to find their partner from the beginning of the lesson. Ask them to consider these questions about friendships and Jesus:

What does it mean to be friends with Jesus? What does that look like?

What difference does it make in your life to consider Jesus a friend?

How does love fit into that relationship?

How does your friendship with Jesus affect and inform your earthly relationships?

Give everyone time to share with each other and then open the floor for a larger group discussion and conversation.

The Challenge

This week, cultivate a new friendship; or mend a broken friendship. Who do you want to make friends with? How will you do it? How will Jesus help you with this challenge? How will Jesus model what needs to happen?

Prayer

God of love, you give us love; you model love for us; you command us to love others. Thank you for love. Thank you for loving us. Work within our hearts to love others as you love us. As we cultivate our friendships, remind us to love others the way you love us. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

What a friend—Most readers are no doubt familiar with the hymn “What a Friend We Have In Jesus,” so popular that it has appeared in 1,458 hymnals, according to Hymnary.org. Surprisingly, Joseph Scriven, the author of the lyrics, never intended it for publication. Scriven was an Irishman who moved to Canada at age 25, according to Ira D. Sankey in his memoir, *My Life and Sacred Songs*. Sankey reports that Scriven (1820-1886) was a devoted Christian of humble demeanor who was not known to have a poetic bent until he fell ill shortly before his death. A neighbor who had come to sit with him ran across the handwritten poem and found it delightful. When asked about it, Scriven said he had written it for his mother, “to comfort her in a time of special sorrow,” and had not planned for anyone else to see it. (*My Life and Sacred Songs* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906], 279-80).

Surely Scriven must have been familiar with John’s depiction of a farewell discourse in which Jesus gathered his disciples around him a few hours before his arrest, and talked to them about friendship. “I do not call you servants any longer,” Jesus said, “... but I have called you friends” (v. 15).

Friends with God?—Have you ever noticed how the Hebrew scriptures talk about God’s willingness to be a friend? Exodus 33:11 says “*The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*” And in Isaiah 41:8, God speaks of “*Abraham, my friend.*” Can you imagine being friends with God?

Frederick Buechener describes it this way in his classic devotional book, *Whistling in the Dark*:

It is not something God does. It is something Abraham and God, or Moses and God, do together. Not even God can be a friend all by himself apparently. You see Abraham, say, not standing at all but sitting down, loosening his prayer shawl, trimming the end off his cigar. He is not being Creature for the moment, and God is not being Creator. There is no agenda. They are simply being together, the two of them, and being themselves.

Is it a privilege only for patriarchs? Not as far as Jesus is concerned at least. “You are my friends,” he says, if you do what I command you.” The command, of course, is “to love one another,” as he puts it. To be his friends, that is to say, we have to be each other’s friends, conceivably even lay down our lives for each other. You never know (John 15:12-15). It is a high price to pay, and Jesus does not pretend otherwise, but the implication is that it’s worth every cent.

(*Whistling in the Dark: An ABC Theologized* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988], pp. 49-50).

Digging Deeper *continued*

Love as a virtue—In commenting on this text, David S. Cunningham posits that “Love in this sense is a *theological virtue*: an excellence of character that God has by nature and in which we participate by grace. Such love is primarily interested in the good of the other person, rather than one’s own. It does not attempt to possess or dominate the other. Nor is it limited by the scarcities that are imposed by time and place: one can have a few good friends and fewer lovers, but one can have *agapē* for all.” (*In Feasting on the Word, Year B*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 2 of Accordance electronic ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008], paragraph 11016.)

Reading in three tenses—As we read this text, it is helpful to consider multiple perspectives. First, we try to put ourselves in the place of the disciples. How would they have heard Jesus’ call to friendship and his call to sacrificial love? When we read from that perspective, we probably think immediately of Christ’s coming crucifixion.

Second, imagine how you would hear these words if you were among the first to read John’s gospel. Most scholars believe it was written late in the first century and directed to a Christian community that was facing trial and potential persecutions. In that context, a reader would be more likely to think of the possibility that he or she might literally be faced with the possibility of dying for their faith – or for a friend.

Finally, we ask how these words speak to us in our own context. While the threat of martyrdom may seem far away, we live in such a self-directed culture that even the thought of loving generosity may seem radical. In our setting, the text reminds us that the gift of being friends with Christ calls us to self-giving love for others, too.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Did Jesus really tell the disciples everything he knew?

In v. 15 of today's text, the Fourth Gospel asserts that Jesus said a remarkable thing: "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you *friends*, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."

Could that be true, that Jesus revealed to the disciples *everything* he had heard from the Father? Obviously, we can't really answer that question with confidence. We have no way of knowing just what Jesus knew, or when. Jesus' life as God-made-flesh will always be a mystery to us. Though it seems clear that Jesus surrendered some heavenly prerogatives and was self-limited in some ways, we can't say to what extent he maintained a heavenly consciousness.

The gospels portray Jesus as spending much time in prayer, taking his burdens to the Father, but we have no way of knowing how and when the Father spoke to Jesus. Luke's story of Jesus bewildering the rabbis on a temple visit at age 12 suggests that he was very perceptive from a very young age (Luke 2:41-52). Could he, or would he have revealed to the disciples every detail of his knowledge?

I suspect the point of the story is that Jesus didn't keep secrets: the verse probably does not suggest that Jesus spelled out every possible thing he knew – how could the disciples have comprehended or held it all? But Jesus did not conceal what was about to happen, even to keep from causing them pain. He did not keep the divine plan secret, but openly shared with his friends what he knew: he was about to die, but would rise again. It was going to be a hard and lonely road, but in traveling it he would become the savior of the world.