

Grace in Friendship

“Throughout our lives, we have friends and “just” friends, old friends, new friends, good friends and best friends-each relationship meeting some part of ourselves that cries out for expression. One friend taps our intellectual capacities more deeply than others, another connects most profoundly to our emotional side. One calls upon our nurturant, care-taking qualities, another permits our dependency needs to surface. One friend touches our fun-loving side, another our more serious part. One friend is the sister we wish we had, another offers the mothering we missed.”

- Lillian Rubin, “Just Friends” (1985, p.56)

Friendships are different than siblings, family or a spouse. Friends can renew their relationships instantly with a timely phone-call, letter or email message-even after years without having seen or heard from each other. It is good to reconnect, and as the old British Telecom (BT) company slogan used to say on their television advertisements “It’s good to talk.”

What a blessing it is to have friendships in life. We can’t choose who becomes our family members, but we can certainly choose our friends.

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WARMING UP

1. What makes a good friend, a good friend?
2. What makes a difficult person, a difficult person?

INTO THE PASSAGES

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Galatians 5:22-23 - the PAST

3. What things are mentioned in both these famous scripture passages of love and the fruit of the Spirit? Why do you think Paul writes this? Which do you struggle with the most and why?
4. What does the world say about kindness?
5. What are some ways in which we can demonstrate God's love to others, without it being seen as altruistic or with selfish-gain and motives?

Read Ephesians 4:29-5:2; 1 John 3:16-18- the PRESENT

6. In Ephesians 4, it talks about loving through words, why should we do this? How can we build someone up in how we say things tactfully? And in dealing with difficult people?
7. In stark contrast, 1 John 3, tells us to not love with words and tongue but through actions and truth; how does this work with Ephesians 4 in mind? Of both passages, which demonstrates biblical kindness?

Read John 15:9-17- the FUTURE

8. How do we know that God loves us?
9. As believers, how can we find a balance between loving God and loving others? Surely loving people can be idolatry? How does this work?
10. How can we practise giving grace within our small group, friendship circles, church, workplace and beyond?

MOVING FORWARD

God has given us friendships within our small groups, friendships in our church, the workplace and more. It is important to encourage each other for God's glory, not for selfish and personal gain.

Jesus demonstrates giving grace to us, and so we too need to give grace to others. When we look to Jesus we learn how to love and give grace to our friends, the unloveable and even the difficult.

We need to remember that they too are made in the image of God, and Jesus IS the image. Loving God first and foremost, then loving others will come naturally.

LIFE TOGETHER

Spend some time sharing with each other three people you are currently having a hard time loving.

Pray for each other, and this week, we challenge you to demonstrate Christ's love to your three.

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These leader notes as follows are primarily for the "Into the Passage" section, and can be used as a guideline for the study or as commentary notes.

Please take them with a grain of salt, and we pray that God will inspire you through His spirit through the discussion and studying of His word.

INTO THE PASSAGES

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Galatians 5:22-23 - the PAST

3. What things are mentioned in both these famous scripture passages of love and the fruit of the Spirit? Why do you think Paul writes this? Which do you struggle with the most and why?

Love, kindness and patience are mentioned in both passages. It appears that having patience is hard enough, and kindness may seem natural. Asking the question "Are you a kind person?" Most people would agree that they are; whereas asking "Are you a patient person?" most would say, sometimes, but not always. But Paul writes this because both are hard and require the Spirit's help to bear these fruits, it does not come natural to be kind and patient.

4. What does the world say about kindness?

The world suggests that kindness is doing altruistic things like doing moralistic/charitable works. It can also be doing/saying kind things as a form of manipulation to get things your way. Kindness can also come about through people-pleasing so to appear as agreeable and likeable, making you feel loved. These are very me-focused, selfish things.

5. What are some ways in which we can demonstrate God's love to others, without it being seen as altruistic or with selfish-gain and motives?

Having acknowledged that Christ's love compels us to love beyond-showing kindness, compassion, love and grace will come naturally. We will do things without grumbling and complaining, our attitude will demonstrate humility and love. Demonstrating love without expecting gratitude of thanks is humbling, but shows we do these things not for recognition but as an act of worship: for God's glory and because of His Love

Read Ephesians 4:29-5:2; 1 John 3:16-18 - the PRESENT

6. In Ephesians 4, it talks about loving through words, why should we do this? How can we build someone up in how we say things tactfully?

Speaking truthfully with love, and being gentle can help. Sometimes it may seem unkind/not very nice to have to correct someone, but asking the Holy Spirit to help can be beneficial for both parties. (It is also important to remember that different people can be offended by different things so adapting your delivery to suit the individual is key, asking for the HS wisdom is also important too!)

7. In stark contrast, 1 John 3, tells us to not love with words and tongue but through actions and truth; how does this work with Ephesians 4 in mind? Of both passages, which demonstrates biblical kindness?

The phrase "practise what you preach" is very applicable here! We can talk and say things, but actions DO speak louder than words. Words in love are as important as demonstrating actions in love. Both go hand-in-hand. It's not easy, but with a willing heart, God can help.

Read John 15:9-17- the FUTURE

8. How do we know that God loves us?

v13: He lay down his life for us (we are his friends). And we are no longer his servant, slave, worker but we are his friends and He loves us and shares all things with us (knowledge, blessings and our inheritance)

9. As believers, how can we find a balance between loving God and loving others? Surely loving people can be idolatry? How does this work? **If we ask ourselves WHY we are being nice/kind, demonstrating these acts of love? Is it for personal gain? To please the other person or demonstrate how wonderful and great I am? It can be clear what our motives are. The balance is knowing why we do these things and for what purpose. Is it for God's glory or mine?**

10. How can we practise giving grace within our small group, friendship circles, church, workplace and beyond?

When we are honest through our sharing, and being transparent with each other can lead to two paths: they will either judge you or they will show grace. Building trust within the group will help us move forward and grow in love and grace.