

FIRST TUESDAY

Celebrating Friendships – Session one: **Wanted: A Few Good Women** February 1, 2011

You might want to keep a notepad just for this study so that you can jot things down. There may not always be enough room to answer questions on the handout sheet. Also, you may want to add things during our session itself.

Wanted: A few good women to form a circle of friends. Must be smart, fun loving, always there when I need them. The type who'll love my kids, drop dinner by when I'm stressed, always see the best in me, and never complain about their lives or anything I do. Gift-givers and surprise-party throwers a plus. **Required:** commitments to never change, move away, or like anybody else better than me.

Wouldn't it be great if you could write a want ad for the perfect group of friends, and they'd show up at your door (with the exact characteristics you requested) to whisk you away for a Saturday adventure? It's a nice, lingering thought, but in the real world friendships don't develop that way. Yes, there are times you get it off with someone immediately and the relationship easily flourishes. But most good friendships develop over the years, fluctuate up and down, and challenge you to grow. And, of course, there are friendships that blow up or fizzle out, leaving you to wonder, *what did I do wrong?*

However you gather up friendships, you have expectations about them. (Even if you consider yourself the easygoing type, when you dig inside, you'll find a friendship code lurking about—and what it says may surprise you!) The irony is, friends seldom express these desires (or demands) to each other. We make lists and ponder how to find Mr. Right, buy a new car, or assess a job offer. But friendship? We tend to enter that blindfolded. We don't know what we want or what the other person expects. We miss each other's signals and when the relationship falters, we're perplexed and disappointed.

But wait. Don't give up hope. Fabulous friendships are possible. They're fun, heartwarming, cherishable, and not-to-be-missed. And guess what? They thrive on respecting each other's expectations, even if they can't all be fulfilled.

So for this session, you get to dream a little. You'll answer the question, "What is a good friend like?" You have a chance to be honest about what matters and hoot about your way-out-there ideas. Then you'll see what the Bible says about friendship qualities, helping you define what good relationships can be. Because along with you, God wants the best for your friendships.

A friend is a gift you give yourself. Robert Louis Stevenson

By friendship you mean the greatest love, the greatest usefulness, the most open communication. Jeremy Taylor

A MOMENT FOR QUIET REFLECTION

1. Take a few minutes alone, grab a pen, pencil, or computer and make three lists (off the top of your head) by answering the following questions. Don't censor yourself. Write as little or as much as comes to mind. Be honest, idealistic, even silly, to spill out your ideas. You can call these your expectations. (Take your list to First Tuesday session)

List one. Why do I need friendships?

List two. What is a good friend like? What are your expectations?

List three. What do I want from my friendships? What are your expectations?

2. Now review your lists and ask, are my friendships living up to these expectations?
A). Yes, some are, some aren't, no, you've got to be kidding.

3. Before we meet on February 1st, give God a State-of-the-friendships report. Thank him for the great friends in our life. Ask him to heal the hurting relationships and remove any barriers you have to making new friends. Invite him to teach you how to nurture loving, lasting relationships.

KNOWING GOD'S HEART (We'll do this together)

1. Referring to your own list from Quiet Reflection, let's create our own group list of expectations. Or what is a good friend like?
2. Review the list, which by now probably staggers and describes Superwoman. Why do you think we have so many expectations about friends?
3. Let's try to choose from the list the five (maybe 10) most important qualities of a friend. What does this list reveal about the friendship needs we share in common?

The Bible brims with stories about friendship. Abraham and Jehovah. David and Jonathan. Naomi and Ruth. Daniel and his furnace friends. Mary and Elizabeth. Jesus and the disciples. Paul and Timothy. God's word also offers advice on making friends and managing relationships.

In fact, most of the Bible speaks to relationships. Companionship is God's intent for us, but he knows we're only human. Sometimes we need help sorting out our "stuff". He wants us to throw out the junk and jump into the joy.

4. For each scripture below ask, what is the friendship quality expressed here? Why is this quality important? You can check these out ahead of time if you would like

We can call this God's List

Proverbs 17:17

Proverbs 18:24

Proverbs 27:10

Proverbs 24:26

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

Proverbs 27:6

John 15:13

5. Qualities are important in relationships. What traits would affect friendship? We'll add these to God's list of qualities. Keep in mind that different translations may use different words.

Matthew 5:3-10

Romans 12:9-18

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Galatians 5:22-23

Ephesians 4:2-3, 32

6. Compare our group's list of friendship qualities to God's list. How are they similar? Different?

7. What unrealistic expectation(s) will you need to let go of?

As time permits, think about the following to share with the group.

8. Share with the group a time when a friend expressed one of the qualities on God's list to you, and how it affected you and your friendship.

9. Of all the qualities discussed, what is the one that you need to specifically work on and why?

10. Romans 12:10 says to “Honor one another above yourselves.” Describe a time when you practiced this principle, when you honored your friend. Did the experience still allow you to meet your needs? Why or why not?

11. Suppose that this month, you need to lovingly express an expectation to a friend: You think you should spend more time together. Devise a step-by-step plan for managing the conversation.

12. Now create an addendum to the plan. If your friend balks at giving you more time, what is your method for working through your difference in needs and opinions?

FRIENDSHIP BOOSTERS (Each time we meet)

A big part of why we come together is to deepen our friendships with each other and to support each other in meaningful ways. An activity will be proposed designed to link us in the bonds of friendship, faith, and joy. It will give us an opportunity to support each other in practical ways.

JUST FOR FUN (Each time we meet)

Our lives are not all work and no play. Central to being a woman of faith is cultivating a joyful spirit, a balanced perspective, and an ability to enjoy life because of God’s faithfulness. Just for fun will offer an idea or activity that will encourage us to enjoy our journey, laugh, and lighten our load as we travel the path toward wholehearted devotions together.

PRAYING TOGETHER (Each time we meet)

We will spend some time talking to God about our individual and mutual concerns.

MAKING IT REAL IN YOUR OWN LIFE (Each time we meet)

Recall the friendship quality you said you wanted to work on from this session. Practice it in some way every day. You’re more likely to remember if you write down a simple plan.

One who knows how to show and accept kindness will be a friend better than any possession. Sophocles