

## ***Forever Friends***

Welcome back to another session of “Walking with Christ”. This group is a highlight of my week, and I hope you can say the same. After all, we are getting together as friends...to talk about the One Who I hope is growing to be more of a friend to each of us every day. I haven’t always thought of God as a friend. I grew up seeing Sunday School pictures of Jesus on the streets of Jerusalem, and well...He just seemed so “removed” from my life! When I pictured **Him** teaching, I pictured my teachers! Let’s all admit...that may not give any of us the picture of a loving, caring, and yes...smiling Jesus! Therefore, into early adulthood I think I was too religious to **enjoy** being a Christian!

I had compartmentalized my world: my “spiritual world”, including prayer, Bible study and selfless works for others...apart from my “real world”, of study, friends, sports and entertainment...where I spent most of my time! I had a spiritual realm full of beliefs, doctrines and convictions about God, but very little experience. So, as we begin today, let’s pause and think about how Christ really showed up in our lives this week. How did he come off the imaginary flannel board, showing that He is real and cares for you?

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## **Fellowship**

1. Can you think of a time this week when God may have been:

- Enjoying a joke with you...
- Crying alongside you...
- Been frustrated with sin along with you...
- Happy for you...
- Teaching you to...
- Urging you to...

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## ***MERGEFORMATINET Discipleship***

I’ve been thinking about what I appreciate in my friends. Here are a few things I came up with: They’re fun to be with; they challenge me; they accept me as I am but are interested in my growth, and we have lots in common. Common goals and interests. And, one of the big ones: we can really talk and communicate. Well, one Sunday a friend introduced me to a great video series called, “Matthew.” It was a word-for-word portrayal of the whole book of Matthew. But the thing is, the producers got a man to play the part of Jesus who was joyful! I saw Jesus come alive on the screen, as He walked and talked with His disciples. I saw Him spray them with water when they were hot after sitting and listening to Him on a hilltop! He ate, He talked, He walked and He just “was” with them! It was

during this movie that I fell head over heels in love with Jesus! I wanted that friendship with Him that the disciples had! I was finally living and breathing for the day I would see Him face to face! I wanted to pray to speak to Him and read my Bible to hear what He would say to me! He became my best friend. I would go throughout my days remembering the looks on His face, and my daily annoyances suddenly didn't seem like such a big deal.

God created us to crave intimacy...with others and Himself! It's precious, yet something money can't buy. It's been reported that Howard Hughes, one of the wealthiest people in the world said this when he was worth approximately 4 billion dollars: "I'd **give it all** for **one** good friend."

Now, I've been proud to have friends in my life who have done some pretty amazing things...but nothing compares to the awesome God Who allows me to call Him "friend"! As a small group, turn to John 1:1-18, as we explore together a truly great Friend!

2. Read John 1:1-18. Which qualities do you most appreciate about The Word made flesh?

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

3. What were His goals in becoming flesh and living among us? (9-14).

4. Why did it require such a drastic measure...living as a human in our midst?

I trust you found some true treasure from these verses! I stand in amazement at who walks through our lowly lives with us. First of all, He is Creator God! He created everything! This means that nothing is too difficult for Him! I can bring all my hurts, fears and worries to Him and know that if He knows I need a miracle, He's big enough to make it happen! So, **He's a friend I can trust**. Secondly, in verse 4 we see that He is the source of life and brings light! When I am confused on which career path to take, need wisdom in raising my kids, or don't know how to react when someone is cruel, I can come to Him for guidance and trust that He will shed light on the situation! **He's a friend who gives good advice, 100% of the time**. In verse 5, it says that the darkness doesn't stand a chance against the light and can never put it out! Jesus is invincible and isn't going anywhere. **He is a friend who will never leave me**. Verses 10 and 11 say that Jesus was rejected! Those He came to save didn't receive Him nor welcome

Him. Since He wasn't accepted for who He was, He understands when I don't fit in. ***He's a friend who's been there and can truly understand.*** In verse 14, it says that Jesus lived among us. He didn't have to, but He chose to! ***He's a friend who's chosen friendship with me!*** Verse 16 tells us how He has blessed us all, giving one blessing after another. ***He's a generous and kind friend, not afraid to give.*** Verse 17: He's truthful and gracious, meaning He gives me underserved favor. ***He's a friend who will tell me the truth, but who I can trust to not be cruel.*** And finally, in verse 18, we see that He wants to be known! None of us would be able to see God the Father, but God wants to be known and made a way for it to happen. ***He's a friend who I can get to know.***

Brothers and sisters, we are just brushing the surface! We haven't yet begun to compare God to the Father Who guides His children, the mother who longs to gather her chicks under her wings, or the High Priest who understands every temptation and is waiting to stand in our defense. But here's what we know just from this passage about our Best Friend: He's Someone you can trust; He gives good advice, 100% of the time; He will never leave you; He's there and can truly understand; He chose friendship with YOU; He's generous, kind and giving; He'll tell you the truth yet never be cruel...and He's Someone you can get to know.

What more could we ask from a friend?

Jackie Robinson was the first black person to play major league baseball and consequently faced jeering crowds in every stadium. During one game in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he made a mistake. The fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then, his friend and shortstop Pee Wee Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet.

Robinson later said that Pee Wee's arm around his shoulder saved his career.

May God bless you as you grow in friendship with Him and may Philippians 3:10a be our cry every day until we meet Him face to face: "***All I want*** is to know Christ, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly."

5. What insights do you gain from Jesus' teaching in the following passages?

Luke 6:27-38

Matthew 5:46-47

John 13:34-35

Matthew 9:9-13

6. What is the cost to us to obey His teachings? Which do you find most challenging in your life?

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## **Ministry**

7. Read Hebrews 4:15-16. As a small group, you are the best earthly example of a support system! He is using ***each*** of you to minister to each other. Take a moment quietly to ask the Lord how He has designed you to sympathize with the weaknesses of others.

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## **Evangelism**

8. Do you think we have done a good job describing Christianity to the world? Do you think most people understand it is an offer to be friends with Jesus?

9. Who is within your circle of influence? That's your mission field! How does it feel to be a missionary?

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## *Worship*

10. How can we pray for each other this week?

Spend some time in intercessory prayer and thanksgiving to your Friend who sticks closer than a brother.