

# MAKING FRIENDS WITH PEOPLE

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## John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I 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. 16You did not choose me, but I

chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

## REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?
2. Sometimes we think of Jesus as a heroic individual working on his own. But Jesus had friends, and he treasured them. How does seeing Jesus in this way impact your understanding of him? Why do you think friendship is important to Jesus?
3. Why is friendship important to you?
4. Name or write down the names of your five (5) closest friends. Include them in your prayers today or this week, and consider sending them a note or message sharing how much their friendship means to you.
5. What do you think are the essential ingredients to being a good friend? Name at least 3-5

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things that you've learned or are trying to practice.

6. What are the biggest challenges to a long-lasting friendship?
7. Who were/are your closest or best childhood friends?
  - a. How did you meet?
  - b. What has kept you close or caused you to drift apart?
  - c. How was making or keeping friends as a child different from doing so now?
8. In what ways can the church support, strengthen, or nourish spiritual friendship?
9. Read the note below and reflect on what "friendship with Jesus" means.

## A NOTE ON ROMAN FRIENDSHIP

Friendship worked in a few different ways in the ancient world: friendship was described by Aristotle (Greek) as a relationship of mutual respect and care between equals. In Rome, friendship took on a different dimension. "Friend" described the relationship between a Patron and their subordinate client. It was no longer a relationship between equals. Being a "friend" to a powerful person meant you pledged loyalty and obedience to them, and then received certain benefits of association with them, and access to their social networks. The Patron remained your superior.

In addition, slaves became "friends" of their former masters when they were freed—ie, loyal to the one who set them free. What the NRSV translates as "servants" in John 15:15 is literally "slaves."

So in John 15, Jesus is using the ideas of Rome in a creative way: he sets his disciples free from a condition of blind obedience ("slaves") to him by teaching them what he is up to and modeling compassion. Freed from their ignorance, the disciples are now friends of Jesus with access to his spiritual network (God) and the benefits of God's kingdom life. As "friends," they are subordinate to Jesus, and also fully equal to one another.

Then Jesus takes it a step further: it was *not common* for a Roman patron to "lay down his life" for his "friends" (subordinate clients). This is not something Caesar would do for his clients, nor would a wealthy magistrate do for his clients. The gifts and access they provided their clients were far more measured.

Thus, when Jesus makes such a self-sacrificial claim about himself, he is claiming to be greater than any Roman patron. In short, being a friend of Jesus is **better** than being a client of Caesar, Pilate, King Herod, or anyone else, no matter how wealthy or influential they might be.

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