

Friends of God

A Discipleship Experience



The Discipleship Diary

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(Name)

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Hello, Friend!

Welcome to *Friends of God: A Discipleship Experience*! You're about to set out on an adventure—an adventure of friendship with Jesus.

You'll risk taking Jesus at his word that he wants to be your friend.

That you can know his heart for you.

That discipleship is more than one long, demanding to-do list.

That Jesus is ready and able to transform you—from the inside out.

That's because Jesus-style discipleship is all about your heart, Jesus' heart, and drawing the two of you closer together. It's moving past head knowledge to heart knowledge.

That's why, through a dozen get-togethers with other disciples and some eye-opening adventures, we'll keep our focus on the heart.

Your heart. Jesus' heart. And the hearts of the disciples experiencing this journey alongside you.

You'll love this—because this is where the joy is. The peace. The purpose.

And the fun.

So buckle up. You're following Jesus, and you never quite know where he'll take you.



SESSION 1

You're a Friend of God—and Friends Get Acquainted

Your friendships have at least one thing in common: At one time, you weren't friends.

There's a time even you and your best friend were strangers. But then you got acquainted, and something sparked. Something drew you together, and once you got to know each other...well, that was the start of a beautiful friendship.

It's the same with your friendship with God.

Almost the same, anyway.

The truth is that God has always known you. Always known everything about you. And always loved you.

But you *haven't* always known God.

And it's possible that when others first told you about God, they muddled the message. Maybe they told you he was a stern taskmaster who watched to see if he could catch you making a mistake. Or that he was distant, not interested in you at all.

In this session you'll take a fresh look at God. You'll clear away the clutter and see him for who he really is, maybe for the first time.

And you'll consider whether the two of you could become close friends.

He'd like that—but it's up to you, too.

Names of Jesus

The Bread of Life
The Light of the World
The Gate for the Sheep
The Good Shepherd
The True Vine
The Word
The Lamb of God

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

—Jesus

(John 15:15, NIV)

Talk About This

What are the differences between a servant relationship and a close friendship?

Fill in this statement:

“A servant relationship is _____, but a friendship is _____.”



Jot your thoughts:

Adventures in Discipleship

After each session, you'll invite Jesus to help you grow closer to him.

He's all for that. Just as he called his first batch of disciples his friends, he's saying the same thing to you. And he's eager for you to embrace and deepen that relationship with him.

You're on an adventure with Jesus—an adventure of friendship.

Here's the thing about adventures: You're never quite sure how they'll turn out.

But that's why they're so much fun, right?

You and a friend set off on an hour's hike in the forest, make a wrong turn at that oak tree, and two hours later you're taking in a stunning view you'd never have seen if you'd stayed on the predictable path.

The big tour of New York City you so carefully planned is shut down by an unexpected blizzard, and you end up sledding in Central Park instead. Big fun and a story you'll never tire of telling others.

Another truth about adventures: They aren't as much about what you're doing as who you're with. And though you'll do some of the adventures in this book with a group and some alone or with a friend, Jesus will always be along for the ride.

He loves this sort of thing: moving you just outside your comfort zone so you can see him more clearly and rely on him more fully.

That's what disciples do—and that's how you deepen your friendship with Jesus.

So before your next session, here are opportunities to embrace the adventure you're on with Jesus.



The Names of Jesus

While you were at the group get-together, you talked about the name of Jesus that was most meaningful to you.

Take a few minutes to dig into the other names of Jesus as well.

Read the Bible passage associated with each name; then ask Jesus to tell you what that name says about him...and what it means to you in your friendship with him.

Don't rush this. Consider one name and then go on your way, letting Jesus speak to you about himself throughout the rest of the day.

Circle back the next day to explore another name.

There's no hurry—you're deepening your friendship with Jesus as the two of you become better acquainted.

The Bread of Life (John 6:35)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



The Light of the World (John 8:12)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



The Gate for the Sheep (John 10:9)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



The Good Shepherd (John 10:11)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



The True Vine (John 15:1)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



The Word (John 1:1)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



The Lamb of God (John 1:29)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



Wonderful Counselor (Isaiah 9:6)

Jesus, what does this name say about who you are...and why is this important in our friendship?



Being a Friend of God

Disciples are friends of Jesus, good friends. But it's tough to wholeheartedly follow someone you don't know or trust.

So pause to consider where your friendship with Jesus stands.

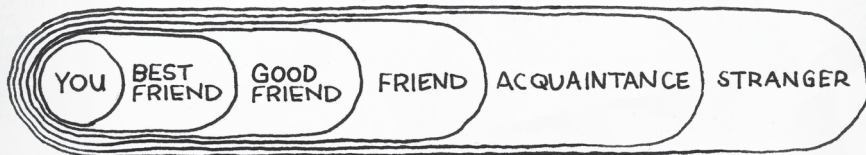
Because the word *friend* covers a lot of ground.

You might call a childhood buddy a friend even though you haven't talked in years. Or you might use the word to describe someone you see often, who knows everything about you including, you know, *that* thing.

Do this: Place a small cross in the space below that best describes the current status of your friendship with Jesus. Not where you think your friendship *should* be, but where it actually *is*.

It's okay if the two of you aren't as close as you'd like to be. You're moving in that direction, and friendships take time to grow and deepen.

Place a cross in one of the spaces now.



Stranger

You talk about the weather, but not about anything personal. A familiar face on the bus or at the gym, someone who you might not even know by name.

Acquaintance

You're getting to know each other, sharing some information and opinions—but only safe ones. You aren't sure you can trust this person.

Friend

There's trust now, and you're able to relax more. Conversations feel natural and flow easily. You care what this person thinks of you and care deeply about the person's welfare.

Good Friend

Your relationship has survived disagreements, and you've been there for each other through good times and tough times. You're not going anywhere; you're committed.

Best Friend

This is who you call when you need a lifeline. You can't imagine your life without this person in it, and the feeling is mutual.

Talk About It

Jesus is all-in when it comes to you.

He's committed to you right now—just as you are—even if you're not all that sure about him.

So when you take a next step toward him, growing as a disciple and friend, he is hugely happy.

A question for the two of you to talk about: What, if anything, is in the way of your friendship becoming even deeper? What will it take to overcome that obstacle?

Ask the question; then listen for whatever Jesus might tell you. Jot what you hear below. Jot your thoughts about the question, too.



Let's Talk About Your Name

Before Session 2, meet with a few friends to do what you did during the first session: Talk about your names.

Call or visit three friends and ask about their names. You might contact family members, buddies, neighbors, classmates—anyone you want to know better.

Hear their stories about their names; then ask follow-up questions to peel back additional layers of their stories:

- What about your middle name? What's the story there?
- How did you feel about your name when you were little?
- What awkward nicknames evolved from your name?
- If at some point your name changed, how did you feel about making that change?

Your friends will probably wonder why you're asking. Feel free to tell them about this *Friends of God Discipleship Experience*; you may open the door to faith conversations.

This will be fun and informative. You'll get to know these three friends better, and that's a good thing.

And it's also a good thing to have fun. Friendships are fueled by fun and laughter—and as you draw closer to Jesus, you'll find yourself laughing with him, too.

And that's just as it should be for disciples!



Being a friend of God changes everything...

You're about to embark on a friendship adventure with Jesus that'll transform you from the inside out. That's because you'll be drawing close to his heart—the epicenter of peace and joy.

Along the way, you'll use this Discipleship Diary...

- **As a guide through all 12 sessions of *Friends of God*.** It contains Scriptures, discussion questions, and directions you'll need for each session. You'll refer to it again and again.
- **As a devotional during the week.** It's full of journal spaces, reflections, Bible study, devotions, and discipleship adventures to try during your everyday life.
- **As a keepsake.** By the end of Session 12, your diary will be as unique as you are! You'll love revisiting it during the months and years to come as a reminder of your life-changing friendship journey.

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