



Discussion Guide

MEN and WOMEN

“The culture of FRIENDS” part 1

Become wise by walking with the wise; hang out with fools and watch your life fall to pieces. Proverbs 13:20 (MSG)

In this D Guide, we’ll consider how we can rise above empty cultural values that result in broken lives. OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE. PICK AND CHOOSE YOUR POINTS.

THE BATTLE FOR HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

1. FRIENDSHIPS DRIVEN BY CULTURE’S VALUES

What does 1 John 2:15 teach us *not* to love?

- Which of the cultural influences identified in this verse affect our personal lives? How do they shape our relationships?
- Why are we susceptible to temptations?
- Why is love of the world around us not compatible with the love of God?
- When we allow cultural values to drive our lives, how are our relationships with the opposite gender affected?

WOMEN

1. PERCEPTIONS

2. COMPARISON

3. INSECURITY

Result: INSINCERE

MEN

1. COMPETITION

2. ACQUAINTANCES

3. SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Result: ISOLATION

COMMON DENOMINATOR: DISTANCE

Fellowship—The quality of our character reflects the quality of our relationships. In other words, “who we soak with is who we end up tasting like.”

Women focus on how they are **perceived**, who they are **compared** to, and they become **insecure**. The end result is women become **insincere**.

On the other hand, men focus on being **competitive**, developing **surface acquaintances**, and they become **self-sufficient**. The end result is men become **isolated**. Women and men who live according to this world's cultural values both grow **distant** from one another. **Share a time when fellowship with those around you who did not love Christ negatively impacted your life.**

2. FRIENDSHIPS DRIVEN BY CHRIST’S VALUES

According to Hebrews 10:24, what are the characteristics of a Christ-driven friendship?

- Is it easier to tear a person down or build them up? Why?
- What happens to a person when encouraged by a friend?
- List some practical things we can do to show kindness to each other.

First Samuel 23:15–18 describes a relationship between two friends, David and Jonathan, during a time when David was in great distress. What did Jonathan say that showed he was a true friend? Share a time when a friend encouraged you. What impact did that have on your life?

WOMEN

1. **TRANSPARENCY**
2. **MUTUAL RESPECT**
3. **ENCOURAGEMENT**

Result: **ACCEPTED IN CHRIST**

MEN

1. **CONFESSION**
2. **DIVING DEEP**
3. **DEPEND ON A BROTHER**

Result: **AFFIRMED IN CHRIST**

COMMON DENOMINATOR: **HELP**

Christ offers a new set of values for friendships; However, the way we are enriched is uniquely different for men and women.

When a woman chooses to value what Christ values in a friendship with another woman, she finds an ability to be **transparent**. Walls come down. She becomes authentic and stops comparing. As a result, both feel loved and **accepted in Christ**.

When a man chooses to value what Christ values, he becomes honest with other men about the issues of his life. Another way to say this is “**confession**.” Instead of competing with others, he **dives deep** with honesty. As he realizes that his brother may have the same struggles, he sheds his self-sufficiency. He becomes open and willing to **depend on his brother** in Christ. As a result, the men experience **affirmation in Christ** and in their relationship with one another.

Worship—When we spend time with Christ in worship, he transforms us. He plants in us his deep and abiding values, replacing the shallow values of today’s culture regardless of gender.

How is this discussion helping you sense a need for change in your relationships?

PERSONAL APPLICATION AND COMMITMENT:

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22 (NIV)

HOW DO WE HELP EACH OTHER?

When we look at the result of chasing cultural values, we see petty jealousies, one-upmanship, competition, insecurities, and other qualities that have plagued us since our middle school years. God calls us to grow up. He created us to live in unity, serving together to build up the family at Friends. When we rise above cultural values and seek Christ’s better way, we become a force for God that can change our valley.

How Woman Can Help Men—Men are built to need respect. So women, look for ways to offer that value to the men in your lives. Realize that a man’s spiritual life is *not* like yours. Few men have deep relationships, but once they dive below the surface, their lives are changed. Affirm your man in the area of character, and then release him to connect with other godly men in fellowship at Friends.

How Men Can Help Women—Women need acceptance and affirmation. The best way for them to get that is through involvement with other spiritually strong, healthy Christian women. Allowing the women in your lives to find this connection may require giving up some time together, but the investment you make will pay off for both of you.

Sermon Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Goals for this Week's Study

- Take a few moments to tell the group about the best friend you ever had. What made that friendship so valuable?
- Recognize how society sets us up for failure when it comes to having healthy relationships and how Christ changes our value structure.
- Understand that in Christ it is possible for men and women to overcome cultural values to develop friendships shaped by Christ.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

- ✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God's wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God's instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- ✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60–90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God's five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission, and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- ✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

- This Sermon Discussion Guide is only a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. For most groups there are too many questions to answer in one session together. After considering the needs of your group you may choose one of the following options:
 - One section of questions;
 - One or two questions from each section
- Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, add Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.
- The questions relating to the five purposes are helpful to develop balance and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can bring your group to an awareness of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- Personal application is key to everyone's growth and should be included in every discussion. When asked how he or she intends to apply a certain principle a group member may say, "I need to spend more time in the Bible and in prayer." It is important for you to help group members make applications that are more specific and commit to a specific plan of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 30 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- As the leader your goal is to help bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their need for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.