

**Instructions:**

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



**Series: Connections, the Pathways to God**

Life is busy, full, uncertain, and stressful. Some seasons are so overwhelming that we are left feeling tired, fragmented, disconnected, with little energy left to give toward our own spiritual lives. In these wild times, how can we breathe deeply and feel rejuvenated? How can we become more aware of the presence of God that is, supposedly, always with us? Join us as we revisit practices that help us remain connected to God and to one another; the tried-and-true practices of the faith that keep us tethered and grounded during chaotic times.

**Message description**

We were not meant to live this life alone. We know this and yet it is often hard to find time to invest in true friendships. Friendship has the power to connect us to God and to one another because Jesus serves as both the model and the source of our friendship. We can love because he first loved us! May we find time this week to connect, encourage, and spur one another on in love and good deeds.

**Key Scriptures**

*John 15:1-17*

**Special Events coming up:**

- The week of October 24, phone a friend throughout the week!
- October 30, REVAPALOOZA live music, chili cook-off, pumpkin painting, and games! 3-5pm
- October 31, All Saints Celebration at 10am

**Additional sources for independent study:**

- *The Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper
- *Sacred Rhythms* by Ruth Haley Barton
- *The Common Rule* by Justin Earley
- *Overflow* by Lovett Weems and Tom Berlin
- <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/how-to-foster-spiritual-disciplines-in-the-church>
- John Wesley sermon on "The Means of Grace" - <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/>

### **Questions Related to This Week's Message:**

1. Do you have a friendship that has withstood the test of time in your life? If so, why do you think it has lasted? What challenges has your relationship faced with changing seasons of life?
2. What spiritual friends are you grateful for today?
3. Do you ever struggle to let your friends *be* friends and help you? What ways can you practice accepting the love and help of others more freely?
4. True friendship is possible because Jesus calls us friends and demonstrates what true friendship looks like. How does it feel to know that Jesus calls you his friend?

### **Going Deeper: Choose 2-3 for further reflection on the power of spiritual friendship**

#### **Read 1 SAMUEL 18:1-5**

Jonathan and David formed a friendship that was so rare and beautiful that it can be difficult to understand.

- How many of your relationships would you describe as covenantal (marriage, kids, certain friendships, colleagues in ministry)?
- Do you find that more of your day-to-day relationships are transactional or covenantal?

#### **Read 1 THESSALONIANS 5:10-11**

Paul makes it a point in most of his letters to remind followers of Christ to encourage one another in their faith and life together. This is a mark of good friendship. When we put all of our striving and achievements in the context of living together with Jesus, we have all the motivation we need to work to build each other up. This kind of life and relationship is an outflow of God's generosity to us.

- Are you a natural encourager? Do you find it easy to do? Or are you more prone to see critique or criticism first?
- Do you make encouragement and the building up of others a regular part of your life?
- Where do you see opportunities to encourage others today?

#### **Read ROMANS 12:3-21**

This passage is often referred to as the marks of a Christian.

- Could this passage also be called the marks of a spiritual friendship?
- What image or phrase sticks out to you in the passage?
- Not everyone we meet can be a spiritual friend. We don't have the capacity for that! But we are called to love others with a sincere love, to hate what is evil and to cling to what is good. What practices help you honor others above yourself?
- Identify those whom you have the hardest time honoring above yourself. Pray for them.

#### **Read PSALM 133**

The goodness of unity among God's people is described as a generous pouring of oil over the head of Aaron. This act is described in Leviticus 8:12 when Aaron was anointed as priest. Picture the oil covering every pore. Unity and spiritual friendship are like a coating of protection and a mark of blessing for the world to see.

- How does a lack of unity among believers impact the witness of the church?
- What does unity in friendship in the church look like to you? Does it have to mean unity in thought, belief, political vote, and/or action? Why or why not?

### **Youtube video: Open Your World**

Watch the following commercial found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etlqIn7vT4w>

*[note: this a commercial for Heineken, but its use here is not an endorsement! It is simply meant be a thought-provoking exercise.]*

- Where do you see the power of friendship in this video?
- Do you think conversations and relationships like this can build bridges across differences?
- What role does “sharing a beer” play in this scenario? We see Jesus throughout Scripture share table fellowship, eat meals, and enter homes of people consider “sinners” on the other side of some cultural or religious divide. How did Jesus’ actions tear down these barriers? As a church, where can we offer similar opportunities for grace and relationship-building in our own divisive climate?
- Though not spiritual in nature, how can this video inform our spiritual relationships and unity within church?