

Philippians Small Group 1

2:19-30 – New Friendships

Resource: 'A Life worth Living' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 5

Timing: One hour, including worship, prayer and ministry

Materials: 1 large sheet of paper and a marker pen

Focus: Choose one or two sections that are most appropriate for your group

Welcome

Icebreaker: "You can choose your friends, but not your family." If you could choose to get to know anyone alive today as a new friend, who would you choose and why?

Worship

Play your favourite song about friendship on CD. Thank God for our existing friendship with Him and others. Ask God to infuse our friendship with Him and one another with new passion, purpose, perseverance and courage. End by reading Philippians 2:19-30 together.

Word and Witness

Foundations

Men and women were created to live in a relationship with God and each other (Genesis 3:8; 2:18). Sin caused the breakdown of all these relationships (Gen 3:8-19), so that we all live with the tension of desiring human friendship (because of how we were created), but often find them difficult or painful (because of the inherent sin in the world around us). Jesus restores relationship by (a) on the cross destroying the "dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:14) between God and one another; (b) by example, choosing disciples as friends (John 15:14).

- How does the value that our society places on friendship compare to the Christian view?
- Does this biblical view tally with our modern-day experience of friendship?
- How can friendship teach us about our relationship with God?

Philippians 2:19-30 gives us an insight into Paul's friendships with Timothy and Epaphroditus. Take a big sheet of blank paper and in the middle of it write "Paul's Friendships". Distribute the following verses around the group and ask people to read out each verse and brainstorm what they show about both their friendship. Record the main points on the sheet. Verses: 1 Corinthians 4:17, 16:10; Philippians 1:1, 2:19-23, 2:25-30; Colossians 1:1; Acts 16:1-5, 18:5, 20:4; 1 Thessalonians 3:6.

You should be able to use this sheet to summarise some hallmarks of Christian friendship. A section follows on 4 such hallmarks. Choose one or two of these for discussion in your group.

1. Be Genuinely Interested (v.20)

Paul contrasts Timothy's "*genuine interest*" (v.20) approach to friendship with a surrounding culture blighted by self-interest (v.21). Likewise, Paul's genuine concern for Epaphroditus (v.27-30) is equal to Epaphroditus' genuine concern for the Philippians' interests rather than his own (v.26).

- Friendship and evangelism go hand in hand. But if we make friends in order to evangelise doesn't this compromise genuine interest?
- How do we develop a genuine interest for others if we have become too self-interested?

2. Foster a Common Focus (v.21)

Close Christian friends have a common focus quite unlike that of the surrounding culture (v.21). This unique dimension in Christian friendship gives an unparalleled closeness that the New Testament terms “fellowship” – about which the world knows nothing. Fellowship comes from more than our common interest in Christianity. It comes from the trust, security and openness that is the result of our common focus on Jesus Christ.

- Jesus accepted everyone, but chose his friends. How do we decide who to build deep friendships with?
- Paul trusted Timothy very deeply (see 1 Thessalonians 3:2). How can we build the kind of deep trust and “fellowship” the New Testament talks about?

3. Serve Together (v.22)

Paul and Timothy’s friendship had a common vision and goal. Both understood their roles in pursuing that purpose together. Paul didn’t lord his apostleship over Timothy, but they “co-slaved” together (in Greek v.22 means “he slaved with me”). Often it’s working together for the gospel that brings us close to our Christian friends. Likewise, Epaphroditus was Paul’s “fellow-worker” (v.25). Friendship and mission go hand in hand in the New Testament. Any group not involved together in “the work of the gospel” eventually shrivels and dies. Conversely, working together causes friendship to flourish.

- As friends, what’s the purpose of our homegroup? What are we trying to achieve together?

4. Take Risks and Battle Together (v.25)

The three words in v.25 “brother, fellow-worker and *fellow-soldier*” are arranged in an ascending scale of common sympathy, common work, *common danger and toil and suffering*.

Epaphroditus had been prepared to “risk his life” for Paul (v.30). His name suggests his parents had devoted him to Aphrodite – the goddess of love and the patron of gambling. The Greek historian Plutarch, calls the highest cast of the dice “Epaphroditus”, so his name may mean “one blessed with gambling luck”. Likewise, the RSV version of the bible describes the expression in v.30 as “hazarding his life” and an accurate translation may be “gambling his life”. Perhaps by associating with Paul (who was in prison) he risked being charged of the same offence, or risked his health through excessive hard work. Either way, he showed reckless courage and disregard for self.

All friendship involves taking risks. Jesus was open (John 15:15) and committed to the hilt (John 15:13). Christian friends know that it is often in hazarding our lives for one another that we find true blessing. The old Sunday School definition of joy: J(esus) O(thers) Y(ourself) is shown in the friendships of Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

- In what ways do we as a friendship group give our lives for each other?
- In what ways do we as a friendship group take risks on each other’s behalf?

Prayer and Ministry

- Pray for your small group, that as friends together you might put into practice some of the things you have been discussing during the session
- Pray for your group’s friends who aren’t Christians – that our involvement in their lives might flow from a genuine interest and love, and evangelism might go hand in hand with our interest
- Pray for wisdom to know which friendships to invest in