

WEEK 1: DEVELOPING LIFELONG FRIENDSHIPS

CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- Would you rather never be able to sit down or never be able to stand?
- What is one amazing talent you would love to have?
- Who is the first friend you can ever remember having? What is one thing you remember about them?

DISCUSS

- What are the top 3 qualities you would look for in a best friend? (Leader: Give every person an opportunity to share)
- Have you ever thought someone would be your best friend for life and then suddenly the friendship changed or ended? What happened? How did you feel?
- Why do you think some friendships last longer than others?
- Do you think it's possible to have a friendship that lasts a lifetime? What ingredients do you think are needed for a life-long friendship?

This week we will look at the story of Ruth and Naomi in the Bible who give us a great example of a deep, meaningful life-long friendship.

They start as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law but their relationship becomes much deeper than this.

When both of their husbands die, Ruth commits to stay with Naomi for life.

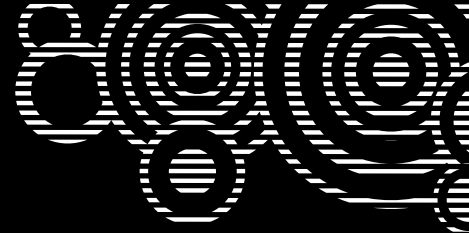
Naomi later helps Ruth find a new husband and helps care for Ruth's child.

As a group, read together: Ruth 1:1-18.

- Do you think it is possible to have a friendship with someone who is much older or younger than you? Why/why not?
- Read verses 16-17 again. How do you think Naomi felt when Ruth committed to stay with her? How would you feel?
- Naomi's other daughter-in-law Orpah chose not to go with her. Is the end of a friendship always a bad thing?
- Are your main friendships centred on a shared hobby or interest or is there a deep and genuine care for each other?



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WEEK 1: DEVELOPING LIFELONG FRIENDSHIPS

INVOLVE

As a group, make a list of the top 10 qualities you feel a life-long best friend should have.

(Write your list on paper large enough for your whole group to see).

Ask everyone to identify the quality that they are strongest in and the quality they are weakest in.

Pray for each other about these areas of strength/weakness.

AND/OR

Have everyone in the group finish the following statement, referring to a person in the room.

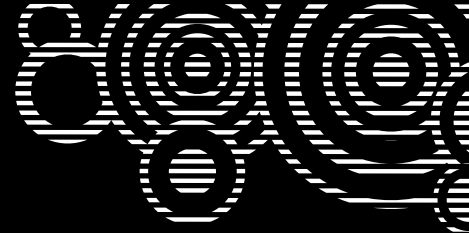
I value our friendship because ...

(Leaders: It might be helpful to spend a moment reminding your group about the power of encouragement)

APPLY

What is one thing you will commit to doing this week to improve your area of friendship weakness?





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WEEK 2: WHEN YOUR FRIEND ISN'T A CHRISTIAN YET

CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- What is the funniest thing you have ever seen?
- What is one thing you have learnt from the Bible recently?
- Which 'fruit of the Spirit' do you feel being developed in you at the moment? (See Galatians 5:22-23)

Jesus spent a lot of time hanging out with and loving people who were not following God's law. He did it so much that he earned the nickname "Friend of Sinners". Somehow, he managed to have genuine friendships with them without ever adopting their sinful behaviours. During this study, we will be look at how we can do likewise.

DISCUSS

- How would you define a 'Sinner'?
- "Show me your friends and I'll show you your future". Do you agree or disagree with this quote? Why?
- Do you find it easier to be friends with Christians or non-Christians? Why do you think that is?
- As a young Christian, do you think your friends should be mostly Christian or mostly non-Christian? Why? What are the benefits of a Christian having non-Christian friends? What are the potential dangers?

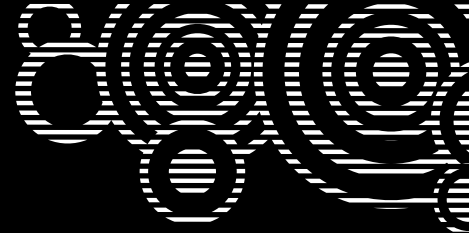
Ask a volunteer to read Luke 19:1-10

- Jesus was in a crowd of people. Why do you think he singled out Zaccheus?
- Why do you think the people reacted to Jesus' treatment of Zaccheus?
- Jesus reached out to Zaccheus despite other people's disapproval. Would you have found it hard to go against those voices?
- How much do you let other people's opinions shape who you hang out with?
- Do you think your parents should have a say in who you hang out with? Why/why not?
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said: "the healthy don't need a doctor"? Was this statement just relevant for Jesus or are we called to treat the 'sick' too?



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS





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WEEK 2: WHEN YOUR FRIEND ISN'T A CHRISTIAN YET

- Should you be friends with someone just to 'help' them?

Ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 6:14

- Does this verse seem to you to contradict what Jesus modelled? Why/why not?

Explain to the group that a 'yolk' is something that joins two working animals together. If a small goat and an ox were yoked together, for instance, the yoking would be said to be 'unequal' and the impact on the animals would be huge. The ox would be held back, slowed down and prevented from reaching its capacity. It's possible that the unequal pairing could also cause the ox to fall.

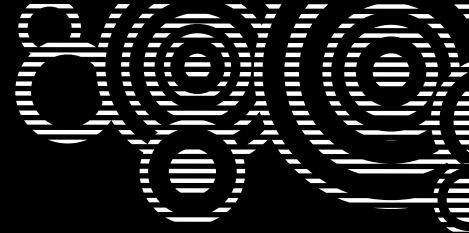
- What do you think would it look like to be 'yoked' to a non-Christian friend? (I.e. so strongly bound together that you are dramatically effected by their strengths, faith, behaviours, etc).
- What can you do to protect yourself from being 'unequally yoked' while still being a friend to those who are not yet Christians?

INVOLVE

As a group, go through all or some of these "What would you do in this situation?" questions. Make sure you involve everyone in the group and allow everyone to contribute to the conversation.

- Your friend brings someone to youth group for the first time. You recognize him/her from school. He/she is the guy/girl who smokes in the toilets, gets drunk on the weekend and truants school frequently. What would you do?
- You have been best friends with this particular person since primary school. You have always done everything together. All of a sudden your friend starts to change. They are doing things that you know God wouldn't want you to do and they are constantly trying to pull you into it with them. What would you do?
- You find out from a friend that one of your other friends has been talking behind your back. The things they are saying are pretty horrible, but the friend is very nice in front of your face. How would you approach this situation?
- All of your friends are Christians. You love hanging out with them but feel more and more disconnected from people who don't know Jesus. What would you do?





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WEEK 2: WHEN YOUR FRIEND ISN'T A CHRISTIAN YET

- Your whole LIFE group have been praying for your friend to encounter Jesus. You have invited them to countless things at church and had many chats with them about Jesus but they still don't seem interested. Is it time to move on and focus on a new non-Christian friend?
- The guy/girl you really like asks you to be their boyfriend/girlfriend. They are not a Christian. What would you do?

APPLY

What is ONE thing you have felt challenged about tonight?

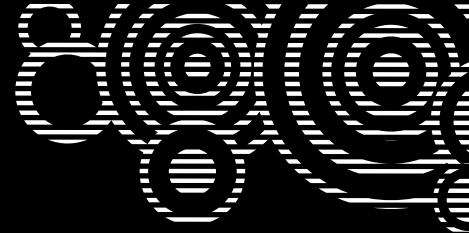
OR

Challenge the group to choose one person they consider similar to Zaccheus this week and do one thing to 'befriend' them. Let them know that you will ask everyone to report back next week.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Create a helpful atmosphere. Put some music on, have some snacks available and have something for people to do when they arrive.
- Tax Collectors, in Biblical times, were considered outcasts in Society. They were despised by other people as they were usually greedy and took more money from people than what they were entitled too. Zacchaeus was particularly corrupt as well, which is why people were even more outraged at Jesus' actions. They couldn't understand why Jesus would rather be the guest of a sinner than of a more respectable or "righteous" person
- The young people in your group will probably need some guidance from you about whether or not a specific relationship is healthy.
- Bible note: In 2 Corinthians 6:14 Paul seems to be alluding to Deuteronomy 22:10: 'Do not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together.'





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WEEK 3: WHEN YOUR FRIEND OUTSHINES YOU

CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- How did everyone go with last week's challenge?
- Ask everyone to share the best & worst part of their week so far
- Do you think Reality TV is awesome or awful?
- How have you encouraged someone recently?

Have you ever felt jealous of a friend's God-given talents or opportunities? This week we will explore how to eliminate jealousy and be people who celebrate & nurture the abilities God has given our friends.

DISCUSS

- How would you describe 'jealousy'?
- Be really honest. Have you ever felt jealous of a friend?
- What do you think causes the feeling of jealousy?

In 1 Samuel we read about a man named David. David was definitely the kind of person people get jealous of. He was way more successful than anyone else and from a young age he was chosen by God to be the future king. (1 Sam 16:8-13).

Ask volunteers to read out loud:

1 Samuel 18:1-9

1 Samuel 19:1-7

1 Samuel 20

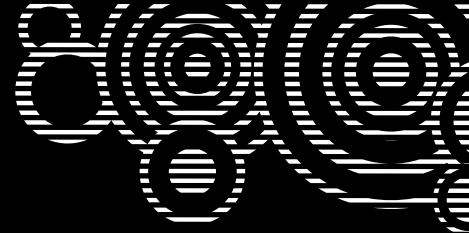
These passages explore the relationships between 3 men: Saul (King of Israel), Jonathan (Saul's son & heir to the throne) and David (God's chosen king).

- As a group, summarise the relationships in the story. Does everyone agree?
- Saul is very hostile towards David. Can you understand where Saul is coming from? Why/why not?
- Who do you naturally relate to more: Saul or David?



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS





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WEEK 3: WHEN YOUR FRIEND OUTSHINES YOU

- How did God use Jonathan in bringing about his purpose for David?

Ask a volunteer to read Luke 1:5-7, 39-45 for another example of friendship that celebrates potential in others.

- Imagine you're Elizabeth. You're super excited because after trying to get pregnant for years you are finally expecting a baby! Then your young friend trumps your news in a major way by announcing she's pregnant with God's son! How would you feel?
- Imagine you are Mary. You've just received this scary, unexpected news. How do you think Elizabeth's reaction impacted Mary?
- How do you think Jonathon and Elizabeth got to a point where they were not jealous of their friends?

INVOLVE

Ask a volunteer to read the following quote out loud:

"If someone is leaving you behind, and you are becoming jealous and embittered, keep praying that he may have success in the very matter where he is awakening your envy; and whether he is helped or not, one thing is sure, that your own soul will be cleansed and ennobled". - William Law

Have each member identify a friend they have been jealous or critical of or who they recognise God's purpose or potential in. Give each member of the group time to 'talk up', celebrate & pray that they would achieve their God-given potential

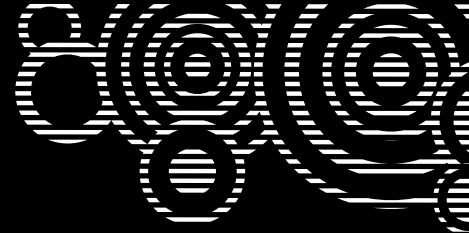
OR

Jonathan and Elizabeth demonstrated healthy friendships to their best mates. They celebrated with them when good things happened and made sacrifices to help them.

As a group, make a list of other things that would indicate a healthy friendship.

Have the group identify the thing on the list that they find easiest and the thing they find most difficult, then spend time as a group praying for each other.





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WEEK 3: WHEN YOUR FRIEND OUTSHINES YOU

APPLY

What is one thing you have felt challenged about tonight?

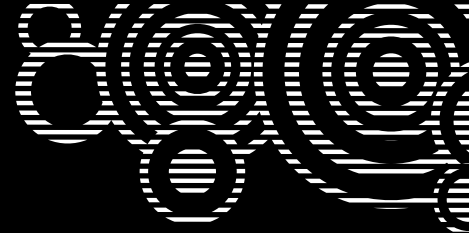
OR

Based on tonight's discussion, what is one thing you will do differently this week?

LEADER'S NOTES

- Don't forget to set aside some time to ENJOY. Play a game, have supper, or just chill
- Always include prayer as part of your night.
- If you've never read it, we recommend checking out our LIFE Leaders Handbook. It'll give you a whole pile of practical advice on how to be a great life group leader. You can download one at salvos.org.au/more/life





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WEEK 4: WHEN YOUR FRIEND HURTS YOU

CONNECT

Ask your choice of the following questions:

- If you could trade places with any animal for one whole week which would you choose and why?
- What was your favourite childhood movie?
- Finish this sentence. "A true best mate would never, ever, ever..."

Ever been let down by a friend? If you haven't yet, chances are you will one day. As Christians, we are called to forgive even when someone hurts us repeatedly, but this doesn't mean we have to keep letting them hurt us. This week, we will explore how to respond when friends hurt you.

DISCUSS

- Have you ever been let down by a friend? How did it make you feel?
- Can you think of a time when you have let down a friend?
- Do you find it hard to stay friends with someone who has hurt you? Why?

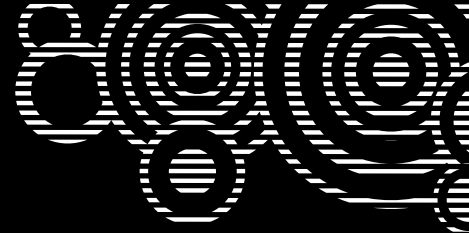
Read Matthew 18:21-35

- What do you think these verses are saying? Does everyone agree with the summary?
- According to these verses, do you think Jesus is ever supportive of us carrying a grudge against a friend?
- Do you think forgiveness is a feeling or a choice? Why?
- What does it mean to forgive someone?
- Does forgiveness mean that the friendship has to go back to how it was before? Why/why not?
- What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?
- Under what circumstances might there be forgiveness but not reconciliation? (E.g. The friend shows no remorse and continues to hurt you; the friend doesn't want to make up; the friend has intentionally brought serious harm to you)
- How do you think you can draw back from a friendship while still showing grace, kindness and forgiveness?



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WEEK 4: WHEN YOUR FRIEND HURTS YOU

- When friendships break down there is usually more than one casualty. Can you think of a time when have responded hurtfully to a friend who hurt you?

INVOLVE

- Is anyone in the group struggling in the area we have discussed today?

As a group, take some time to listen to and pray for any group members who are being challenged in this area. You might like to lay hands on them as you pray.

APPLY

Ask your group to share one thing they learnt or feel challenged to put into action this week.

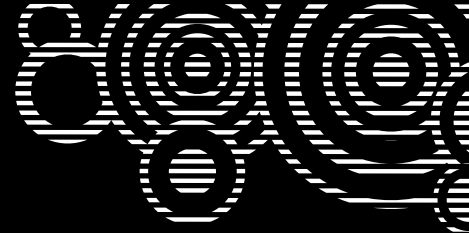
OR

Ask everyone to choose one thing off the 'tips for forgiveness' list that they will put into practice this week.

LEADER'S NOTES

- Group members might need some guidance on whether the relationship is ready to be reconciled or not. Young people should be encouraged to have healthy boundaries to protect them from harm.
- Be sensitive to those who may have some deeper issues in need of forgiveness. Take care not to exert pressure or imply judgement if someone is not ready to forgive. Reinforce God's love for them and his willingness to help them through this difficult process.
- It might be helpful to remind your group that forgiveness is not about saying what someone did is okay. It is about choosing not to try to hurt them back with our words, actions or attitude.
- You might find it helpful to distribute or draw on the 'tips for forgiveness' list
- Is anyone from your group missing? You might want to spend time texting or praying for them





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

5 TIPS FOR FORGIVENESS

1. Think about your own experience of God's grace.

If you're a Christian, you have already experienced some pretty extreme forgiveness. Lots of people find it really helpful to spend time reflecting on the way God has let us off the hook even though we didn't do anything to deserve it.

By reflecting on the undeserved favour he has shown to us, we help position ourselves to show that same favour to others through Jesus.

2. Leave justice to God

It can be particularly hard to forgive someone if we don't see any justice being served – if we don't see the person who wronged us, face any consequences for what they did. It can make us feel so angry – like we really want to make them pay.

But God tells us not to seek revenge or to try and get even. He says that we should trust Him to deal with everyone justly.

Romans 12:19 says, "Never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God for He has said that He will repay those who deserve it."

So, when it seems like the person who has wronged you has not faced any consequences, it can be really helpful to remember that they will be answerable to God – who is perfectly just and perfectly righteous.

3. Pray for them

When your mind inevitably goes to that place where it starts rehearsing the story of what they did to you... when your mind starts thinking about how you'd like to make them pay... stop!

Stop those thoughts in their tracks and make a choice to pray for the person.

Ask God to help you have compassion for them – to help you see them as he sees them.

4. Forgive them again, and again, and again...

I mentioned earlier that sometimes when we make a genuine choice to forgive that person who has hurt us, those feelings of resentment or anger or the desire for revenge can return to us. It can make us wonder if there's even any point in trying.

The thing is – if the pain we've experienced is deep, we will almost certainly have to make that choice to forgive them more than once.

5. Say it in different ways

The phrase 'I forgive them' can start to feel a bit empty. Try different ways of speaking it out to yourself. "I cancel their debt". "I let go of my desire to get revenge". "I'm leaving justice to God".



WEEK 5: WHEN YOUR FRIEND IS SUFFERING

CONNECT

- Give your week a score out of 10. Why did you give it that score?
- If you couldn't live in Australia, which country would you choose to live in and why?

You probably don't have any issues supporting a friend when they've had a busy week or have the flu. But how do we respond when our friend's suffering is intense and/or long lasting? This week we will find out how to support our friends in circumstances like these.

DISCUSS

Ask a volunteer to read Galatians 6:2.

- Tell us about a time when a friend assist you in carrying a 'burden'? (e.g. Helped you move house; visited you when you were sick).
- How did their efforts impact you?

Ask your group if they have heard of Job. If yes, ask them to share what they know about him. (Leader: You want everyone in the group to understand that Job was a man who honoured God in every area of his life. Within a short period of time he lost his family, his wealth and his physical well-being. This wasn't a punishment for his sin. Job had done nothing to deserve the suffering that came upon him).

Ask a volunteer to read Job 2:11-13

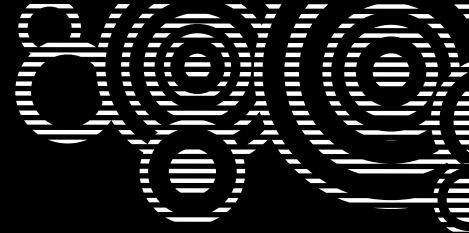
- When Job's friends heard about his troubles, they travelled to be with him. When you hear that a friend is going through trauma is your instinct to go to them or to avoid them? Why do you think some of us keep a distance?
- Do you think sending a card or facebook message can be just as good as being physically present? Why/Why not?
- In verse 12 Job's friends cry & mourn with him. Do you think this is a helpful response? Why/why not?

Ask a volunteer to read Job 4:1-11.

- How do you think Job would have felt when his friend implied that he had brought his suffering on himself?
- Have you ever had someone give you advice when you just wanted them to listen? How did that feel?



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS



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WEEK 5: WHEN YOUR FRIEND IS SUFFERING

- Do you find it easier to talk or to listen when comforting a friend?
- How do you work out when it is appropriate to give advice and when it is right to just listen?
- What are some things you could say or do in the following situations:
 - A friend is grieving over the death of a family member
 - A friend has just discovered that their parents are getting a divorce
 - A friend has found out that they have a serious illness
 - A friend is suffering from depression
 - A friend is deliberately hurting themselves

INVOLVE

Think of some people who need comforting and discuss how you could show them support and love. Make a plan about what you will do.

(Leader: Ensure this 'thoughtfulness' doesn't come across as a 'project')

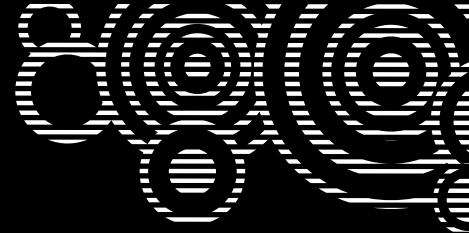
APPLY

What is one thing you will do this week based on what we have discussed?

LEADER'S NOTES

- At your discretion, feel free to mention the part of the story where Satan questions God's people and God responds by showing how his servant, Job would remain faithful during the good and the bad times. This story would be more appropriate for established Christians. Be aware it could lead to some challenging questions you should be prepared to answer.
- If any group member is dealing with serious situations, e.g. grief, depression then it is important to offer further support about this. You could speak to your Corps Officer or leader.
- You might like to distribute or discuss the handout: "Supporting a friend through trauma"





HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

5 TIPS FOR SUPPORTING A FRIEND THROUGH TRAUMA

1. Be present

Sometimes the best thing you can do is be physically present. You might not know the words to say. They might not want to talk anyway. Dropping your normal schedule and sitting with your friend - even if it is in silence - will send them an important and powerful message of love and support.

2. Listen

If and when your friend feels like talking, listen. Don't feel like you have to respond with great advice or answers. Just give them space and time to share freely.

3. Offer some practical help

Maybe they would be helped by you dropping off a home-cooked meal, offering for them to borrow your car or having them stay over for a few nights?

It might seem like a small thing in light of the circumstances but generously giving or serving will not only lighten your friends burden, it will help them know that they are loved.

4. Stay the course

Many people find it difficult to stay supportive beyond the first month after a trauma occurs. Choose to be someone who will visit, pray for, listen to and practically support your friend continually - for as long as it takes.

5. Get support for yourself

This one is important. Emotionally or practically supporting your friend is likely to take some toll on you. You might need to find a counsellor or support person who can help you.

