



This discussion series is intended to create space to deepen our current friendships and start new ones.

John 11 records Jesus interacting with three of His friends. This is a great starting place for understanding a biblical basis for friendship— love. More specifically, this story offers hope for friendships to be resurrected and redefined by Christ's love.

In [The Four Loves](#), C.S. Lewis describes *eros* or “romantic love” as being face to face with someone whereas *philia* or “friendship love” is being side by side. This imagery illustrates the way a friendship is often based on a common affinity and is headed in a shared direction. My cycling buddies share an affinity with bicycles, but our friendship can fade if I or one of them gets injured. Two friends who share an appreciation for who Christ is and what Christ has done to love them have a much more solid affinity that sustains a loyalty and capacity to forgive rarely found in friendship today. The more we appreciate God's loyalty to us as demonstrated in Christ, the more we can extend that loyalty in friendship.

## Scripture Reading

*John 11:1-44*

## What is Friendship?

*See reverse side*

## Discussion

1. What are times when friendship has seemed most real to you— when you felt most known, stood up for, and loved by someone other than your family or a romantic partner? If helpful to you, draw a timeline that charts the highs and lows of friendship in your life.
2. How would you define friendship?
3. What makes a friendship have a spiritual quality to it? What difference does Jesus— who He is, what He has done, why we needed Him to do it— make in friendship?

## Explore Further

- *Read:* Chapter 4 in [The Four Loves](#) by C.S. Lewis
- *Listen:* Friendship, a sermon on Proverbs 17 by Tim Keller <https://youtu.be/8Tc4VIQrXdE>
- *Read:* Chapter 5 in [A Visit to Vanity Fair](#) by Alan Jacobs
- *Meditate:* 1 Peter 4:8-10; Proverbs 18:24

## Closing Prayer

## What is Friendship?

*A brief sketch of friendship throughout history.*

340BC Aristotle wrote *Nicomachean Ethics* where he defined friendship as “reciprocated goodwill.” He also said true friendship was only possible between “good people similar in virtue” because only a good, virtuous person can love someone else for that person’s sake rather than for selfish utility or pleasure. The question remains am I a good person of virtue (aka a true friend)? If we are honest, we will then face the next question: how can I become a true friend?

44BC Marcus Tullius Cicero wrote *Laelius*, now known as *On Friendship*. His definition became the standard definition: “For friendship is nothing other than agreement in all things divine and human with goodwill and love.”

90 John, the beloved disciple, the closest friend of Jesus, records these words that foretell Jesus’ own sacrificial death: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

397 Augustine of Hippo, a North African bishop equivalent to The Beatles in musical influence on the growth and development of Christian theology— thought a lot about friendship. Here he gives us a window into how friendship has changed now that he has begun to follow Christ, and what we may enjoy but also find lacking in friendships:

“Dearest friend, at one time we were in complete agreement about material things, when I wanted to enjoy those things in the ways of the world, but in the more important things (those of the spirit), there was something lacking in our friendship” (Letter 258, 4).

“What consolations have we in this human society, so replete with mistaken notions and distressing anxieties, except the unfeigned faith and mutual affections of genuine, loyal friends?” (City of God, XIX, 8)

“[Friendship is] to talk and to laugh with them; to do friendly acts of service for one another; to read well-written books together; sometimes to tell jokes and sometimes to be serious; to disagree at times, but without hard feelings, just as a man does with himself; and to keep our many discussions pleasant by the very rarity of such differences; to teach things to the others and to learn from them. To long impatiently for those who were absent, and to receive with joy those joining us. These and similar expressions, proceeding from the hearts of those who loved and repaid their comrade’s love, by way of countenance, tongue, eyes and a thousand pleasing gestures, were like fuel to set our minds ablaze and to make but one out of many.” (Confessions IV, 13)

“What could make me happier than to love and be loved?” (Confessions II, 2; III, 1)

Augustine always emphasized that the greatest stimulus to love is to know that one is loved. A person loves more if he himself is loved (see *Treatises on the Gospel of John*, 32, 3)

1164 Aelred of Rievaulx, pron. *al-red* of *riv-o*, wrote *Spiritual Friendship*. As an abbot in England, he led a group of monks toward a practice of rich friendships. These friendships were rich because they had a dynamic direction toward Christ.

“He who seeks from friendship some profit other than friendship itself has not yet learned what friendship is. Friendship will be full of riches for those who cherish it when it is completely centered upon God; for those whom friendship joins together, it immerses in the contemplation of God.”

“In friendship there is nothing more outstanding than faithfulness, which seems to be both the nurse and guardian of friendship.”

1927 Sigmund Freud’s research popularizes a sexualized understanding of all relationships— including friendship.

2008 The Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience at the University of Chicago (the world’s leading expert on loneliness research— a fun place to work?) conclude loneliness causes damaging levels of the stress hormone epinephrine.

2010 Ronald Dworkin’s research demonstrates a dramatic rise in psychiatric care professionals in America since the 1940s even though the majority of patients in therapy *do not warrant a psychiatric diagnosis*. This suggests that psychiatric professionals now help Americans to address what used to be called regular problems. Societally, have we outsourced the work of friendship and everyday caring to these professionals?