

Pathway

PERSONAL CHRISTIAN GROWTH SERIES

Set aside a special time each day to go through a *Pathway* study. Even if you miss a day or two, don't skip those studies. Begin again where you left off! Each daily study is designed to take only 10-12 minutes, or longer ... it's up to you! Be honest with yourself. This is a private time just between you and God.

Introduction — *Friends*

"You'll probably only have a couple close friends in your life." Do you believe that? This *Pathway* study makes you stop and think about friendship! You'll take a sensitive look at your own needs and wishes. You'll study topics such as sticking close and pulling together, choosing friends, disloyalty, broken hearts, and lifetime friends. If friendships are important to you, what you learn in this study will stay with you for a long time.

My Friend Is Changing

Oh, God, she's such a special friend. I don't want to lose her, but I worry about her so much. Please guide her and help her to make the right decisions. There are so many pressures - and it's hard for her to know what's right. But most of all, Lord, help me remind her how much You love her, and how much I love her, too.

High-school Junior

DAY ONE — Friends

Verse to Think About: *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity (Psalm 133:1).*

Prayer: Talk to the Lord about your desires for friends. Look back at the list you wrote earlier. Tell Him about areas that make you happy and about wounds which need healing. Remember, Jesus really does understand!

Who Needs Friends, Anyway?

Liz is popular and loves being surrounded by her friends. A day rarely passes that she doesn't laugh and talk with them — either at school, ball games, over the phone, or at church. Then there are her special friends, Kate and Casey, to whom she feels especially close. They sit around at each other's houses, go to the shopping mall, and always attend youth group together. They share each other's successes, complain together about boys, and have their usual, but trivial, arguments.

Paul, Liz's brother, doesn't fit into such a great picture. He has lots of friends in general. At church or school, there's usually someone to hang around with. But when it's time to go home, Paul is all by himself. None of his "friends" would ever stop by to shoot baskets or watch TV. He feels alone — and secretly wishes for close friends like his sister enjoys.

Then there's Pete, a freshman. He's fortunate to have a good friend, Matthew. But when the two guys are at a youth group party, they always seem to go off by themselves. Both think they don't fit in with the crowd.

When it comes to friends, some teens feel the need for lots of companionship, while others desire only one or two close friends. Regardless of such differences, however, the answer to "who needs friends?" is clear. We all do!

What are your own personal wishes and desires in friendships? Think for a minute and be honest. ***What do you need and want most in a friend?***

A Look in the Book: Are you aware that it's a natural, human characteristic to desire companionship. Even Jesus had friends. For instance, He spent a lot of time together with His disciples. But Jesus especially enjoyed the special company of three close friends, Peter, James, and John (read Mark 14:32-33). These were the men to whom He poured out His heart and shared some of His most intimate thoughts.

Jesus wants us to care about and love people in the same way He loves us. Read John 13:34. *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. **Why is loving others as Christ loves us the first step in finding and maintaining good friendships?***

Friendship is a special and wonderful part of life — especially during the high-school years. We all need friends to make us smile and laugh and also to help us wade through our hardest times. As you study the topic of friendship this week, be open in admitting your own wishes and needs, and pains and heartaches.

DAY TWO — Friends

Hiding It in My Heart: Memorize this Bible verse today: *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).*

Friends are a gift from God. Let God make you a gift to others!

PRAYER: Sometimes it's not easy to be a good friend. Ask the Lord for His help in being the friend He wants you to be.

Sticking Close and Pulling Together

Becky wandered through a card store looking for that perfect card. Tomorrow was Mark's 17th birthday, and she wanted a card that expressed her exact feelings. Mark and Becky had grown up as next-door neighbors and were best friends! People often asked Becky if Mark was her boyfriend. "No," she'd answer with a smile. "He's just a great friend. It's like having a brother, but even better, because we don't fight!"

Becky finally settled on a silly birthday card. At home, she wrote the following inside:

Dear Mark,

You're the greatest! Thanks for being the best friend ever. You're a great listener, you cheer me up, and you tell me what you're feeling. I can trust you and always depend on you to stick up for me! Happy birthday!

Love, Bec

That note says a lot! Becky listed the things she most appreciates in her friend. Perhaps you enjoy such a friendship. If so, you're very fortunate. If you don't, it's probably something that you desire very much.

List the top five characteristics in a friend that are most important to you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Everyone wishes for great friends whom they can trust. But as the saying goes, "To have friends you can trust, you must be trustworthy yourself." The real question is, "Are you the kind of friend you just described?" It's easy to be friendly when everything is going good. But a real friend sticks close, no matter what.

A Look in the Book: Look up the following verses. Write the guidelines they offer for the way you should treat friends.

1. Proverbs 18:24 (especially the second part): *A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*

2. Romans 12:15: *Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

When you find a friend who will stick close like a brother, be happy for your successes, and genuinely sympathize with your sorrows, you've truly found a FRIEND! A beautiful picture of friendship is found in the fourth chapter of Ecclesiastes. These words provide an ideal or goal for you. Ask yourself, "Am I this kind of friend?"

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up ... And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecc. 4:9-10, 12).

Isn't it great to have friends who will help and protect you? When you fall, there is a hand to pull you up. And those verses tell us that three friends together form an even stronger bond!

What kind of friend are you? Can your friends trust you to stick close, be happy for them, and help them through hard times? Think about it. How do you rate?

DAY THREE — Friends

Verses to Think About: *Be ye not unequally yoked [bound] together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion [fellowship] hath light with darkness? (2 Cor. 6:14).*

Make no friendship with an angry [short-tempered] man; and with a furious [hot-tempered] man thou shalt not go. Lest thou learn his ways ... (Prov. 22:24-25).

Is it possible to choose friends? Or, do friendships “just happen” in your life?

Prayer: Talk to the Lord about those people who tempt you to do wrong. Ask Him to help you not spend so much time with them. Thank Him for Christian friends who encourage you in your faith.

Hanging Around the “Good Guys”

Carlos and his wife work with teens. One evening, 16-year-old Tony volunteered to babysit their son, Scotty. As Tony and Scotty played football in the front yard, another little boy rode by on his bicycle. Scotty waved and said, “Hello.” Then he told Tony, “He’s mean. I’m not supposed to be his friend. But my dad said I’ve gotta be nice when he rides by.”

Later that night, Tony asked Carlos, “Hey, what’s the problem with that kid down the street? Why can’t he and Scotty be friends?”

Carlos leaned against the side of the house. “Well,” he replied, “I wish I could let my son play with anyone he chooses. But I can’t. That boy swears and brags about stealing. Scotty is young and doesn’t need such bad influence.”

“Yeah, I understand,” Tony agreed. “But what about when Scotty’s older? You can’t always be choosing his friends.”

“No,” Carlos finally answered. “But I hope by then he’ll have learned for himself which friends aren’t good for him to be with.”

What about you? Do you agree with Carlos?

___ Yes ___ No ___ Not sure

As you certainly know, five-year-old boys aren’t the only ones tempted to “follow the crowd.” Teenage guys and girls can be easily swayed to gossip, lie to parents, drink at a party (or you name it) when influenced by peers.

A Look in the Book: So what does the Bible say? Is it important for Christian teens to be selective about whom they spend the majority of their time with? **Take a look at Proverbs 13:20.** *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

Why do you think being with “fools” (those who act as if they don’t know right from wrong) can destroy or harm you?

Read Proverbs 13:20 again and let the words sink in. Remember, this is the Bible speaking! Spending time with those who don’t care about doing right can hurt you.

But on the other hand, Christian friends can really help each other. **Read Hebrews 10:24-25:** *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Write two ways you can be helpful to your friends.

1. _____
2. _____

It’s so important that you select as your closest friends those who love God as you do – those teens who’ll build you up in the Lord. You can’t always dictate who will be around you. But you CAN decide who will play influencing roles in your life.

Think about the friends you have now. Which ones encourage you in the Christian life? Which friends are (or may be) destroying you? **Make a list of friends who are positive influences in your life and those who are negative influences.**

Positive influences:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Negative influences:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



DAY FOUR — Friends

Verses to Think About: *A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity [to help in time of need] (Prov. 17:17). (When you're in trouble, you see who your most loyal friends are and how helpful they can be!)*

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint (Prov. 25:19).

How far can your friends trust you?

Prayer: Make the words you just wrote a sincere prayer to your heavenly Father.

When Disloyalty Strikes!

Check which situations you've personally encountered within the past few years.

___ You told a friend something in confidence, and he or she betrayed you by repeating it.

___ A friend lied to you.

___ A friend broke plans with you to spend time with someone else.

___ A friend cut you down in front of others.

Go back and underline each statement that describes something you've done to a friend. (For example, you betrayed his or her confidence, lied, etc.)

It's very disturbing when a friend shows outright acts of disloyalty. One high-school sophomore says, "If someone is disloyal to me, he or she isn't my friend."

How about you? What are your feelings concerning loyalty in friendship? Be specific. Is loyalty important to you? Is disloyalty ever excusable?

A Look in the Book: The Bible records a super-loyal friendship between Naomi and Ruth. Read Ruth 1:16-17. *And Ruth said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."*

It is one of the most beautiful pictures of commitment and loyalty ever written. **List two of Ruth's statements to Naomi that most impress you.**

1. _____

2. _____

The Bible also portrays a close friendship between David and Jonathan. The story is somewhat long and detailed, but the greatest element is their complete devotion to each other. **Read 1 Samuel 20:42.** *And Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, 'saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever.'" And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.*

On whom did the two men base their friendship? _____

How can this apply to your own friendships? _____

Today, as long ago, loyal friends come few and far between. One devoted friend is far more valuable than a dozen friends who may betray you. Look back at the exercise you completed at the beginning of this lesson. Think about yourself and how you treat your friends. Then, consider the examples of loyal friends which you find in the Bible. **Take a look at Proverbs 11:13.** *A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter. How do you measure up as a faithful friend?*

___ Pretty good

___ Average

___ Rotten

Write a prayer to the Lord concerning your own loyalty to friends. Remember, you can't hide anything from Him. Are you loyal, or aren't you? **What are some areas in which you need to work?**

Dear Lord, when it comes to loyalty in friendship, I ... _____

Amen.

DAY FIVE — Friends

Verse to Think About: *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).*

PRAYER: Thank the Lord for the friends He has brought into your life. Ask for His strength if and when a friendship ends.

Broken Friendships/Wounded Hearts

Tammy and Karen were close friends. Not only did they enjoy each other's company, but they also depended on each other for moral support at school.

In March of last year, however, Tammy noticed Karen changing. Karen started spending time with a different group of girls. Her language began to go downhill. She confided to Tammy that she'd been drinking. As the spring weeks turned into summer months, the girls spent less and less time together. By the fall, and start of their junior year, they hardly even spoke to each other. The former "best friends" now avoided seeing each other because both felt hurt and didn't know what to say.

A broken friendship or relationship hurts. Whether between close friends or boyfriend and girlfriend, there aren't many words to comfort the pain. Time is usually the only healer of such wounds.

Have you ever experienced a broken friendship?

___ Yes ___ No

Sometimes, it's up to you to end a friendship. Other times, it just happens. Think back to Tammy. The broken friendship devastated her. It might have helped if she'd spent time beforehand considering how to react in such a situation.

1. First, Tammy needed to realize that it's not wrong to end a friendship. Sometimes you have no choice. If friends influence you to lower your Christian standards or tempt you to sin, GET OUT! **Read Proverbs 4:14-15.** *Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.*

Write how this passage applies to ending a friendship. _____

In other cases, friendships cease to exist simply because common interests are lost. The relationship deteriorates and soon ends. Although this is sad, it's often true. In either of these cases, however, the broken friendship in itself isn't wrong.

2. But Tammy also needed to realize that her Christian obligation to friendliness and caring never ends. Although Tammy's close bond with Karen was cut, that didn't give her reason to ignore Karen or act rude. It may seem awkward at first, but friendliness is always best. Read Hebrews 13:1 for an applicable command which really sums it up! Let brotherly love continue.

3. Lastly, Tammy should understand that a broken friendship unleashes a variety of emotions. A broken or lost relationship is one of the most painful things you can experience.

Read the advice or counsel from God's Word regarding the following problem areas:

Problem: Broken friendships bring about hurt, disappointment, and loneliness.

Advice/Counsel: Psalm 34:18: *The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

Problem: Often you'll feel angry or bitter toward that person.

Advice/Counsel: Ephesians 4:31-32: *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

When a friendship ends, it's important to remember that God is always with you, even when you hurt. And, when you feel bitter for being wronged, God has already provided the example in forgiving. He wants you to forgive as He so lovingly and continually does for you.

On My Own: A broken friendship is never easy. When it happens, you may need to depend on others for strength. **Ask your youth director or another Christian adult you respect about a time when a friendship was broken in his or her life. Record how he or she dealt with the emotions involved. Was the friendship ever restored?**



Can Friends Be Friends Forever?

As David and Amy left for different colleges, they renewed their mutual commitment. They really loved each other and vowed to remain loyal! They both thought they'd eventually marry, but soon they found other interests and loves. Within a couple of years, they completely lost touch with each other.

Two girls, two guys, or one of each — it doesn't really matter. High-school friends are famous for vows to always remain close. Yet David and Amy certainly aren't the first to break such promises of friendship as miles and years pull them apart. Most likely, your friends will change after high school. You'll slowly begin to realize that everyone heads down separate paths. Friendships come and go. Guys and girls you now spend every lunch hour with may become only a fond, fading memory. But some high-school friendships can last forever — especially if you work on them now!

Which of your present friends are so special that you'd like to "keep them" forever?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Your Best Friend

If you were raised in a Christian home, you probably learned at an early age that Jesus can be your best Friend. Or maybe you've just recently discovered this great friendship with the Lord. He's an unique sort of friend because He can't be your science lab partner working beside you. But He can be your buddy in gym class when no one else on the team likes you! **Look up the following verses and discover some characteristics of this great Friend.**

1 John 3:16: *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

Characteristic of friendship Jesus demonstrates: He sacrificed His life for me.

What this means to me: He really loves me in a great way. Who else would give up His life just for me?

Hebrews 13:5: *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."*

Characteristic of friendship Jesus demonstrates: _____

What this means to me: _____

Ephesians 4:32: *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

Characteristic of friendship Jesus demonstrates: _____

What this means to me: _____

Philippians 4:19: *But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

Characteristic of friendship Jesus demonstrates: _____

What this means to me: _____

The sincere love that you as a teenage guy or girl have for the Lord is something to be cherished and cultivated forever. Remember when you first came to know Him? What about the first time you really began to understand His love? Do you recall moments when He was the only One there? All human friendships are in jeopardy of failing, but your fellowship with Jesus can last a lifetime. Those precious memories are just a sample of blessings to come!

Close Christian Friends

Although it's not always easy, it is possible to preserve and deepen your high school relationships for many years to come. Your Christian "brothers and sisters" are family, so treat them with special care. Who knows — maybe you'll still be laughing together over that joke from English class when you're in rocking chairs!