

Today's Christian Woman

Series

LEADER'S GUIDE

The More Friends the Merrier

Cultivating a group of friends.

Thousands of people lack the courage to take the risks involved with making friends, and so they suffer alone. How can we cultivate friendships that are inclusive? What are the benefits to having more than one friend? These are the questions we'll be asking (and answering) in this study.

Scripture:

Proverbs 11:14; Ecclesiastes 4:12; Matthew 9:9–13; 12:46–50; 19:13–14; Luke 19:1–7; John 14:2

Based on:

"Girl Power," by Camerin Courtney, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, July/August 1999, Vol. 21, No. 4, Page 42



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PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: Prior to the class, provide for each person the article "Girl Power" from TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN magazine (included at the end of this study).

We all experienced it when we were younger. We saw a group of kids that were having fun, and we took a chance. Slowly, deliberately, we made our way over to their game. We swallowed the frog in our throats, stammering out the question, "Can I play?" Then we waited for what seemed like forever to hear the melodious answer, "Sure!"



When we matured, the scenario looked similar as we observed a group of people we wanted to join, but when we tried to speak, nothing came out of our mouths. We were certain we wouldn't be welcome. *They would have invited me already if they had wanted to*, we tell ourselves.

It is possible to feel lonely in a room full of people. The truth is, many people are lonely. Taking a moment to scan a crowded room can fill you in right away. Not everyone is connected to someone. Read Luke 19:1–7. When Jesus was in a crowd, he noticed someone who was by himself and reached out to him.

It's a stretch to reach out to some people. When we have things in common with people, it makes it easier. When we don't, we have to work at it. Jesus didn't have anything in common with Zacchaeus, but he still sought him out. In fact, it wasn't popular for Jesus to even make a movement toward this man. Jesus didn't care what other people thought—just what his Father thought.

Larry Crabb said, "Ordinary people have the power to change other people's lives. The power is found in connection, that profound meeting when the truest part of one soul meets the emptiest recesses in another and finds something there, when life passes from one to the other. When that happens, the giver is left more full than before and the receiver less terrified, eventually eager to experience even deeper, more mutual connection" (*Connecting*, 2005).

Discussion starters:

- [Q] Share a time when you wanted to join a group of any kind but your fears got the best of you. What was the result?
- [Q] Are you aware of those who seem to be on the outskirts of a group? What practical thing can you do the next time you are in a group and notice someone on the fringes?
- [Q] Share if you are an introvert or an extrovert. How has this helped or hindered you in getting to know other people?
- [Q] Have you experienced the kind of connection that Larry Crabb described? Explain.



PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles**Teaching point one: Christianity is non-exclusive.**

When we were children, we would vie for our parents' attention. Siblings were rivals. Getting time one on one with a parent was always special. Jesus spent this kind of time with his disciples, for example John, "the disciple that Jesus loved." But Jesus did not exclude people. Read Matthew 19:13–14. Even children were not prevented from coming to Jesus. And back in Jesus' day, children were not given the status they hold today.

It's easy to exclude people, whether we're aware of it or not. It takes more work to have a conversation with several rather than just one. You have to listen twice as hard. But the benefits could be double. If we are to help expand the kingdom of God, we can start in our backyards. It's a practical way to love one another.

Camerin Courtney said, "As women we know the benefits of friendship: support, free advice, accountability, laugh therapy, prayer, free rides to the airport, last-minute babysitters, shopping companions, lunch buddies, people to balance out weaknesses—and the list goes on. The great thing is, these benefits increase exponentially when you add more than one friend to the picture."

- [Q] Share a special time when you got to spend one-on-one time with one of your parents. What did you do?
- [Q] Name a couple of reasons we choose to do things with just one person instead of inviting another along.
- [Q] How many of your friends know each other? Share if you have done anything as a group.
- [Q] From the list of benefits Courtney gives in the quote above, name the ones you would rank as the top three.

Teaching point two: Relationships take time and effort.

We live in a busy world. People hardly walk anywhere. Whether you see someone in a store or in a car, they usually have a cell phone attached to their ear. We have work, families, and church. How can we have time for relationships when we have only 24 hours in a day? It's true: relationships take work as well as time, but the benefits far outweigh the cost. If we don't make the time and effort necessary to have friends, we are the ones that will ultimately lose out. People can share our joys as well as our sorrows, if we let them. Many of us have family members that are friends, but we should have friends outside our family as well.

It is not a 1-2-3 formula where you just make a decision, and presto, you have friends. But nonetheless, it is an investment that will yield great returns. And if you do have one or two friends, why not add another to the mix? One temptation will be to think, *Why add any more people to my life? I have enough friends; I am content with the way my life is right now.* The danger in this thinking is that you are closing the door to what God may have in store for you. Instead, why not be open to whatever he has in mind? After all, he sees the whole picture. If



you are closed to adding any more people to your life, confess your rigidity to God. He is the great stretcher of our minds.

Read about how Jesus viewed others in Matthew 12:46–50.

- [Q] Contrast friendships today with friendships in years gone by. What were some of the benefits of living in a slower society when it came to having relationships? What principles can we borrow from that earlier time period?
- [Q] Name the biggest challenge you would face in expanding your list of friends. What would be the biggest benefit?
- [Q] Which would you rather receive: an e-mail, a phone call, or a letter? Mention a particular one of those that was special to you and why.
- [Q] Think of three people God has in your life right now who could become friends. Share some practical steps you could take to encourage this.

Teaching point three: Having abundant relationships means taking risks.

You may think this is too scary: *What if they don't have a good time? What if they don't get along? This sounds too risky.* Courtney said, "You don't know the gang potential of a group of friends until you try. Sure, it may bomb. But the possibility of a circle of close-knit friends is well worth the risk of a lousy lunch or an awkward shopping excursion."

One way to minimize the risks is to start slowly and plan outings that are less threatening. Getting a group together to watch a chick flick may be less intimidating than making plans for something requiring more participation. You choose how often you all get together. Some women organize get-togethers every couple of months; others may plan just a yearly event. One determining factor could be the stage of life of the women.

Read about the risk Jesus took to reach out to others in Matthew 9:9–13.

- [Q] What risk did Jesus take in reaching out to Matthew and his friends?
- [Q] Share a time when you felt intimidated in a social gathering of people. What was expected of you? How did it turn out?
- [Q] What stage of life would lend itself to getting together more often in groups? Explain your answer.
- [Q] Give at least three reasons why people don't pursue friendships with more than one person. Do you claim any of these reasons for yourself?
- [Q] Share if you have any friends who do not get along with each other. How have you handled the situation?



Teaching point four: There is strength in numbers.

Sometimes a good friend can lighten a load, but when a heart is really hurting there is strength in numbers. What if one friend is busy? Having a group of friends can more readily ensure someone's availability.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:12. Sometimes a group of friends can stand with you and give you strength when a difficult decision needs to be made.

Read Proverbs 11:14. Many a time a person in turmoil has turned to friends and seen her situation more clearly than ever before.

Courtney wrote, "Vulnerability isn't always easy, but it fosters the kind of intimacy that leads to deep friendships. The ability of women to rally around someone who's hurting is amazing. And that matches our desire for others to gather around us when we're in need."

At times it's easier to reach out to others than it is to let them know you are hurting. Having a group of friends could increase the chances that there will be someone you feel comfortable reaching out to. In groups, friends check on friends.

[Q] Share something valuable you have learned about friendships.

[Q] Share a time that one of your friends was one of your main supports.

[Q] What advantages could there be to having many friends?

Alternate Activity

Purpose: To recognize the individual gifts we have in our present friends and to foster a sense of appreciation.

Activity: You are nominating three of your friends for Friend of the Year. Some ideas for categories are: Friend in Need, Funny Bone, Tell It Like It Is, Shoulder to Cry On, Praying Hands, Party Planner. Write down three of your friend's names and the award they are being nominated for with your supporting reasons. Then think of what the prize would be for your chosen category. For example, Jane Doe is nominated for the Funny Bone Award because she actually wore a window valance as a tutu in an improv skit at a women's retreat. She deserves this award because she has demonstrated... The prize would be dancing lessons at the Gene Kelly Dance Studio. The awards can be serious or funny, the prizes outrageous. Then you can take turns reading your nominations.

PART 3**Apply Your Findings**

Sharon Hersh said, "I have discovered that deep within every woman is a heart of longing for relationships. It is woven into the very fabric of the one in whose image we were made" (*Brave Hearts*, 2000). We desire relationships because that's how we were created. And when we see the Lord our relationships won't end but will continue on.

Read John 14:2. Our friendships with believers will continue once we leave this earth. We will inhabit mansions Jesus is preparing for us. We will fellowship together forever. This is the time



to develop those friendships. We have the privilege of learning to love one another while we are still here. We get the opportunity of inviting others into our lives, and ultimately, into God's family.

Friends are God's idea. We can take his idea, developing it into a vessel to bring others into his kingdom. He has instructed us to love each other, submit to each other, and forgive each other. Friendship gives us the platform to put into effect the things God has asked us to do. Friends can multiply our joy and divide our grief. They can weep with us, rejoice with us, and storm heaven for us. And we can return the favor. We can love them with a love only God provides and invite them into our homes, lives, and hearts. One day, we will enter heaven. There we'll sit with our Lord, our family members, and hopefully our friends. There is still time to look around. The people in our lives are not there by accident but by God's design. If we look to him, he will show us how to reach out to others and invite them in. Our friendships don't have to be an exclusive club—the more, the merrier.

- [Q]** What practical advice would you give someone who's having trouble making friends?
- [Q]** Share the story of how God brought you and one of your friends together.

—Study prepared by Anne Peterson, poet, speaker, ongoing student of God's Word, and regular contributor to Christian Bible Studies.

Additional Resources



ChristianBibleStudies.com
[-Developing True Accountability](#)
[-Friendships That Benefit Parenting](#)
[-Authentic Fellowship](#)



Brave Hearts: Unlocking the Courage to Love With Abandon, Sharon Hersh
(Random House Inc., 2000; ISBN 1578562961)



Celebrating Friendship: Women of Faith Series, Traci Mullins (Zondervan Corp., 1998; ISBN 031021338X)



Connecting, Larry Crabb (Thomas Nelson, 2005; ISBN 0849945291)



Faithfulness: The Foundation of True Friendship, Jacalyn Eyre (Zondervan Corp., 2001; ISBN 0310238633)



One Anothering, Richard C. Meyer (Innisfree Press, 1990; ISBN 0931055733)



Six Keys to Lasting Friendships, Carol Kent, Karen Lee-Thorp (NavPress, 2000; ISBN 1576831329)



Today's Christian Woman

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ARTICLE

Girl power!

How to get a circle of friends

By Camerin Courtney, for the study, “The More Friends the Merrier”

My fridge front is plastered with pictures of me with four of my closest friends—Karen (my roommate), Julie, Lisa, and Ruth. There’s a photo of us crammed on a bench on Chicago’s Navy Pier, one of us in flannel PJs the morning after last year’s New Year’s Eve slumber party, and a shot of us decked out to go to a swanky German restaurant to celebrate Lisa’s birthday. These photos bring back fond memories of good times shared with my own little gang.



As women, we know the benefits of friendship: support, free advice, accountability, laugh therapy, prayer, free rides to the airport, last-minute babysitters, shopping companions, lunch buddies, people to balance our weaknesses—and the list goes on. The great thing is, these benefits increase exponentially when you add more than one friend to the picture. When we combine Julie’s never-met-a-stranger personality with Karen’s sense of fun, Lisa’s ability to research any vacation destination or cultural event, Ruth’s get-to-the-point philosophy, and my easy sense of humor, we experience all manner of adventure we wouldn’t on our own.

We all long for the kind of companionship that allows us to cry on each other’s shoulder at 2 A.M., or send each other into a giggle fit with just one sideways glance. But how do you establish those intimate friendships? How do you get a gang? Here are a few lessons I’ve learned from my relationships with the Fab Five—and other gangs of women friends.

Never Underestimate the Power of Prayer.

I distinctly remember driving down a street in Des Moines before my big move to Chicago, the Windy City, and mentally preparing myself for the lonely days ahead. *It’s gonna be hard. Brace yourself*, I thought. Before I could degenerate into having a full-on pity party, another thought hit me: *It doesn’t have to be so tough*. It’s as if God tapped me on the shoulder and reminded me oh-so-gently that he controls the



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universe, including my relationships. I was humbled and encouraged by his loving reminder, so I poured out my heart: *God, please provide some kindred spirits.*

His provision first came in the form of Christa and Jan, two wonderful women I met in my office. As we interacted at meetings and staff coffee breaks, we discovered common interests in antiques, quirky romantic movies, Edy's Grand Light French Silk Ice Cream, and earth-toned clothing. Our friendships soon blossomed. God had heard—and answered—my prayers. Lesson learned.

And it was a lesson I needed. Within a year of each other, both Christa and Jan moved out of state. When I felt back at square one with loneliness as a constant companion, I clung to the fact that the God who'd provided these dear friends in the first place hadn't changed. He would provide again according to his plan and time.

Get a Little Risky.

The first time my roommate, Karen, and I invited her coworker, Lisa, and my friend-of-a-friend, Julie, to join us for dinner one night several years ago, we had no idea what to expect. Lisa and Julie had never met—and we hadn't met each other's friend yet, either. Not exactly the ingredients for a sure-fire great evening! While we could've sat in awkward silence all evening, munching our chips and salsa, we were pleasantly surprised by the smooth flow of conversation and laughter.

You don't know the gang potential of a group of friends until you try. Sure, it's risky. Sure, it may bomb. But the possibility of a circle of close-knit friends is well worth the risk of a lousy lunch or awkward shopping excursion.

Make New Friends, but Keep the Old.

My friend, Michelle, is part of a foursome who've been friends since 1979. The secret of their longevity? A commitment to get together for each other's birthdays no matter what. One of Michelle's friends moved across the country, another is now married with small children, the other is at seminary. But despite the fact Michelle now has a local circle of girlfriends and a demanding career in advertising, she still makes these longstanding friendships a priority. "These women are like sisters to me," says Michelle. "The richness they bring to my life makes it well worth the effort to stay in touch."

Remember: The More the Merrier.

My Fab Five actually started as a Fab Four. Julie, Karen, Lisa, and I used to frequent local restaurants and share many a Blockbuster night together. Once, we even went on vacation together—laughing, chatting, eating, and shopping our way through San Antonio, Texas. What fun memories!



Common ground can be a great foundation for a circle of friends. An awesome bunch of friends may be right under your nose!

Then along came Ruth. She started out as “Julie’s friend.” They’d met at church, when Julie’s family “adopted” Ruth, whose nearest relatives lived hundreds of miles away in Puerto Rico. Julie invited Ruth to some of our get-togethers, and at first she was very quiet. But as we learned to decipher her Spanish accent and appreciate her tell-it-like-it-is spunk, we discovered a friend who added new flourishes to our crew. Now Ruth is our friend and we couldn’t picture our gang without her.

Find Some Common Ground.

My gang and I are all single. My friend, Louise, and her group were all sorority sisters, now married, who still keep in touch. My mom and four of her closest friends have been playing bridge together for a couple decades. Common ground can be a great foundation for a circle of friends. Determine to notice the people around you this week as you go about your daily routine. An awesome bunch of friends may be right under your nose!

Celebrate!

“We use whatever reason we can come up with to get together,” Louise says about her sorority sisters. Weddings, baby showers, holidays, and Pampered Chef parties are all excuses to gather and gab. Every summer these women hold a cookout for their families to get together. “Put food in front of us, and we can gab for hours!” says Louise.

Despite the challenge of the typical soccer mom schedule, these women make time for each other, even if only three or four people can attend. “It’s wonderful to celebrate rites of passage together, and even just life in general,” says Louise. “Before you know it, we’ll be attending graduation parties for our kids!”

Get Real.

A few years ago, when my gang and I were gathering to celebrate Julie’s birthday, I showed up in tears. My then-boyfriend of three years and I had just broken up that afternoon. I was miserable, but I wanted to honor my friend, and I knew I could use the company of these dear friends. So I shared my sob story, cried a bit, got a round of hugs, then went out to eat to celebrate Julie’s special day. Though my eyes were swollen and my heart was nearly broken, I felt safe and somehow hopeful surrounded by the love, laughter, and support of my gang. Through the years we’ve helped each other through “female surgery,” deaths in the family, dating disasters, and work nightmares.



Vulnerability isn't always easy, but it fosters the kind of intimacy that leads to deep friendships. The ability of women to rally around someone who's hurting is amazing. And that matches our desire for others to gather around us when we're in need. Sharing real life—warts and all—with each other fosters friendships faster than just about anything I know. And the rewards of my gang—all the laughter, deep sharing, prayer support, and silliness—are sweeter than just about anything I know, too.

"Girl Power," by Camerin Courtney, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, July/August 1999, Vol. 21, No. 4, Page 42





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