



LEADER GUIDE

Your step-by-step guide to
leading people into an intimate
friendship with Jesus

Friends of God

A Discipleship Experience



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LEADER GUIDE

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The Discipleship Experience
Leader Guide

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Special thanks to the people from all over the U.S. who helped us test these experiences. You proved that entering into a friendship with God changes *everything*.

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Introduction

Welcome to *Friends of God: A Discipleship Experience*! You and the people joining you for these dozen sessions are setting out on an adventure.

It's an adventure of friendship with Jesus.

You'll take Jesus at his word that he wants to be your friend. You'll trust that you can know his heart for you. And you'll discover that discipleship is more than one long, demanding to-do list.

This isn't like any other discipleship program. That's because it's all about your heart...Jesus' heart...and drawing the two of you closer together.

Which means these 12 sessions are perfect for anyone.

For Christians who've known Jesus for decades.

For young believers still sorting out what a friendship with Jesus can be.

And for not-yet-believers who wonder if Jesus exists at all.

You're all invited—because everyone can take a next step in a friendship with Jesus.

A next step into deeper joy. An abiding peace. And a life of grace-filled purpose.

A next step on the journey of discipleship.

So buckle up and lean into the adventure.

Let's grow together as disciples.

A Quick-Start Guide

Hello, friend.

You're about to lead the people who join you on this journey into an experience that will be a "marker moment" in their lives. The life of a disciple of Jesus is an everyday epic adventure in which we are transformed by our deepening relationship with him and, as a result, become a magnet for others who are searching for a way to fill what Blaise Pascal called the hole in our souls. This Friends of God resource is no experiment—it has been tested and tested again with real people in real settings. We know that the environment created by this discipleship experience is transforming. The people who gather for these 12 sessions will emerge with a much closer relationship with God and much closer relationships with one another.

As you gear up to launch this adventure, here are a few important things to know:

Your Biblical Guide

In John 15:15 Jesus gives his disciples a game-changing invitation: *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you"* (NIV). In Romans 5:11, the Apostle Paul reiterates, *"So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."* These invitations into a deeper friendship form the backbone of this experience—the path you'll follow is the same one Jesus walks. It's a relational journey, not an academic pursuit.

The Basics

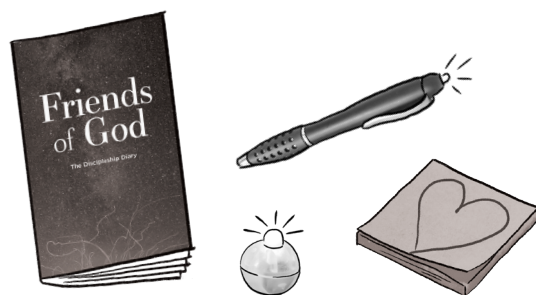
This kit contains the resources you need to lead twelve 60-minute sessions. It includes...

- This ***Friends of God: The Discipleship Experience Leader Guide***. It guides you in what to say, what to ask, and how to lead the experiences embedded in each session. It also lists the supplies you'll need for each session.
- ***Friends of God Session DVDs***. Two of these are contained in one case. One is for Sessions 1 through 6; the other is for Sessions 7 through 12. The DVDs contain the presentation files for each session, including discussion questions and short video clips for some sessions, as well as a short video called "Leader Insights" to watch before you lead each session.

- ***Unheard Of: One Man's Journey to the Middle of a Miracle***. This is a feature-length film that participants will watch as part of this experience.
- ***Friends of God Promo and Session Graphics CD***. This CD contains printable flyers and graphics to help promote this discipleship experience as well as printable materials you'll need in some of the sessions.
- One copy of each of our three Jesus-Centered guides: ***Help! How Do I Read the Bible?***, ***Help! How Do I Pray?***, and ***Help! How Do I Know God's Will?*** These books are designed to help Jesus-followers practice these three basic aspects of Christian discipleship.
- An **Essential Value Pack**. This pack includes a sample of everything each participant will need. All of these elements are central to the discipleship experience, and each participant will need one of each. These items may be purchased individually or in bundles and are available at group.com or your favorite Christian retailer.

The pack includes...

- ***Friends of God: The Discipleship Diary***
- **Friends of God Glow Pen**
- **Heart of Jesus Sticky Notes**
- **Friends of God Go-and-Glow Light**
- A bonus packet of 10 **Friends of God Go-and-Glow Lights**.
These lights are an important part of Session 12.



Though you'll find common elements in every session, each experience is very different. You'll need to gather some basic extra supplies for some sessions, and none for others. And for every session, we recommend having snacks and drinks available—Jesus used food to promote conversation, and it works as well today as it did then.

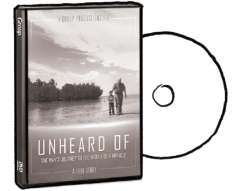
The Setting

Our strategy with Friends of God is relational, so conversations and shared experiences dominate each session. That means...

- You'll need easily movable seating, not rows of fixed chairs. We use 36-inch round tables, a setting that encourages conversation instead of working against it. And you'll need to have at least one screen or big-screen TV to project discussion questions and videos to the group. Place the screen or TV where everyone in the room can see it.
- Experiences (both inside and outside of the gathering) are a central focus. So you'll need to support and encourage a playful, risk-taking environment. We

know that if the leader believes participants will do something, they always will. So seed the environment with your own enthusiastic belief, and you'll see people do things you never thought possible.

- In Session 6, you'll all watch *Unheard Of: One Man's Journey to the Middle of a Miracle*, a feature-length film produced just for this discipleship experience. That session, which will include a short introduction and closing, may be slightly longer than 60 minutes.
- It's important to create a warm, inviting environment for these experiences. If you're not meeting in a home, create as much of a home-like environment as possible. If you're meeting in a rather sterile room, consider bringing table lamps for warmer lighting and more comfortable chairs. We recommend using a streaming music service or your own music before and after the gatherings and during longer conversation times. We like to use instrumental jazz when we lead this experience, but anything unobtrusive will work.
- As the leader, your greatest asset is your ability to ask and respond to questions and to guide people in a conversational environment. You're not a person who believes you have to have all the answers. You're willing to trust the Holy Spirit for guidance and outcomes, and you have a giving mentality. You're more comfortable with dissonance and uncertainty than the average person. Most important, you love Jesus and live with him at the center of your life. You know you're doing a great job when you see others changing and growing right before your eyes. The focus will be on Jesus more than you, and you're happy with that.
- "Getting through the material" is not the goal. Instead, your goal is to create an environment for life-changing moments. This is a relational model, so your standards for success are all relational.



And keep in mind this discipleship experience is *super* flexible. It can be used in a small group, on Sunday mornings, in a youth group, or on a weekend retreat. You can host one session per week or one per month. You're moving deeper into a friendship with God, and that sort of authentic discipleship moves at the speed of relationship.

So use these 12 sessions any way you want—they'll always draw you closer to Jesus and to each other.

And thank you for having the courage to try something new in your quest to live out Jesus' mission to "go and make disciples of all the nations." We're thrilled to partner with you!

Session 1: Getting Acquainted

The Point: God is looking for a friendship with you—really.

In this session, participants will...

- Explore the power of names—theirs and Jesus’
- Compare notes on what makes a great friend
- Discover that God is already calling them his friends

Supplies

- ☐ Snacks and drinks
- ☐ *Friends of God Session DVD*, DVD player, and a screen for viewing
- ☐ Whiteboard and dry-erase markers or easel pad and thick, dark markers
- ☐ Paper plates or bowls for snack experience (see page 22-23)
- ☐ A way to stream instrumental music (optional)

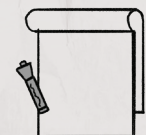
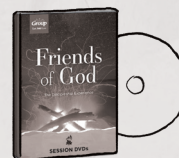
Supplies Per Person

- ☐ *Friends of God: The Discipleship Diary*
- ☐ Friends of God Glow Pen

Notes to the Leader

- Before this session, watch the brief “Session 1 Leader Insights” video on the *Friends of God Session DVD*.
- Create a warm, conversational environment.
- As participants arrive, give each a nametag to fill out and wear. This is optional; if the group is relatively small and people know one another, nametags probably aren’t necessary. But if you think nametags would be helpful, you may find graphics for them on the *Friends of God Promo and Session Graphics CD*.
- Place snacks on plates—one plate for each group of four people. Keep these plates out of sight.

SUPPLIES



SUPPLIES PER PERSON



JUST FOR YOU

Thanks for leading this session. During your time together, you'll help participants grow closer to Jesus and to one another. And you'll help them discover an astounding truth: God wants to be their friend.

Though some people think discipleship is an academic exercise and is all about learning more facts about God, the truth is, it's all about relationship.

All about drawing close to God's heart.

All about friendship.

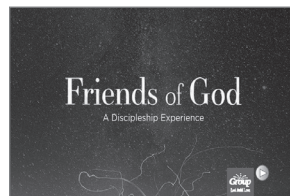
During your next few sessions, you'll see participants open up, embrace God in fresh ways, and grow in their friendship with him. You'll see joy—and that's a great sign they're connecting with the heart of God.

And *you'll* feel joy, too, because he's using you to help that happen.

Thank you!

- Recruit someone to help you list the qualities of a good friend (see pages 17 to 18) and the differences between servants and friends (see pages 19 to 20).
- Be prepared to share a story about your name (see page 15).
- Also, be prepared to describe a close friend of yours (see page 16).

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION (about 3 minutes)



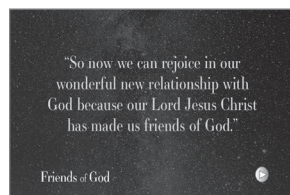
Welcome to *Friends of God: A Discipleship Experience*! I'm so glad you're here and that we're on this discipleship journey together.

Four things I want all of us to know at the outset:

First, if you think of discipleship as getting better at doing the right stuff, that's not where we're going. We're looking at discipleship the way Jesus looks at it: as a deep, loving friendship with God that draws us closer to God and transforms us from the inside out.

In Romans 5:11, Paul sums it up this way:

READ ALOUD FROM THE SCREEN:



"So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."

That means when we come to God as his friends, we're not somehow taking liberties or stepping out of line. Friendship is *God's* idea!

Through Jesus we enter into a relationship with God that's joyful and fulfilling, not one that's all about duty and drudgery.

So rather than a discipleship class packed with tips about how to be a better person, this experience is an opportunity to know God better. To grow in friendship with him the same way you grow in friendship with anyone else.

And that leads me to the second point. We'll use our friendships with people as a map for growing in our friendship with God. And as we grow closer to God, we'll also grow closer to one another.

We'll eat together, talk together, make discoveries together, have adventures together, and play together.

Third, we'll talk a lot *about* Jesus and *with* Jesus. That's because when we know, love, and follow Jesus, we're knowing, loving, and following God. The two are the same, and later we'll dive into how Jesus reveals the heart of God.

Finally, there's this: We'll have a lot of fun along the way. We'll enjoy one another and enjoy God, too.

Because that's what friends do.

I have something for you, by the way.

HOLD UP *THE DISCIPLESHIP DIARY*.

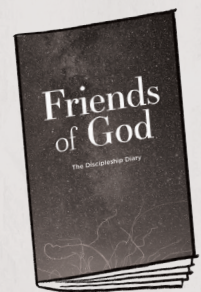
You'll each need *The Discipleship Diary*. We'll use these when we get together, and you'll also use yours between our times together. We have one for each of you.

PAUSE AS YOU DISTRIBUTE DIARIES.

When you get yours, turn to page 1. You'll see two lines. On the top line write your name, and on the second line you'll see "A Friend of God." Because that's who you are. 😊

Wait! You'll need one of these, too...

HOLD UP A FRIENDS OF GOD GLOW PEN.





This is your official Friends of God Glow Pen—one's coming your way now.

CONTINUE SPEAKING AS YOU OR SOMEONE YOU'VE ASKED TO HELP DISTRIBUTES PENS.

Your pen may look like every other pen, but it has a special power...

DEMONSTRATE HOW THE PEN LIGHTS UP.

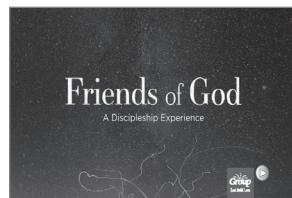
These glow pens...glow. At any time, they can bring light into darkness, reveal something that might be hidden.

That's what happens as we draw closer to Jesus. We see him and ourselves more clearly.

And as we follow Jesus more closely as disciples, others will see his light shining through us.

So hang on to your pen and keep it with your diary. And take a moment to write your name on page 1 now.

PAUSE AS PARTICIPANTS DO AS YOU'VE ASKED.



Thanks. Now you can be sure you'll take the right diary home with you!

FIELD-TEST FINDING

We've done this activity hundreds of times, and it always works. Everyone has a story. One woman told us she was named after her dad's old girlfriend. Hmm...

2. TALKING ABOUT YOUR NAME (about 10 minutes)

When making a friend, we usually start by learning the other person's name.

We'll do that, but instead of just sharing our names, we'll also share stories *about* our names.

Do this for me: Scoot your chairs around to form a group of four people. We'll all be talking at the same time, so scoot close. Everyone needs to be in a group of four.

HELP ORGANIZE THIS; IF NECESSARY THERE CAN BE ONE GROUP OF TWO OR THREE PEOPLE. JOIN IN IF THAT HELPS FILL OUT A GROUP.

Thanks. By the way, we're often going to be forming groups of four or pairing up for conversations. We do that so everyone gets a chance to talk. Also, because discipleship is all about friendship, it's a great idea for us to become better friends along the way—and that happens best when we talk with one another.

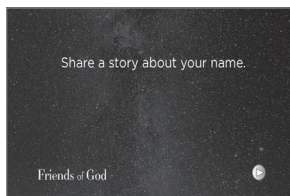
Now, starting with the person in your group who's seated closest to me, let's take turns sharing a story about our names.

Maybe you're named after a relative or a movie star. Maybe when you were a child your name was twisted into a nickname you hated. Or maybe you have no idea where your name came from.

As for me...

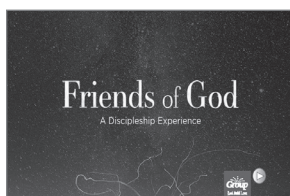
SHARE A BRIEF STORY ABOUT YOUR NAME.

That's me—now it's your turn. In your group of four, share a story about your name. You'll each have about a minute to share.



ALLOW TIME FOR **GROUPS OF FOUR** TO TALK.

WHEN ONE MINUTE REMAINS, TELL THE GROUP THEY HAVE A MINUTE MORE TO SHARE. THEN, WHEN 30 SECONDS REMAIN, ADVANCE TO THE NEXT SLIDE.



FIELD-TEST FINDING

We streamed background music during this and other discussions. Music eliminates awkward silences and helps signal it's about time to wrap up conversations when you fade it about 30 seconds before calling attention back to yourself.

3. QUALITIES OF A GOOD FRIEND (about 10 minutes)

Thanks for getting to know more about the people in your small group.

We'll do that a lot when we get together because that's what friends do: They chat and discover more about one another. 😊

We'll keep the conversational ball rolling, but this time, you'll talk with just one other person. If you're in a group of four, simply partner with one other person in the group. Everyone will need a partner.

PAUSE AS PARTICIPANTS FORM PAIRS.

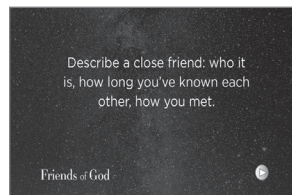
Now think of a close friend—someone you know well and enjoy having in your life. Got someone in mind?

In just a minute I'll ask you to describe that close friend to your partner. Tell how you met and share a little bit about the person.

For instance, I have a friend named...

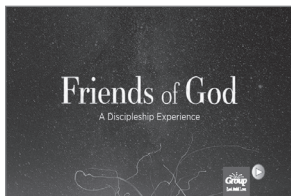
BRIEFLY DESCRIBE A CLOSE FRIEND—WHO IT IS, HOW LONG YOU'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER, HOW YOU MET.

That's a friend of mine. Now it's your turn. Tell your partner about a close friend.



ALLOW TIME FOR **PAIRS** TO TALK.

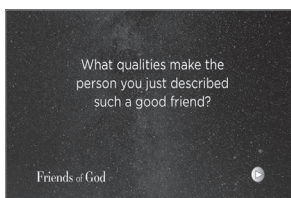
WHEN ONE MINUTE REMAINS, TELL PAIRS THEY HAVE A MINUTE MORE TO SHARE. THEN, WHEN 30 SECONDS REMAIN, ADVANCE TO THE NEXT SLIDE.



Thanks! Now tell your partner about the qualities that make the person you just described such a good friend.

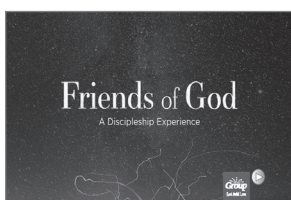
Maybe your friend is honest or committed. Maybe your friend is hilarious, and the two of you laugh nonstop when you're together.

Whatever those qualities are, tell your partner about them.



ALLOW TIME FOR **PAIRS** TO TALK.

WHEN ONE MINUTE REMAINS, TELL PAIRS THEY HAVE A MINUTE MORE TO SHARE. THEN, WHEN 30 SECONDS REMAIN, ADVANCE TO THE NEXT SLIDE.



4. FRIENDS' QUALITIES (about 3 minutes)

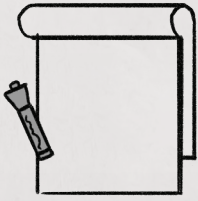
Thanks for chatting!

I've asked [NAME OF YOUR HELPER] to make a list of the qualities you've identified.

Call out the qualities you talked about. What qualities make the person you described such a good friend?

FIELD-TEST FINDING

Write down all the qualities participants share, even things like "we laugh a lot," "have fun," or "go out for a beer." The more "regular" the ideas, the more you can point out God's desire to draw close to people in every part of their lives.



REPEAT COMMENTS AS YOUR HELPER WRITES THEM ON A WHITEBOARD OR EASEL PAD. WHEN YOU HAVE A SIZABLE LIST, THANK YOUR HELPER AND THEN POINT TO THE LIST.

That's quite a list. No wonder we want to hang on to friends like that!

5. GOD'S QUALITIES (about 4 minutes)

Here's a question for the whole group: How do the qualities on this list line up with God's qualities?

What do you think? Are the qualities of God and the qualities of a good friend the same...or different? And why?

ALLOW SEVERAL **GROUP** RESPONSES.

6. NAMES OF JESUS (about 6 minutes)

Thanks for sharing your thoughts.

Maybe "friend" just isn't a name you've associated with God.

But let's pause to do with Jesus what we just did with each other.

Let's talk about his name. Maybe we'll discover something about him that we didn't know before.

In fact, let's look at several names used to describe Jesus in the Bible.

Turn to page 8 in *The Discipleship Diary* and find the list of seven names used to describe Jesus.

PAUSE AS PARTICIPANTS DO AS YOU'VE ASKED.

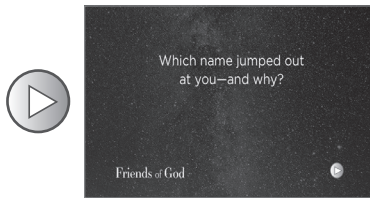
Now glance at those names—just linger on each name for a few minutes, thinking about what each name communicates about Jesus.

Then close your eyes and ask yourself, "Which of these names is most meaningful to me—and why?"

I'll quit talking and give you 30 seconds to do that.

PAUSE 30 SECONDS.

Now tell your partner which name jumped out at you—and why.



ALLOW TIME FOR **PAIRS** TO TALK.

WHEN ONE MINUTE REMAINS, TELL PAIRS THEY HAVE A MINUTE MORE TO SHARE. THEN, WHEN 30 SECONDS REMAIN, ADVANCE TO THE NEXT SLIDE.



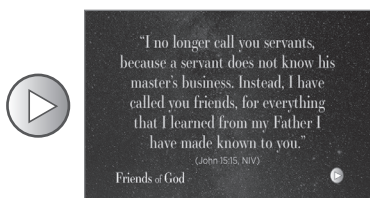
7. EXPERIENCE: SERVANT/FRIEND (about 12 minutes)

Jesus is described in so many ways—and for good reason. He's amazing, confounding, astonishing. As we pay attention to him, we discover that he's so much more than we realized at first.

And one of the most important things we can miss is this: He's our friend.

Jesus said this to his first disciples...

READ ALOUD FROM THE SCREEN:



"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called

you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

He called them his friends.

And he’s saying the same thing to us. As we follow him, as he pours into us what he wants us to know, he’s not lecturing us as students. Or holding us at arm’s length as servants.

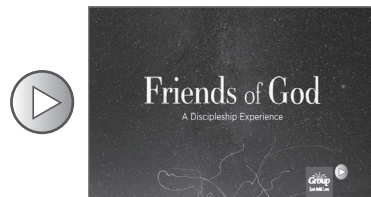
He’s embracing us as friends—and that changes everything.

Turn to page 8 in your diary, and you’ll find this sentence: “A servant relationship is _____, but a friendship is _____.”

In your group of four, take a few minutes to jot down all the differences you can think of between a servant relationship and a friend relationship. There’s space for you to do that in your diary.

I’ll give you a few minutes to explore that.

WHEN ONE MINUTE REMAINS, TELL GROUPS THEY HAVE A MINUTE MORE TO SHARE.



Now let’s see what you discovered. My friend [NAME OF HELPER] will jot down your insights as you call them out.

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO CALL OUT THE DIFFERENCES AS YOUR HELPER WRITES THEM ON A WHITEBOARD OR FLIP PAD.

Thanks for your insights!

A question for the whole group: Looking at this list, why do you think Jesus calls us his friends instead of his servants?

Servant	Friend

AS PEOPLE RESPOND, PEEL BACK THEIR RESPONSES. ASK FOR EXAMPLES FROM THEIR LIVES OR THE LIVES OF PEOPLE THEY KNOW.

8. WHERE WE'RE HEADED (about 5 minutes)

Thanks for sharing your thoughts.

Let's take another look at the qualities of a good friend that we listed earlier.

READ THE LIST ALOUD.

That list describes the qualities of a good friend—and they're just as present in our friendship with God as they are with people.

They provide a road map of where we're headed in our discipleship experience. We'll move past knowing *about* God to knowing God's heart for us. We'll move past facts to intimacy, past caution to trust.

We'll move deeper into discipleship because we'll move deeper into friendship.

HOLD UP THE DIARY.

Your diary will play a big role in your journey. You'll find Bible passages to ponder, prayer prompts, and adventures that will move you a bit outside your comfort zone.

Some of what you find here you'll do only with Jesus.

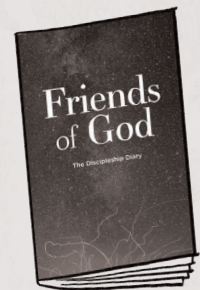
Other times you'll do things with Jesus and other people—sometimes people in our group and sometimes people you know who aren't part of this experience.

I want to encourage you to take advantage of these opportunities to deepen your friendship with God. Sometimes we'll talk about how it went when we get together; other times what you do is just between you and Jesus.

But one thing we'll always do is dive into adventures!

FIELD-TEST FINDING

Discovering that God wants to be your friend makes a difference. One woman, who had been a church volunteer for most of her life, teared up. "I realized for the first time that God desires to be with me. He wants me to be his *friend*, not just a worker."



Turn to page 14 in your diary, and let's take a look at an adventure for you to enjoy between now and the next time we get together.

PAUSE AS PARTICIPANTS FIND THE ADVENTURE. READ IT ALOUD; THEN ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO CONNECT NOW WITH SOMEONE AND SET UP A TIME TO TRY THIS.

This is going to be fun!

And we'll have fun when we get together next time, too. Here's the when and where...

ANNOUNCE THE TIME AND LOCATION OF YOUR NEXT SESSION.

9. EXPERIENCE: EATING AND DRINKING

(about 7 minutes)

As we wrap up our time together, let me quickly sum up what the big idea was for me in this session: God wants to be my friend. And friendship is *God's* idea; it's what God wants whether I've chosen to cozy up to him or not.

God is so sold on the idea that he showed up in the person of Jesus to extend the invitation personally.

Maybe you've been told that sort of connection with God just isn't possible. That God is a distant authority figure, not a friend.

But John 6 describes a time Jesus was teaching in a synagogue and made it abundantly clear that a close friendship with him is not only possible but exactly what he's after.

Jesus told the people crowded around him that they had to "eat his body and drink his blood" to have a closer friendship with him.

That left some people scratching their heads and others thinking that just maybe Jesus was crazy. And when Jesus didn't explain himself, many people walked away from him.

CONTINUE TO SPEAK AS A HELPER DELIVERS A PLATE OF SNACKS TO EACH GROUP OF FOUR.

Think about it: Eating and drinking is about as intimate an experience as you can have. It's taking something from outside your body and consuming it, letting it fuel your body and shape your health.

That's the level of intimacy Jesus wants with you. It's where he's headed as he transforms you...and me.

Do this: Take one of the snacks and hold it as we wrap up our hour together with prayer.

PAUSE AS FRIENDS DO AS YOU'VE ASKED.

This prayer is a little...different.

I'm going to ask that you slowly enjoy your snack as you listen to some words Jesus has for you. Take in these words the same way you're taking in that snack—letting them fuel your life and shape you.

Normally our idea of prayer is doing all the talking, but friends don't have conversations like that. There's give and take, speaking and listening. So for the next 60 seconds or so, I'll ask you to listen to some of the things that your friend Jesus has promised you.

Close your eyes, listen, and receive these promises from Jesus.

READ SLOWLY, PAUSING BETWEEN STATEMENTS.

- If you'll give your whole life to me, you'll find the life you've always hungered for.
- My purpose in your life is to give you a rich and satisfying life.
- I sacrificed my life for you, and I'll never stop fighting for you, no matter what.
- I know you, and I've given you the ability to know me.
- Wherever I am, I want you to be with me.
- I want to fill you and your life with joy.

Thank you for these words for us, Jesus.

Amen.



The Discipleship Experience

LEADER GUIDE

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So get ready to embark on a life-changing relational experience to grow closer to Jesus and each other.

Just like Jesus, you'll immerse people in unforgettable experiences and thought-provoking conversations.

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Best of all, *Friends of God* is not an experiment—it has been tested and tested again with real people in real settings. You can be confident that the advice in your leader guide—taken from our own experience—works!

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- Custom notes for each session, including setup ideas and how to keep things running smoothly
- “Just for you” sections to help you see the big picture behind each session and get excited about what God's going to do
- Recommendations for creating a warm, inviting, relational environment, including tips for setting up your space and keeping conversations flowing

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