

Series: Born to Be a Pilgrim

Lesson 4: The Best Companions

Lesson Objectives:

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to...

- Explore friendship and soul friendship.
- Identify the three dangers of friendship.
- Identify God as their companion on the spiritual journey.

Materials Needed:

- Copies of page A-34 and A-35
- Pens
- Board and markers
- Writing paper, envelopes, stamps
- Bibles

Lead In:

Here is this week's Lead In message from the writer. Tell the students to listen for the question in the text because you are going to ask for their answers. Then read them the message.

Walking long distances in the hot sun or cold rain can be really tough. But there is one thing that keeps you going, that keeps you laughing, that encourages you when you are down, and helps you when you are broken, and that is company. I did the Santiago pilgrimage with my best friend and it was the best decision I made before going. We took care of each other, we talked, we shared supplies, we prayed and sang together, and we laughed our heads off throughout the whole trip. We never even fought or bickered once on that whole trail; just good old fashioned love and friendship. Good friends like that don't come along every day—they may only come once or twice in a lifetime—but when they do, watch out! Have you ever had a friend that just made total sense to you and you to her or him? You liked everything about that person or they inspired you or made you strive to be better than you are? They even helped you walk the journey of faith, talking with you about your fears, doubts, successes and failures? Praying for you? Keeping you accountable? Making you laugh? Hopefully you have met someone like that or perhaps you will later in life. I wonder though, if you had to go on a long pilgrimage or journey, who would you want to take with you and why?

Solicit some answers from the students as to who they would take and why.

Task One:

Have students divide into groups of three. Hand out copies of page A-34 and A-35 and pens and instruct students to complete the first task on the sheet.

When students are done, refocus their attention together and go through each question out loud until the students agree on the answers (or agree to disagree). Have a student read a statement and give the group's answer. Have the other students agree or disagree with that answer. Here are some possible answers:

1. We should be friends with everyone.
 - a. No. We should love everyone, even our enemies (Matthew 5:44), but we do not have to have a friendship with everyone. Jesus loved all kinds of people, but he also had a small group of people that he knew better and lived with and trusted with his plans. While we need to love everyone, seek the best for them, and do to them as we want them to do to us, we will not be friends with everyone and that's okay.

2. If you want to make a friend, it is good to be friendly.
 - a. Yes. Making friends often involves extending kindness to someone else or speaking to someone else first. You must get to know someone before you can know whether you can be close friends.

3. Boys and girls, men and women, can't be friends.
 - a. People's opinions differ here. The reality is that many people make friendships between people of two genders work. Look around and you are bound to find examples. For other people, this is not realistic or desirable. Men and women who are friends can often put aside attraction and sexuality in order to have a good friendship.

4. A soul friend is a friend, a close friend, who also helps you grow closer to God.
 - a. Yes. The concept of soul friends is a common one in Christian thinking. St. Gregory said of St. Basil that "it seemed that in either of us there was but one soul dwelling in two bodies." In a soul friendship, two people who are very good friends also help each other grow in faith and virtue. This is one of the most exciting kinds of friendships, notable not in

quantity but quality: there may not be many soul friends out there, but those that are are highly treasured. Soul friends are different than spiritual directors or guides; one is a relationship of equals, the other is a master-pupil relationship. See also Proverbs 18:24, 27:6, 27:9, and Ecclesiastes 4:10.

5. There are different levels of friendship.
 - a. Yes. Most people have concentric circles of friends, ranging from the most intimate like spouses and soul friends and siblings in the centre of the circle to friendly acquaintances at the outer edges of the circle.

6. You can only be friends with people if you have a lot in common with them.
 - a. Again, people's opinions will differ. It certainly helps if friends have common interests to talk about and do together and most friendships seem to develop along these lines.

7. We should look for friends who have good character qualities.
 - a. Yes. Some students will argue no here because they have been taught that all people are equal and valuable and so on. However, people of character and integrity make better friends than people who are selfish and self-serving. Ask those same students how they would feel if their friend gossiped about them or couldn't keep a secret or stole money from them or lied. Yes, these people deserve our love but they probably aren't great candidates for close friendship. See also Proverbs 22:11.

Task Two:

Instruct students to go on to Task Two on the handout. When they are done, refocus their attention and solicit suggestions as to the three dangers. Here are the model answers. Guide students by grouping their answers, asking them for examples, clarifying and

correcting, and asking them if they have questions. The exact words aren't important; only the ideas are.

1. Friendship can become **exclusive**. Friends become jealous or withdraw from family or other friends. Healthy friendship *is* exclusive in the sense that we are not friends with everyone, but it can also become too exclusive, where the friends become jealous of one another when they are with other people.
2. Friendship can become **possessive**. One friend feels they own the other friends and can control him or her. Perhaps one friend can't tolerate the absence of the other or seeks to dominate the other.
3. Friendship can become **obsessive**. This kind of friendship becomes a distraction from life, from God, and from prayer. The friends aren't interested in anything but each other.

Task Three:

Write a list of these Scriptures on the board. You can do this ahead of time.

Proverbs 18:24

Proverbs 27:6

Proverbs 27:9

Ecclesiastes 4:10

Deuteronomy 31:8

Tell the students that you are going to give them an opportunity to be a good friend and also to encourage a good friend. You are going to give them paper, envelopes, stamps, and pens so that they can write a letter to a friend, a letter expressing their feelings or cheering the friend up or a fun letter to a friend they haven't seen in a while or something similar. Try to find nice stationary that will make the letter writing seem special.

Alternatively, if they cannot think of a friend to write to, they can also write to God, like a written-down prayer, telling God about their hopes and wishes for a soul friend to journey with them in life or thanking God for never forsaking them. They will not have to share this letter with anyone. Tell them that you have written the references for some Scripture verses about friendship on the board and that they can choose one of these verses to include in their letter if they wish. Have Bibles available for looking these up. Distribute the supplies and given students a chance to write, seal, and address their letters. If they have the address with them, they can put a stamp on it and you can offer to post it for them. If not, they can take it home to mail or give from there. Here are the verses:

Task Four:

Finally, say something like, Today we have talked about friendship, companions, and soul friends. About the special people who accompany us in life and help us to know God and ourselves and to live with meaning and purpose and love. Some people already have friends like that, which they value highly and care about and who make sense to them. Some people do not, but these will come along later in life. That is quite common. But for all of us, there is one companion who promises never to leave us. Look at these verses on the board and find the one I mean.

Have students look up the verses again or for the first time. The verse that is meant is Deuteronomy 31:8, "The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." (NIV)

Finish by saying something like, *God is always interested in you; always loyal and good; always compassionate and merciful; always available in prayer and comfort. And so we do not leave afraid, but in the best possible company!*

Closing:

Close by praying for the friends you have now and the friends you will make later on in life. Pray that the people in your group would be good friends and that they would find good friends, soul friends. Thank God for his presence and availability.