

# You Got A Friend In Me

*John 15:10-17 and James 2:14-26*



## Week of the Laity Resources

January 19 - 25, 2020

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# Table of Contents

## *Bible Study Resources*

- Scripture John 15:10-17
- Background
- Opening Prayer
- Questions for Discussion
- Breath Prayer

## *Worship Resources*

- Call to Worship
- Invocation
- Litany Prayer

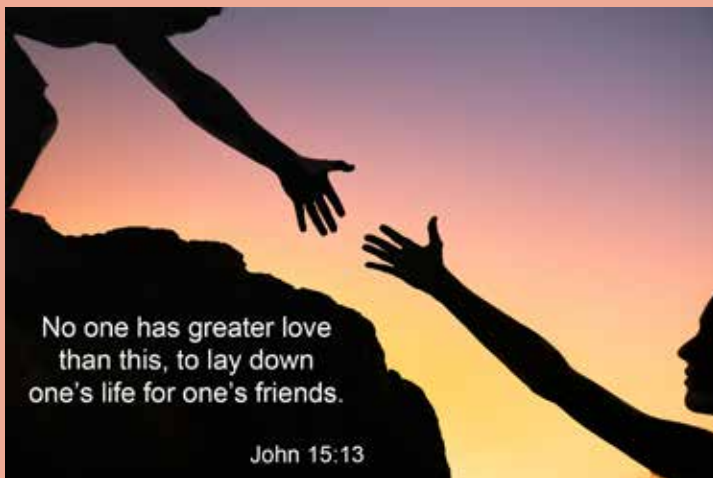
- Children's Moment
- Sermon on James 2:14-26
- Background
- Sermon Suggestions
- Suggestions for Visual Liturgy
- Benediction
- Music Suggestions

## *Prayer and Devotional Activity*

- Being a Friend

*Within the church the fundamental ministry is that of Jesus Christ whose servanthood offered to God in behalf of humanity, defines and gives character to all ministry exercised in his name...  
By baptism all Christians are inducted into the corporate ministry of God's people and by sharing in it fulfill their own callings as servants of Christ.*

*(Policies and Criteria for the Order of Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ))*



***"You've got a friend in me  
You've got a friend in me  
When the road looks rough ahead  
And you're miles and miles  
From your nice warm bed  
You just remember what your old pal  
said  
Boy, you've got a friend in me"***

Lyrics from You Got a Friend in Me  
**"Toy Story"**  
Randy Newman

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## Introduction:

### *The Centrality of the Laity in the Founding of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)<sup>1</sup>*

As the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was being born, church affiliation was around 40 percent of the citizens of the United States. Separation of church and state was in its infancy with states like Connecticut, New Hampshire and Massachusetts continuing to have official state religions well into the second decade of the nineteenth century. In this system of state affiliated religion, religious leaders relied on the state for the support of the church's ministries. From this cultural reality of the United States, leaders rose up and called for renewal and restoration. The 1801 Great Revival at Cane Ridge was a part of this grassroots movement as Restoration preachers were able to reach the common people with calls to reclaim a New Testament identity. By 1835, seventy-five percent of United States citizens identified some church affiliation.

Founders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone shared a general mistrust of clerical authority and denominational hierarchies due to the potential for abuse. Stone reinterpreted Presbyterian understandings of ordained ministry. For him, pastors or elders served as local congregational preachers, administering baptism and the Lord's Table and overseeing church discipline. The ruling elder assisted in administering church discipline. Deacons oversaw the care of the spiritual and material needs of the congregation. Campbell emphasized that every baptized Christian was a minister and that **ministry rose from the laity**. In his view, elders, deacons, and evangelists did not cease to be laity but represented the laity in the functions that they performed on their behalf. With his anti-clerical views, Campbell identified elders (also called bishops), deacons, and evangelists as the spiritual leaders of the church. Elders and deacons served at a congregational level. He advocated for the laity to officiate at the Lord's Table stating that requiring the presence of ordained clergy prevented many congregations from celebrating the Lord's Table weekly. Evangelists were traveling preachers who were supported by a particular congregation. Each congregation was to appoint its own elders, one of whom would serve as the "president" who assumed full-time ministry and was compensated by the congregation. None of the three offices were portable but associated with a particular congregation.

Stone's and Campbell's disestablishment views and understanding of the importance of the laity, resulted in an emphasis that **ministry is dependent on the gathered community**. Campbell emphasized the need for the laity to be biblically literate and equipped to think theologically so that they might articulate the Christian story faithfully. Within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) the laity is integral to the full ministry of the church, without the laity there is no ministry. According to Mark Toulouse, "When ordained ministers and lay people fulfill ministerial roles in the world, they do not merely represent congregations, regions, or denominations. Rather, they serve as representatives and re-presenters of the one ministry of Jesus Christ in the world... Ministry is, as Ronald Osborn so eloquently put it, "identification with God's will."<sup>2</sup>

Today, this understanding of the importance of the laity in claiming and carrying out the mission and work of the church remains as one of the core values of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Our polity and governance reflects this understanding and our relevancy in the world around us is contingent upon it being lived out in the lives of our congregations. As we identify with God's will, we have a friend in Jesus and Jesus has a friend in us.

## Bible Study

Scripture John 15: 10 – 17

*If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. <sup>17</sup>I give you these commandments so that you can love each other.*

(Common English Bible, CEB)

## Background

The Gospel of John, the last gospel written, offers a theological reflection on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is constructed around a series of signs that invite the reader to share the evangelist's understanding of creation and incarnation which reveals the "self-giving and life-affirming love" of God as seen through Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

John is unique, differing from the synoptic gospels. In this gospel, Jesus visits Jerusalem on three occasions. Jesus speaks in long self-revelatory discourses. The identity of the evangelist who wrote John is unknown. While unlikely, tradition suggests that it was written by John, son of Zebedee. Further, tradition suggests that the gospel was written in Ephesus. While possibly the city of origin, it can be said with certainty that the gospel was composed in a Hellenistic city with large Jewish population such as Ephesus. The gospel was written around 95 – 100 CE.\*

Our passage today comes from Jesus' Farewell Discourse that begins at 13:1 and concludes at 16:33. This discourse can be divided into 3 sections with 15:10–17 coming from the middle section that calls for the disciples to abide in love and warns of hatred from the world. Chapter 15 further develops Jesus' words on love and community that began in 14:20–21. Here, as in other places in the gospel, Jesus uses the term abiding to convey the idea of discipleship. For John to abide conveys an understanding of intimacy and connection that is fundamental for faith. The pericope begins with Jesus stating that we continue to abide in him when we are obedient to his commands. In other words, when we love God and others. The concept of friendship is used to identify the nature of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Being a friend of Jesus suggests that there is mutuality in the relationship. The extent of our friendship with Jesus is centered in Jesus' friendship with us that is demonstrated in his dying for his friends. In this way, Jesus reminds his disciples that true, abiding love is not always easy.

## Love - Agape and Philia

Words are important and express what is important to us. I live in Illinois. As you read this, snow will be on the minds of those who live here. Listening to the weather, I will be very aware of the difference in flurries, snow showers, and blizzard. Differentiating between these words for snow, will allow me to make plans to run errands or make plans to sit in front of a fire with a cup of tea and a good book. In cultures where snow is even more important there are even more words to distinguish

\* The author of this resource makes use of the abbreviations BCE (Before Common era) and CE (common Era), instead of older terminology of BC (Before Christ) and AD ("Anno Domini": Latin term roughly translating "In the year of our Lord"). Use of BCE/CE has been increasingly used over the last 50 years, even by Christians, mostly as courtesy and out of respect for broader global contexts that include Christians but are also bigger than one faith group. As far as calendars are concerned, BCE is equivalent to BC, and CE is equivalent to AD.

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the nature and type of snow. Eskimos have fifty words and Swedes have 25 words for snow.

In English, we use the word love. It can be used to identify how I feel about my husband, my labradoodle, or my favorite chocolate dessert. In ancient Greek there are seven words for love. Depending on the word that was chosen, one could identify certain characteristics about the nature of love that was being expressed. The seven Greek words for love include:

- *Eros* referring to sexual passion
- *Philia* referring to deep friendship.
- *Ludus* referring to playful love.
- *Agape* referring to love for everyone.
- *Pragma* referring to longstanding love.
- *Philautia* referring to love of the self.
- *Storge*, referring to love of a child

We often speak of God's love as *agape* love. In Hebrew, it is the concept expressed with the word *hesed*. This type of love is thought of as steadfast and unending. It connotes the mercy and grace of God who is our shepherd, our rock. It assures us that we are accepted as we are. And, it is the foundation of the covenantal relationship to which God invites God's people in both the First Testament and the New Testament. Today, we might say unconditional love. In the passage in John the word *agape* is used when speaking of the depth of a love that is seen when one is willing to give up one's life for another.

Our passage from John also uses a form of the word *philia*. In using this we see another aspect of the love that is descriptive of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We are friends of God. To understand this passage, it is important that we understand the nature of *philia*. This love or friendship connotes something that is deep and that has developed over time. It is characterized by loyalty and intimacy. When we share *philia*, we share more than interests. We share values with those with whom we have this type of love. We have a bond and connection of care and concern.

## ***Outline for Bible Study Session***

### ***Opening Prayer***

### ***Read the John 15:10-17***

### ***Read Love- Agape and Philia***

### ***Summarize the background information***

### ***Questions for Discussion***

1. What stands out to you in this passage?
2. How do we abide in Christ's love?
3. What does it mean to love one another as Christ has loved us?
4. As a group make a list of the characteristics of friendship. Have a scribe write the characteristics on a sheet of newsprint as the group brainstorms. Post this list where all can see it.
5. How is our relationship with God different because Jesus calls us friends instead of servants?

6. Jesus says that we are chosen as friends so that we might bear fruit. How is this fruit revealed through the work of the laity?
7. Mark Toulouse states that the laity, “serve as representatives and re-presenters of the one ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.” What is the one ministry of Jesus Christ in the world today? How is that ministry being represented by the ministries of your congregation?
8. If possible, obtain a copy of the song, *If I Didn't have You* by Randy Newman. A video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEqrt6nZTS4>. You can also download the song through music services such as Itunes or find it on a cd of the soundtrack of *Monsters Inc.* If you are unable to get the song – have someone read the lyrics that can be found at <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=if+i+didn%27t+have+you+lyrics&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

*If I Didn't Have You* is sung by John Goodman and Billy Crystal who are the voices of Sully and Mike from the Pixar movie, *Monsters, Inc.* It conveys the closeness of the two monsters and their importance to one another. It talks about the challenges of friendship as well as the support and value that is a part of their friendship. Consider the following as you listen to the song:

- How does the song describe their friendship?
- How does this relate to your relationship with God?  
After you have listened, or read through the lyrics, discuss to following:
- How is our relationship enriched by considering God our friend as well as our parent, our Lord, or other names that you use for God?
- What is challenging in being a friend of God?
- Is friendship a metaphor that you feel comfortable with in describing your relationship with God?
- How is shared ministry a natural response when God is our friend?

## Breath Prayer

Frederick Dale writes, “Real love (let us admit it) does not come easily. The inhaling of an undeserved divine love for ourselves (received by a usually hesitating but still eager trust) and the exhaling of our all-too-human but still well-intended love for others – this is the breathing exercise that all disciples try to practice every day. Trust (breathe in); have a heart (breathe out). Without the Spirit’s help in this exercise of Christ’s deep love we can never breathe naturally.”

As you conclude the session, invite participants to practice a form of breath prayer.

## Practicing Breath Prayer

Invite participants to sit comfortably with feet on the ground and hands resting in their laps. Invite them to close their eyes if they would like and feel comfortable doing so. Ask them to focus on their breathing. Taking slow, deep, natural breaths. As they breathe, ask them to begin to breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth. Remind them to keep their breathing slow and deep.

After 1 – 2 minutes invite them to focus on the word “Trust” as they breathe in and “Have Heart” as they breathe out. Continue to breathe this way for 5 minutes. Invite them to return focus to the sensation of their breathing. Have them slowly open eyes.

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## *Worship Resources*

### **Call to Worship**

Adapted from Psalm 18

**One Voice:** I love you, Lord, my strength.

The Lord is my solid rock,  
my fortress, my rescuer.

*Many Voices: My God is my rock—*

*I take refuge in him!—  
he's my salvation's strength,  
my place of safety.*

**One Voice:** God is praiseworthy,

I cried out to the Lord,  
and I was saved from my enemies.  
In my distress I cried out to the Lord;  
I called to my God for help.

*Many Voices: God heard my voice from when I called for help,*

*From on high God reached down and grabbed me;  
God saved me from my powerful enemy,  
the Lord was my support.*

**Unison: The Lord Lives! Bless God, my rock!**

**Let the God of my salvation be lifted high.**

**That's why I thank you, Lord,  
in the presence of the nations.**

**That's why I sing praises to your name.**

## *Invocation*

We gather today as friends, friends of you O Lord and of one another. And so, draw close to us so we may draw closer to those around us. Speak to us words of truth so that we may remember our purpose in the world. Meet us at the table so that we may be nourished to act with mercy and to live with love. And through our time together, may our friendship with you deepen and our circle of friends widen. Amen.

## *Litany Prayer*

**One Voice:** Let us pray.

We come together this morning, offering you thanks and lifting your name in praise.

We come acknowledging that you are the source of all good gifts.

In creation, we are reminded of your love and desire that we have  
all that we need for a good and bountiful life.

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**Many voices: I am a friend of God, who is the source of all blessing.**

One Voice: We come to you, offering thanks and lifting your name in praise.

We come trusting that you are there for us in times of stress and difficulty.

In the midst of chaos and disorder, you work to bring forth what is good and holy.

**Many voices: I am a friend of God, who is the source of consolation and wholeness.**

One Voice: We come to you, offering thanks and lifting your name in praise.

We come knowing that you are there in the midst of joy and celebration.

You fill our hearts with laughter and you are the reason for our rejoicing.

**Many voices: I am a friend of God, who is the source of all gladness and delight.**

One Voice: We come to you, offering thanks and lifting your name in praise.

We recommit our lives to you, O Lord,

desiring to center our lives in your purpose

and plan that we may live as a blessing to others.

**Many voices: I am a friend of God, a partner in the renewal of all creation.**

One Voice: We come to you, offering thanks and lifting your name in praise.

We pledge our talents and resources for the work of your kingdom.

We set our feet on the path that Jesus has shown us so that we may

walk in righteousness and humility with our God.

**Many voices: I am a friend of God, who was first a friend to me.**

**Unison: Amen**

### *Children's Moment*

- Ask the children to name individuals with whom they are friends.
- Ask them what they like to do with their friends.
- Ask them what makes a good friend.
- Tell them that the Bible tells us that God is our friend.
- Using some of the characteristics that they identified with friendship talk about how God is a good friend.
- Say a prayer thanking God for being our friend.

Or read and discuss the following book:

Laurie Krasny Brown. *How to Be a Friend: A Guide to Making Friends and Keeping Them*, Little Brown Books for Young Readers, 2001. Ages 5 – 8



## Sermon

Scripture: James 2:14–26

*My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can't save anyone, can it? <sup>15</sup>Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. <sup>16</sup>What if one of you said, "Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!"? What good is it if you don't actually give them what their body needs? <sup>17</sup>In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn't result in faithful activity.*

*<sup>18</sup>Someone might claim, "You have faith and I have action." But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I'll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action. <sup>19</sup>It's good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear. <sup>20</sup>Are you so slow? Do you need to be shown that faith without actions has no value at all? <sup>21</sup>What about Abraham, our father? Wasn't he shown to be righteous through his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup>See, his faith was at work along with his actions. In fact, his faith was made complete by his faithful actions. <sup>23</sup>So the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and God regarded him as righteous. What is more, Abraham was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup>So you see that a person is shown to be righteous through faithful actions and not through faith alone. <sup>25</sup>In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute shown to be righteous when she received the messengers as her guests and then sent them on by another road? <sup>26</sup>As the lifeless body is dead, so faith without actions is dead.*

(CEB)

## Background

The book of James focuses on freeing the members of the faith community from the things that might interfere with them fulfilling God's purposes. It is a reminder that the community must live out the values of the gospel to which they have already committed.

While little is known about the identity of James, it is clear that he is knowledgeable in the teachings of First Testament as well as other Greek writings of the time. The 108 verses of the book has over 50 imperatives; these point the community to a way of life that embodies God's instruction. While James focuses less on Jesus than the Pauline letters, he clearly relates his teachings to Jesus' teachings and traditions.

James 2:14–26 comes from a larger pericope that begins at 1:22 and concludes with 2:26. This larger passage focuses on the listening to God's truth. This is the first of three essays that outline what it means to be wise. Our verses focus on the importance of knowing and accepting God's purpose for our lives. It stresses that acceptance is seen in acts that are congruent with these teachings. The reference to Abraham as a friend of God should be read in light of Isaiah 41:8 and 2 Chronicles 20:17. It should be read in light of James comparison of God's truth and friendship with God in comparison to friendship with the world (1:17–18 and 3:13–4:10). Finally, James seems to suggest that friendship with God is shown through acts of mercy. <sup>10</sup>

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## *Sermon Suggestions to Incorporate in Your Sermon*

1. Begin the sermon with a story of friendship or a video clip that demonstrates friendship. This is a good opportunity to engage the children in your congregation by using a clip of Winnie the Pooh and Piglet or from a Pixar movie such as Toy Story or Monsters Inc.
2. Define characteristics of friendship and connect these characteristics with examples seen in Jesus' ministry.
3. Discuss how the book of James connects obedience and acts of mercy to friendship with God. Frame around the question, "how does being a friend relate to our being a friend with others?".
4. Provide examples of how your congregation's friendship with God is seen through the ministries of your congregation. Identify individuals and groups who make these ministries possible.

## *Visual Liturgy*

Select 21 photos, more if you choose to have multiple photos per slide, that show members of your congregation engaged in the ministries of the congregation. Include images that show members working in the church (i.e. deacons, elders, fellowship events) and members engage in ministry outside of the church facility (i.e. mission trip, community events) Use these to create a slide show with *You Got a Friend in Me* (length 2:04 minutes) as background music to use at conclusion of your sermon or as your offering is being received. Set auto slide advance on slide show to 6 seconds per slide.

## ***Benediction***

We have heard the good news that we are loved and called by God. God is our friend.

We leave this place ready to love and serve others in God's name. We will be a friend to God and others.

## ***Music Suggestions***

***Prayer Hymn – What a Friend We Have In Jesus***

***Hymn of Dedication – Called as Partners in Christ's Service***

***Communion Hymn - O How I Love Jesus***

## ***Devotional Prayer Activity***

### **Step 1**

Gather your Bible, paper, a pen or pencil, the Circles of Friendship diagram

### **Step 2**

Choose a quiet place, free of distractions.

- Sit quietly for a few minutes, breathing in and out.
- Invite God to join you in this time and to direct your thoughts and speak to you through this time.

### **Step 3**

Begin by slowly reading John 15:10–17 and James 2:14–26

- Write down what stands out to you in these verses.

Note what questions or insights you have as you read these passages.

Slowly read the passages a second time.

- Consider what feelings arise as you read the passages. Are they the same throughout the passage? Are they the same for both passages?

### **Step 4**

Turn your attention to the Circles of Friendship.

Consider the four terms acquaintances, colleagues, friends, intimate friends, and soul friends.

How would you define each?

Write the names of individuals who you would identify as acquaintances, colleagues, friends, intimate friends, soul friends.

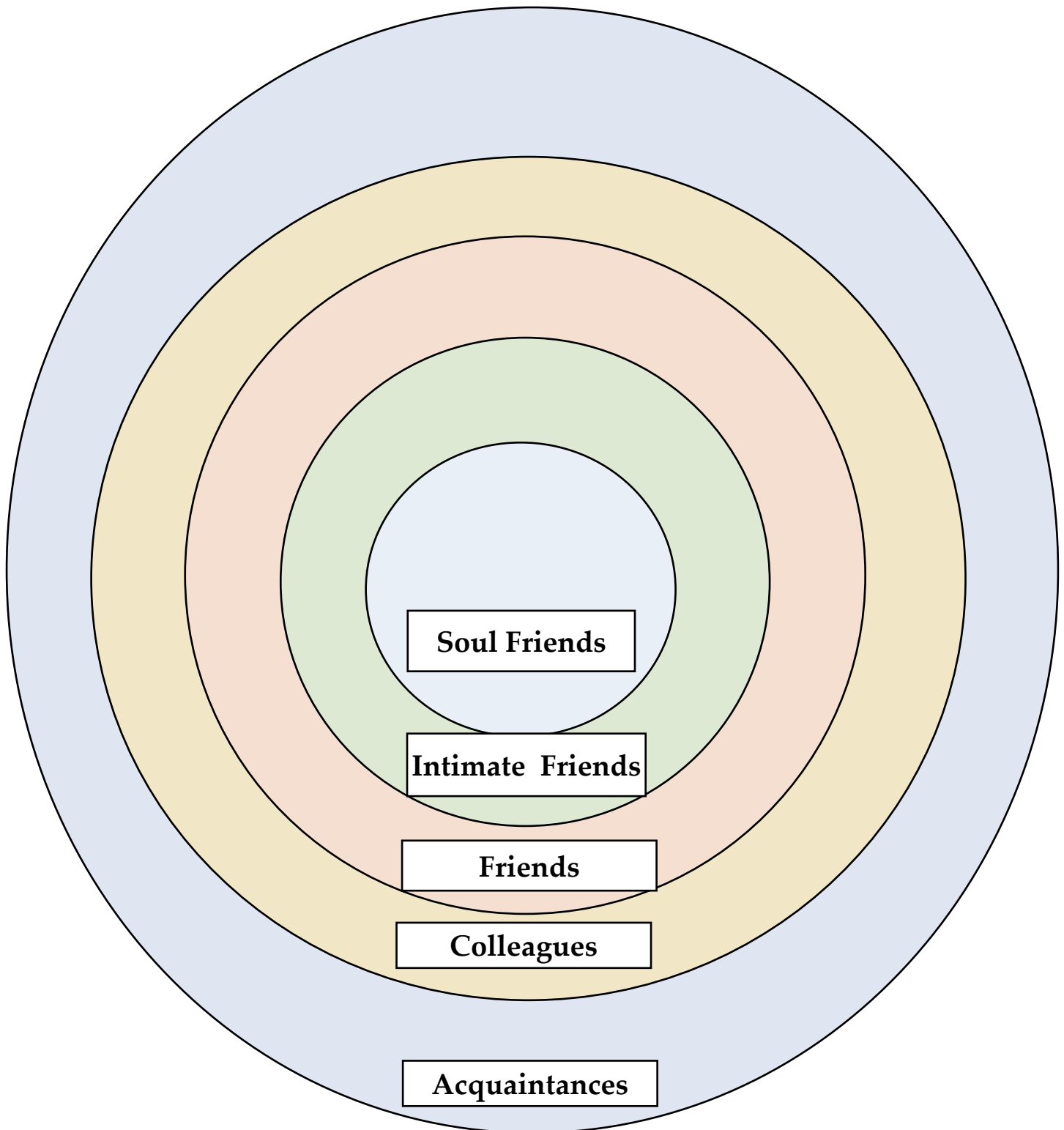
At various times in our lives we relate to God as an acquaintance, colleague, friend, intimate friend, and a soul friend. When have you related to God in each of these ways? What made the difference in the nature of the relationship? How do you relate to God today? Would you like to relate to God differently? How might you do this? How would others know that you are a friend of God?

### **Step 5**

Close with a prayer.

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# Circles of Friendship



## Bio: Beth A. Rupe

The Reverend Doctor Beth Rupe served congregations in Kentucky while attending Lexington Theological Seminary and in Illinois. Prior to going to seminary, Beth was an Outpatient Therapist at a community mental health center. She received a BS with honors in Psychology from Western Illinois University (1988) and a MS in Clinical/Community Mental Health Psychology from Western Illinois University (1990). Beth received her MDiv from Lexington Theological Seminary (2002). She was ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) by the Christian Church in Illinois/Wisconsin. She received her DMin from Lexington Theological Seminary (2014) focusing on liturgical renewal particularly the importance of lament in Disciples Worship.



Beth Rupe

Beth is the Interim Minister of CCIW Women's Ministries. She is the McLean Livingston Regional Elder. Additionally, she is a member of the CCIW Ethic's Investigation Team and the Pro-Reconciliation Anti-Racism Committee/ Team. Beth served as the Worship Coordinator for the 2010 International Disciples Women's Ministries (IDWM) Quadrennial. She has written Advent, Easter, and Week of the Laity Resources for Disciples Home Missions Christian Education and Faith Formation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Special Offering Resources for the Reconciliation Office of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and has published book reviews in *The Lexington Theological Seminary Quarterly*. Writing for Just Women the publication of the International Disciples Women's Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Beth contributee one Bible study in 2016, the study resources for 2019 Bible study issue, quarterly study guides, and authored the column Prayer Stations which considers women of the church and their diverse prayer practices.

Beth is married to Mark. They have two children, Sarah (Aaron) and Benjamin, and two granddaughters Chloe and Emilia. They have a labradoodle puppy, Angus. She enjoys reading and learning new things. Her other hobbies include knitting, quilting and listening to all genres of music. She enjoys cooking for and spending time with family and friends. She finds strength in contemplative prayer and studying scripture. She feels called by God to work for justice. She is currently a member of Centennial Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Bloomington, IL. There she is an active member of the laity, serving as an elder, secretary of the Church Board, and Co-Chair of Nurture and Grow Team, and completing other duties as assigned.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Kinnamon and Jan Linn. *Disciples: Reclaiming Our Identity, Reforming our Practice*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009. Kindle Electronic Edition Location 1191 – 1325 of 1550.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Toulouse. *Joined in Discipleship: The Shaping of Contemporary Disciples* Pg 179 -180.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Ann Lee "John" in *The New Interpreter's Bible One-Volume Commentary*. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Peterson. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010. Kindle Electronic Edition Location 27363 of 39053,

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Dale Bruner. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 889

<sup>5</sup> Ronal Allen. "James" in *The Preacher's Bible Handbook*. O. Wesley Allen Jr, ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster Knox Press, 2019. p 334.

<sup>6</sup> Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament, Second Edition, New Revised Standard Version*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017. Kindle Electronic Edition, 489.

<sup>7</sup> Robert W. Wall. "James" in *The New Interpreter's Bible One-Volume Commentary*. Kindle Electronic Edition Location 34382 of 39053.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 499.

<sup>9</sup> Allen 335- 336.

<sup>10</sup>Wall. Kindle Electronic Location 34468 of 39053.

A FRIEND  
LOVES AT  
ALL TIMES.

-proverbs 17:17



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