

# Gospel Community Guide

In the Circus there is little space and opportunity for depth; especially depth in relationships. We are connected to those we perform alongside and even feel some sort of connection to those we perform for or are spectators of. Yet, our relationships remain relatively shallow and temporary. We develop relationships based on the pleasure we receive from another or the profitability, utility of what the other offers us. When the pleasures wain or our desires change, so does the relationships. When our circumstances change and the relationships usefulness is lessened, so too is the friendship. While pleasure and profitability are natural factors for initiating relationships, they do not provide depth that actually transforms us; and so we go through life longing for vividness and richness but unable to experience either because of the cadenced shallowness of circus relationships, specifically friendships.

Friendship is a lost virtue: a character forming and shaping action and affection. Yet, the Faith Practice of Friendship is a God-given means for us to participate in the work and rhythms of the garden with depth, vividness and richness: abundance. True friendship, friendship that is more than friendliness or kindness because of pleasurable company or profitable gain, requires a mutuality that shifts our affections, a “mutual goodwill”. For it is **“those who desire the good of their friends for their friend’s sake who are most completely friends, since each loves the other for what the other is in themselves and not for something they have about them which they need not have.”**

In friendship I do not need the other to be something or give something. Certainly they are and do, but in true friendship the essence of the person is what I cling to, what keeps me engaged and giving. Something binds us that is more permanent than pleasure or utility, a likeness we see in one another that is at the core of our identity as humans. Therefore the spiritual discipline of friendship practices us, forms us, and **trains us to love our neighbor as ourselves!** Expanding our capacity to both receive and give depth and richness in life; to know and make known the abundant life we have in our friendship with Jesus and one another.

## 1 DISCOVERING OUR FAITH PRACTICE OF *FRIENDSHIP*

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The practice of Friendship is a virtue, a character forming action and affection because it requires us to align with the work of the garden—attuned and intimate cultivation for the flourishing of another; and with the cadence of the garden—consistent yet proportioned effort over time. As Aristotle noted, “Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow-ripening fruit.”

*Think about a friendship in your life today. What makes it distinct and what impact does it have on your life?*

## 2 PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

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This exercise is meant to help us enter into the transformative space of friendship; beginning with Jesus’ friendship extended to us. Being a friend is being like Jesus and in some way experiencing what we have in Jesus!

- 1) Begin by reading John 15:12-17 aloud.
- 2) Reflect on the nature of Jesus’ relationship with his disciples, why he calls them ‘friends’ here at this point in their journey together, and how friendship and bearing fruit are connected.
- 3) Spend some time prayerfully engaging with the Jesus who calls you friend together!
- 4) Now spend some time reflect on the nature of relationships / friendships in your lives through these categories:
  - a. *Examining how you VALUE relationships* | Are relationships significant to you? How so or why not? How would you describe the different types of relationships you have and what you give and get out of them?
  - b. *Observing how you make ROOM for relationships* | True friendship requires both physical time & emotional capacity. There is a cost to friendship. Do you have the space for friendships? Why or why not?
  - c. *Assessing how you take RESPONSIBILITY for relationships* | True friendship is the seeking of good for the other for who they are not what they do. In what ways are you taking responsibility for the good of your friends? In what ways are you not?

## 3 CULTIVATING GRACE THROUGH *FRIENDSHIP*

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Friendship cultivates character that bears fruitfulness over time. **Commit to praying for your friends daily for the month of November. Giving thanks for them and seeking good for them. Don’t forget to write** down what you hear, think, feel, question, are convicted by etc.!