

## **‘I Have Called You Friends’ Discussion Questions**

**February 2019 (03 Feb - 02 March)**

Friendship is at the heart of the Gospel and indeed friendship with God and our neighbour is the sole purpose of the story of salvation.

Our readings in the scriptures will point us to the often implied friendship that God longs to have with his people. In turn we are invited to be people seeking to cultivate the art of Christian friendship. It's not about how we make our churches friendly, it goes far beyond that idea. Christian friendship is about commitment to each other, it's about the "no greater love than to lay down your life for a friend" ideal. If we could begin to strive towards this ideal it would change the way we approach our relationships. Think of the various relationships we have and about the kind of investment we make into them.

During these weeks we will be challenged to think about:

1. Our friendship with God and our families and local communities.
2. The friendships we have that are cross-cultural and cross-generational.
3. The friendships we have with those we know who are seeking to know more about God and who think more deeply about life itself.
4. The friendship we all require to nurture with the culture and society that is around us.

*'I Have Called You Friends' is a reference to John 15: 15.*

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [I Have Called You Friends Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 4 parts to correspond with the 4 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.

These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

Part 1: Our Friendship with God and Neighbours		
<p>Read John 15: 12-17</p> <p>Jesus considers his disciples his friends... The Son of God, makes friends with humanity!</p> <p>What is it like to have a personal friendship with a being on such a vast unimaginable scale?</p> <p>How does it make you feel?</p> <p>What does it mean to you to have a friend in Jesus?</p>	<p>Read Psalm 71</p> <p>In verse 6 of some translations the psalmist speaks of <i>leaning</i> on God. Have there been times in your life where you have felt yourself leaning on God?</p> <p>What does the word 'meek' mean in the context of this passage?</p> <p>What does it mean to talk about 'righteousness'?</p>	<p>Read Matthew 5: 1-11</p> <p>How can we be better friends to the poor in spirit?</p> <p>To those who mourn?</p> <p>To the meek?</p> <p>To those who hunger and thirst for righteousness?</p> <p>To the peacemakers?</p> <p>To the persecuted?</p>

Part 2: Our Friendships with the Next Generation		
<p>Read Psalm 138</p> <p>People born from the mid 1990s on are unlikely to have known life without the internet. The time it takes to find things out or to get in touch with people has sped up rapidly, even within their own lifetimes.</p> <p>All of us are becoming accustomed to accessing answers and contacting people at the tap of a finger.</p> <p>In verse 3 of this psalm we hear the delight of a speedy answer to a call to God. Does an instant generation look for an instant God?</p> <p>How does our use of technology shape how we think about God and how is that different across generations? Do people of different ages have different expectations of God?</p>	<p>Read Matthew 19: 13-15</p> <p>Put yourself in the mind of the parents and carers who were bringing their children to Jesus.</p> <p>How did they feel?</p> <p>What made them risk annoying the stern disciples?</p> <p>Why are people today often put off bringing their children to church on Sundays?</p> <p>How can we make teaching faith more child friendly?</p>	<p>Read 1 Timothy 4: 12</p> <p>When we patronise, sideline, or exclude young people - from our churches, communities, or across wider society - what do we lose?</p> <p>What are we missing out on when we ignore young people?</p> <p>How can we listen more closely and more sincerely to those who are younger than us?</p>

Part 3: Friendships with the Seekers and Deep Thinkers		
<p>Listen together to this story about a man who had two sons. As you go along look out for the different relationships that are in the story.</p> <p>Read Luke 15: 11-32</p> <p>Have you ever had a relationship (like the one between the father and son) which you thought you had ruined forever and yet the other person was happy to pick up where you had left off?</p> <p>How could the older and younger brother build a new friendship after everything they've been through?</p>	<p>Read Luke 4: 18-19</p> <p>Reflect upon the categories of people that Jesus saw himself seeking to serve and ask how willing are we to be the hands and feet of Jesus in today's world?</p> <p>How far will we go to reach the same kind of people as he did?</p>	<p>Read Jeremiah 17: 5-10</p> <p>The tree in verse 8 is not hiding in the shade - it feels the heat - but it is also connected to living water. It stands in dry earth but it is nourished by a connection to something deeper.</p> <p>A tree is both a product of its environment and something with the power to shape that environment - to bring nutrients, and shade, and shelter to others.</p> <p>What are the 'roots' in our lives that sustain us while we interact with the wider world around us?</p>

Part 4: Friendships with the World and Society!		
<p>Read: 2 Corinthians 8: 1-4</p> <p>It is one of life's ironies that it is often in the midst of disaster, calamity and scarcity, that generosity, kindness and hospitality blossom.</p> <p>It's easy to make new acquaintances when times are good but true friendship is often forged through adversity, struggle and shared needs.</p> <p>Have there been times in your life when you went through a difficult period and yet through it you gained a new friend or deepened an existing friendship?</p> <p>How have friends helped you survive tough times?</p>	<p>Read Luke 6: 27-31</p> <p>These instructions are a tall order.</p> <p>How do they make you feel?</p> <p>How on earth can we carry them out?</p>	<p>Read Ezekiel: 34: 17-24</p> <p>It's interesting to read verses 18-19 from an ecological perspective. For too long we have been a bad friend to the earth, taking advantage of it at great cost, trampling all over and fouling it up, doing harm to ourselves and others.</p> <p>The earth belongs to the Lord, we are only here for a short time before we pass the care of it to another generation.</p> <p>How can we be a better friend to God's creation?</p>