

Devotions Jan 30 - Feb 05, 2012

LOVE MONDAY, JANUARY 30 | JOHN 15:12-17

The disciples are to abide in Jesus as a branch abides in the vine. The result of this abiding is fruit, and the most precious fruit of all is love. Love will define the lives of the disciples who stay connected to Jesus and his word. In 13:34-35, Jesus says this: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples ...” This theme is picked up in 15:12. Here we are specifically called to love one another in the body of Christ, and to love our neighbors and enemies. Have you heard your call to love as Jesus loved – completely, unconditionally, and sacrificially? Can you do it? How is it difficult? What can help you? When we build genuine relationships for the sake of planting seeds of faith, we are, in essence, loving one another. Ask God to help you love others better.

CONVERSATION TUESDAY, JANUARY 31 | JOHN 3:1-8

Nicodemus comes to Jesus and engages him in conversation. Nicodemus has questions! Last week we talked about where to find people God may be calling us to reach. If God has opened our eyes to see the opportunities all around us, to no longer see others as scenery or objects, but as people God created, then it's time to take the next step: build a friendship. That process almost always begins with conversation. How do you strike up a conversation with someone new? What are your fears? How can you overcome them? Again, what can help you? Just like the interaction between Jesus and Nicodemus, friendship sometimes leads to spiritual conversation. Ask God to help you reach out and begin a conversation.

THE STACK WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1 | JOHN 3:9-21

Jesus and Nicodemus have a very deep conversation about spiritual things, and seeds of faith are planted into Nicodemus' life through conversation. Here is a tool developed by Tentmakers called The Conversation Stack: Nameplate: A person's name is the sweetest sound to them in the world. House: Where do they live? Where are they from? Ask about their family. Airplane: Where have they been? Where are they going over spring break? Tennis Racquet: What do they do for fun? Do they play sports, have any hobbies? Lightbulb: What are their ideas or thoughts? How do they feel about ...? PFC: Imagine a Private First Class soldier at attention. This stands for problems, frustrations and concerns. What are theirs? Trophy: What are their accomplishments? Flowers: Shower them with genuine compliments along the way. Praying Hands: If appropriate, offer to pray with or for this person. This is the ultimate form of conversation, as it includes God. Does it seem easier now? Let this tool guide you into conversation with someone new today. Try it. Practice.

INTENTIONALITY THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2 | JOHN 4:7-15

Jesus intentionally goes to the well at noon and engages a Samaritan woman in conversation. While conversation is the doorway to friendship, it is only the doorway. Genuine friendship requires a commitment of time and intentionality. Our purpose is not to convert anyone, but to simply love people where they are. We express that love through: Acceptance: God isn't done with them yet, but loves them anyway. We can, too. Genuine kindness: the little things like offering to drive them to the airport or sending a card when times are tough. Affirmation: reflecting back to others the gift that God created them to be. Authenticity: being yourself and only yourself. Transparency: revealing your struggles and frustrations when appropriate, which helps people to be “real” with you. Forgiveness: in genuine friendship we will step on each other's toes! Are your conversations intentional? Are you really trying to know and love all of God's children you encounter? In today's story at the well, Jesus practices all of these intentionalities. Ask God to help you practice intentionality today.

FRIENDSHIP FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3 | JOHN 11:32-44

Jesus weeps at the thought of his friend's death. He knows the power of friendship and uses it. Have you noticed how often Jesus simply welcomes people into his life, just loves them as they are? That is often the prelude to a symphony of conversation about faith. In Jesus' day, the relationship between student and rabbi was one of inferior to superior, but notice what Jesus says to his disciples: “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends. You did not choose me but I chose you.” Friendship is how Jesus shared faith with his disciples, and it's still the primary context for sharing faith today. Have you seen this pattern in your own experience? Did this happen to you? Ask God to help you understand the power of friendship.

PROBLEMS SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4 | JOHN 15:9-11

Jesus truly loves his friends. If we're going to reach over the fence, we'll need to make a new friend or two. But many of us would say that we have enough friends. We're like little LEGO bricks; we have only a limited number of possible connection points. You might think, “I just don't have time for more friends; I have trouble keeping up with the ones I have!” God is simply calling us to reach out to one, no more than two. Make this a priority, because this is a part of God's agenda for his disciples. For many of us, making friends is a lost art form. Some of us haven't made a new friend since fourth grade! For others, the way culture defines genuine friendship (often online!) falls short of the kind of friendship that plants seeds of faith. Do you see these barriers in your life? How can you get past them? Ask God to help you make finding one new friend a priority.

CAUGHT SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5 | JOHN 21:15-19

Peter truly loves Jesus. Their relationship is a good example of faith being more caught than taught. As we look at Jesus' life, we see how faith is caught, and how friendship is the primary bridge Jesus uses to walk from one life into another. It's not about preaching to people, or having all the answers, or converting or convincing. It certainly isn't about shoving the Bible down someone's throat. It's simply about befriending someone, loving them well, earning their trust and respect. And, more often than not, in the context of genuine friendship, faith happens – not because we bring the subject up, but because they do. What have you learned about building genuine friendships this week? How can you apply it?

Ask yourself, honestly, will you do it? Ask God to give you the courage, the desire, and the intentionality to follow through.