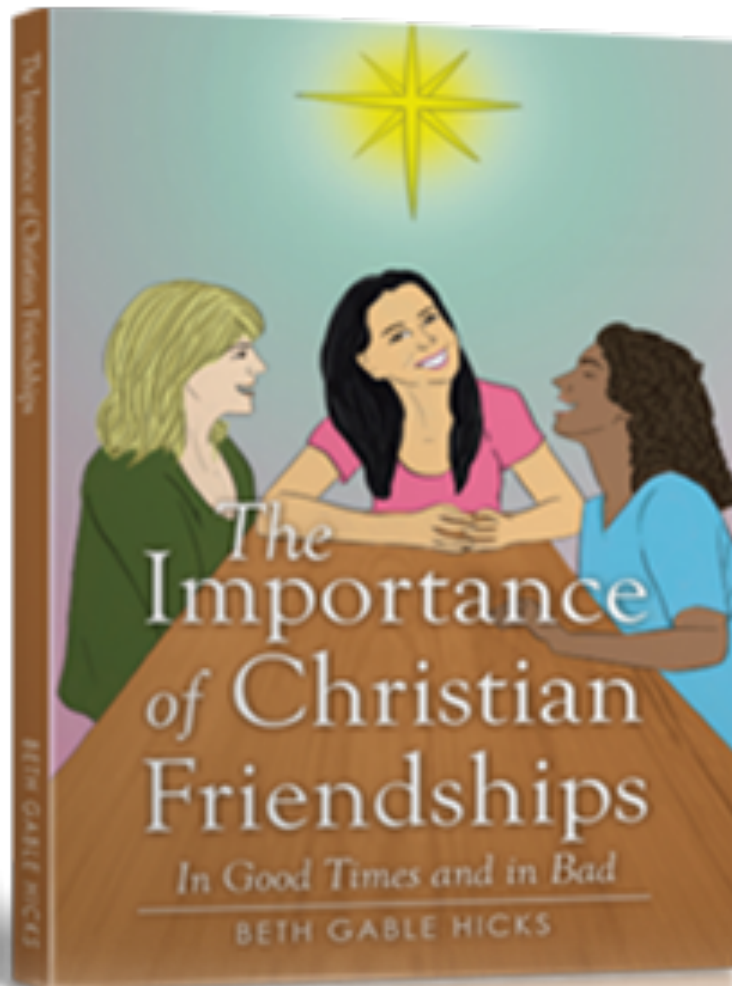


The Importance of Christian Friendships

Study Guide



Chapter 1: They are Understanding, not Judgmental

Why? Because they know we are all sinners.

Discussion

Read John 8:1-11. What lesson can we learn from Jesus about not condemning another person for their sin?

Questions

- When you struggle to show understanding, how do you do it?
- Has there been a time when a friend was judgmental, and it caused you to question whether or not they were a Christian, or even a good person?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed understanding and it strengthened the relationship?

Tips

- If you find it difficult to show understanding, just work on it. Think before you judge, and get to really know the other person.
 - If you are being judged, pause and think about where the judgment is coming from. It may say more about the other person than about you. But check with God in prayer!
 - Remember that God is the ultimate judge.
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Chapter 2: They are Content, Not Envious

Why? Because they know that, one day, the world will be redeemed.

Discussion

Read 1 Samuel 18. What did Saul's jealousy cause him to do?

Questions

- When you struggle to not be envious, how do you do it?
- Has there been a time when a friend was envious and it caused a strain in the relationship?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed contentment rather than envy, and it really impressed you?

Tips

- Cultivate gratitude and count your blessings every day.
- Don't compare your life to someone else's.
- Ask God to show you how much you can depend on him.
- Learn to be teachable, and keep your eyes wide open.

Chapter 3: They bring Hope, not Despair

Why? Because they place their hope in God, whatever their circumstances may be.

Discussion

Read Job 10:1-4, Job 13:23-24, and Job 42: 1-4. What can we learn from these scriptures about overcoming despair?

Questions

- When you feel despair, how do you overcome it?
- Has there been a time when a friend struggled with despair, and you had a difficult time pulling them out of it?
- Has there been a time when a friend gave you hope, and it made a difference?

Tips

- Turn your eyes upon Jesus, and your eternal home in heaven, and let him turn your despair into hope.
 - Have confidence that what God has done for us in the past, and what he has promised us in the scriptures, he will do for us in the future.
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Chapter 4: They are Humble, not Proud

Why? Because they know we are here to glorify God, not ourselves.

Discussion

Read Daniel 3 about Nebuchadnezzar. How did God use the king's pride to show His power and authority as King of Kings?

Questions

- How do you keep your pride in check?
- Has there been a time when a friend was pumped up with personal pride and it separated them from God?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed humility and it really impressed you?

Tips

- Remember that pride can often separate us from God, and cloud our ability to see his plans for our lives.
- Remember the humility of Jesus, how his humility gave his death its value and so became our redemption.
- Remember that wisdom and exaltation can be gained only through humility.

Chapter 5: They are Forgiving, not Resentful

Why? Because they know that God forgave us first, through Christ's incarnation.

Discussion

Read Genesis 45:1-14. How was Joseph able to forgive his brothers, and what impact did it have on them?

Questions

- How do you find forgiveness when the other person may not deserve it?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed you forgiveness when you didn't deserve it, and it opened up your heart?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed resentment, and you could see how much it was hurting them?

Tips

- Don't ever forget, even for a minute, how much you were forgiven. Know it, believe it, and accept it with all your heart.
 - Resentment shows a lack of faith in God and his plan, and it can stem from a love of the things of this world. So don't let hurt become hate, and instead, pray for those who have hurt you.
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Chapter 6: They are Honest, not Deceitful

Why? Because they know it brings God's peace and contentment.

Discussion

Read Genesis 20:1-18. What were the consequences of Abraham's deceit, to his family and to Abimelech's family?

Questions

- How do you practice honesty?
- Has there been a time when a friend was dishonest, and it damaged the relationship?
- Has there been a time when you were honest, and it was especially painful or risky?

Tips

- For happiness and prosperity, now and in the future, Peter advises us to secure God's blessing by being honest when we speak.
- No matter how charming or charismatic the person, don't fall into the belief that you can walk away from the truth of God's commands. You are sure to share in the consequences.

Chapter 7: They bring Harmony, not Discord

Why? Because they know harmony shows anticipation of Christ's return.

Discussion

Read James 4:1-12. What can we learn here about avoiding discord?

Questions

- Are you more likely to bring harmony or discord to relationships?
- Has there been a time when a friend brought discord, and it caused problems that didn't need to exist?
- Has there been a time when you brought people together?

Tips

- The only way to be truly prepared for God's return is to move forward together in harmony, not to take backward steps by practicing discord.
 - When we remember God's mercy and draw on his strength, we invariably see things more clearly and respond to conflict more wisely. We are to draw on his grace and seek peace with others.
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Chapter 8: They seek to Praise First, before Criticizing

Why? Because they know this was the example of Christ.

Discussion

Read Matthew 18:15-17, and Galatians 6:1. What do these scriptures teach us about the proper way to correct a Christian brother or sister?

Questions

- How do you fight the tendency to criticize?
- Has there been a time when a friend praised you before they criticized you, and it really made an impression on you?
- Has there been a time when you were able to praise first, before criticizing, and the reaction was positive and memorable?

Tips

- Remember to look for and praise Christ-like characteristics and traits in another person. This strengthens our relationships.
- Remember how God loves us, and since he wants the best for us, he points out our faults, shortcomings and sins.
- A true friend will speak the truth even when it is hard to hear.

Chapter 9: They are Temperate, Not Angry

Why? Because they know we are called to be slow in anger in obedience to God.

Discussion

Read John 2:13-16. How did Jesus show “righteous anger” at the temple?

Questions

- How do you get control of your anger?
- Has there been a time when a friend held their tongue, and it made an impression on you?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed anger and it damaged the relationship?

Tips

- Think about where the other person is coming from when they get angry. Communicating may go a long way to appeasing your anger.
 - Remember that in the world to come, the things we can get so angry about now won't matter at all. So don't waste your energy.
 - Instead, be angry for Christ – care about the things he cares about and let go of the things that he deems unimportant.
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Chapter 10: They seek the Truth, and do not Mislead

Why? Because they know that only things that are true will last.

Discussion

Read 1 John 2:1-11, and 1 John 4:1-4. What can we learn from these scriptures that can keep us from being misled?

Questions

- How do you seek the truth, and practice it?
- Has there been a time when a friend misled you, and it not only hurt your relationship with them, but also your relationship with God?
- Has there been a time when you led a friend on a righteous path, and they were eternally grateful?

Tips

- Those who live in the here and now but keep their sights on heaven avoid getting misled with lies (at least on a regular basis).
- Stay away from, and avoid conversing with, those who would lead you away from God and his plan for your life.
- Stay in his Word so you will not be misled.

Chapter 11: They have Courage, Not Fear

Why? Because they know God is with them.

Discussion

Read Esther 1:1-17; 3:8-10; 4:1-17, 5:1-3, and 8:1-8. If you strive to be an ounce more devoted to God than you are afraid, do you think you can do extraordinary things like Esther?

Questions

- How do you find courage in the face of fear?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed courage instead of fear, and credited the presence of God to the circumstance?
- Has there been a time when finding courage from God actually turned around a fearful situation for you, or for a friend?

Tips

- Remember that God already knows what you need. He may not give you everything you want, but he will give you everything you need.
 - Remember that God justifies us, and fears cannot separate us from Him.
 - Continually place your worries and fears into God's hands.
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Chapter 12: They bring Comfort, not Grief

Why? Because they know God is working his purpose out.

Discussion

Read John, chapter 11. What can we learn from Jesus about comfort and grief in this story of Lazarus?

Questions

- Are you more likely to bring comfort, or grief?
- Has there been a time when a friend brought you the comfort of Christ?
- Has there been a time when you were able to comfort someone else, because you had experienced God's comfort?

Tips

- Remember that while we may share in Christ's suffering, we will also share in his comfort.
- The best way to overcome grief is by comforting someone else.
- Grieving is a process. Focus on what God is teaching you along the way.
- Life is not fair, but God is good, so stay close to him so He can mend your heart.

Chapter 13: They learn to Adapt, and not be Stubborn

Why? Because they know God has a wonderful future for each of us.

Discussion

Read Judges, chapters 6 and 7. What can we learn from Gideon about the results of moving from stubbornness to adapting to God's plan?

Questions

- Do you find it easy to adapt, or are you resistant to change?
- Has there been a time when a friend was stubborn, and you felt it was working against God's plans?
- Has there been a time when a friend pointed out that your own stubbornness was keeping you from bearing fruit?

Tips

- Do not harden your heart with stubbornness – you may just want to hear from God, and He won't answer your prayers if you harden your heart, time after time.
 - Prayerfully seek God's plans for your schedule and goals, and you will see how wonderful and beautiful his plans really are.
 - Learn to adapt your plans to help others grow.
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Chapter 14: They dwell in Grace, not Guilt

Why? Because they know we were justified through Christ's death on the cross.

Discussion

Read Psalm 51. How did David turn from guilt to grace after he seduced Bathsheba and had her husband killed in battle?

Questions

- How do you find God's grace in the midst of guilt?
- Has there been a time when a friend accepted God's grace instead of feeling guilty, and it made an impact on you?
- When friends hold onto guilt, does it sadden you?

Tips

- Instead of feeling the weight of guilt, try to focus on the grace of God, and seek to be restored to a right relationship with Him.
- Remember that feeling guilty is a waste of time, since God has already forgiven us. Don't put yourself above the sovereignty of God's judgment.
- God stands ready to forgive and forget - if we confess our sins.

Chapter 15: They have Faith, and do not Doubt

Why? Because they have learned that their faith gives them strength.

Discussion

Read John 20:24-29. What do we learn from Jesus' response to Thomas?

Questions

- How do you hold onto faith when things are not going the way you think they should be going?
- Has there been a time when a friend had a lot of doubts and it separated them from the knowledge of how special they are to God?
- Has there been a time when a friend showed faith even when things seemed to be working against them?

Tips

- Put away doubt by focusing on God, and remembering what He has done for you in the past through his steadfast love.
 - Learn to "let go and let God." He only wants the best for you, and he will "make straight your paths" if you acknowledge him.
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Chapter 16: They are Long-Suffering, not Impatient

Why? Because they know that God is teaching them through suffering.

Discussion

Read Genesis 11:26-31 and 18:1-15. What can we learn from Sarah?

Questions

- Are you more likely to wait on God's plans, or act in impatience?
- Has there been a time when a friend suffered for a long time, and it was difficult for both of you to be obedient to God as a result?
- Has there been a time when your patience, or that of a friend, really showed God's grand design and purpose?

Tips

- An important part of long-suffering is obedience. After all, Christ did not go directly to heaven; he went to the cross first.
- Remember that long-suffering is teaching us to rely on God, and God alone.
- If we are impatient, we miss out on the miraculous things God has in mind for us. Windows do get opened when doors are closed, so wait to breathe in the fresh air.

Chapter 17: They Rely on God, and do not Complain

Why? Because they have learned that God's plan is marvelous.

Discussion

Read Exodus 16:1-8 and 17:1-6. Did the Israelites have reason to complain? What should they have done instead of complaining?

Questions

- How do you try to stop complaining and rely on God?
- Has there been a time when a friend was complaining and you saw clearly that they should be relying on God?
- Has there been a time when a friend counseled you and reminded you to rely on God when you were complaining?

Tips

- In the Old Testament, complaining was viewed by God as an act of unbelief. As believers, we should instead rely on God and avoid the mistakes (and consequences) laid out in the Old and New Testament.
 - When we complain, we are leaving no room for the sovereignty of a God who already has a plan for us that includes only the best.
 - God's light does not shine when we are complaining.
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Chapter 18: They seek to be Fulfilled, and are not Frustrated

Why? Because they know that true fulfillment can only be found through obedience to God.

Discussion

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20 and 2:1-3,9. What can we learn from Hannah?

Questions

- How do you try to turn feelings of frustration into feelings of fulfillment?
- Has there been a time when a friend was feeling frustrated and you felt they shouldn't be, when they had reasons to feel fulfilled?
- Has there been a time when a friend was fulfilled and it showed?

Tips

- When you are frustrated, think about whether or not you caused the situation. Maybe God wants you to achieve something different.
- Consider what you can learn from the situation to be more Christ-like.
- Remember that true fulfillment comes from God, given to those who please him.

Chapter 19: They know the Reasons to Believe, and are not Discouraged

Why? Because they are focused on what lies ahead.

Discussion

Read Numbers 14:1-20. What can we learn here about focusing on God's promises and provisions, rather than our own difficulties?

Questions

- How do you fight discouragement?
- Has there been a time when a faithful friend encouraged you?
- When was the last time you helped restore a friend's faith?

Tips

- It is human nature to become discouraged, but it is also a waste of time. Focus on what is ahead – heaven and the New Earth.
 - Keep turning over your disappointments to God, because He is more than willing to take on all your anxieties.
 - God promises that if you are faithful and obedient, you will be blessed.
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Chapter 20: They bring Compassion, not Self-Pity

Why? Because they know the example of Christ's compassion.

Discussion

Read the first 3 chapters of Ruth. What can we learn from Ruth about compassion, and Naomi about self-pity?

Questions

- Do you have the habit of feeling sorry for yourself for long periods?
- Has there been a time when you were able to bring compassion to a friend because of your own weaknesses?
- When was the last time you noticed a friend showing compassion because they were exemplifying Christ?

Tips

- Remember that dwelling in self-pity is not being steadfast and faithful.
- God is right there with us, when we ask, so we need not feel self-pity. He is in charge of the situation, so count your blessings.
- Remember the example of the Good Samaritan, and how Jesus is calling us to be our brother's keeper. He will have compassion for us if we have compassion on others, for that is His will.