



ONE ANOTHER

LIFE GROUP MATERIAL

Bracken Ridge
BAPTIST CHURCH

befriend

Is real friendship too risky? We live in a world where real friendship is hard to find.

Suspicious of others and insecure about ourselves, we retreat to the safety of our small, self-made digital worlds. Tragically, even the church can become a place that reinforces this isolation. Jesus models a much richer vision of friendship. Pastor and teacher Scott Sauls invites Christians to see the breadth of Christ's love toward people we often avoid. In this 6-session series, Scott outlines principles for befriending those around us with the love of Jesus.

Yes, it's true: Real friendship is costly. Love does make us vulnerable. But without risk, our lives will remain impoverished. Learn what it means to be a good friend in an age of judgment, isolation, and fear.

Accessing The Material

On the following pages you will find all of the information needed to go through the One Another Life Group Material. There are corresponding videos that can be accessed through our "RightNow Media" account with the church. If you don't have an account, go to rightnowmedia.org/Account/Invite/BrackenRidgeBaptistChurch. After creating an account search "Befriend" to access the 6 weeks.

rightnow MEDIA

If you are unable for some reason to access the material through these different means, please simply email office@brbc.org.au or call 07 3261 5045.

Bracken Ridge
BAPTIST CHURCH



befriend

create belonging in an age of
judgment, isolation, and fear

Participants' Handouts

Session 1: A Case for Befriending

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: In order for Christians to have deep friendships, we must first learn to befriend ourselves by realizing our identity in Christ.

Head Change: To know that we have a new identity in Jesus that should be understood, embraced, and applied.

Heart Change: To feel loved and known by God, grounding our identity in Christ rather than shame.

Life Change: To pursue God's will for our friendships, which is founded on our identity in Jesus.

OPEN

Leader: *Open the session with prayer. Pass out the Participants' Handout to everyone in the group. If your group is brand new or if everyone doesn't know each other well, spend time getting to know each other before asking the opening question.*

Describe your childhood best friend and share any funny or interesting stories about him or her. What did you do together? What did you have in common? What made that person a good friend?

Before we dive into the series, let's address the issue of friendship. *Befriend* is all about friendship—what it means to be a good friend both to Christians and to those who don't know Jesus. We're going to see how our relationship with God and our attitude toward ourselves influences the kind of friend we are. Scott Sauls, pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Nashville, will teach us principles from his book *Befriend* so we can be like Christ in our relationships.

Do you think friendship is a relevant topic to Christians? What kind of biblical teaching have you had on friendship in the past?

We're going to see how vital it is for us to be invested in our relationships. Friendship matters—it mattered to Jesus and it matters to us today. Let's hear what Scott has to say.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Scott's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Scott answers the following questions.

What's wrong with how we typically view friendship?

What are the three types of "lesser" friendships Scott describes? How does he define them?

How is our identity in Christ related to our friendships?

Show Session 1: A Case for Befriending (16 minutes)

REVIEW

The session opened with Felix's story. Felix became a Christian while in jail for selling drugs. When he was released, he started going to church but never thought he would fit in with the people there. After he opened up to a friend, he realized he had more in common with his friends at church than he thought. **In your experience, have you had the opportunity to be open with other Christians? If so, how has that impacted your friendships?**

Scott quoted C.S. Lewis, who said most real friendships begin when two people discover something they have in common. **What are your easy points of connection with other people? How do you feel when you find someone you connect with?**

True friendship begins with connection, but our culture has made friendship shallow and empty. Scott gave three types of lesser friendships:

- Digital friendship
- Transactional friendship
- One-dimensional friendship

Digital friendships are the relationships we have online, where people tend to highlight the best things about themselves and hide the rest. **What impact do your digital friends have on you? What do they lack that genuine friendships have?**

Transactional friendships happen when people use each other to get a leg up in life, their career, or their goals. These types of friendships can yield both positive and negative results. **When has a transactional friendship benefited you? Or on the other hand, how have you felt used through a transactional friendship?**

The final type of lesser friendship is one-dimensional friendship. These are the friendships that aren't deep and usually based on a mutual connection, but don't go beyond the surface. **How have shallow, one-dimensional friendships impacted you? What consequences did you experience from that type of friendship?**

Our friendships don't always match God's intended purpose. We can see the symptoms of the problem in the lesser forms of friendship. But how did we get there? Kim's story shows us that we are part of the problem. She believed she didn't fit the ideal of the "perfect" Christian woman, which resulted in comparison, loneliness, and depression. If we believe lies about ourselves, it can keep us from genuine relationships. **What sorts of lies do we often believe about ourselves? How could believing those lies affect other people?**

Scott said we often listen to the internal voice of shame instead of the voice of grace. **What differences have you noticed between the voice of shame and the voice of grace? What does shame say? What about grace?**

Scott talked about our worth, which is found in God. He loves us. He made us in His image. **If you've struggled with a poor self-perception, how has it influenced your relationship with others? Would you say it's been a positive or negative influence? Why do you say that?**

With our worth and identity settled in Jesus, we can begin to turn our inward focus onto others.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

When we choose to follow Jesus for the first time, He changes who we are. He gives us a new identity. We're now part of His family, free from sin and death, and filled with the Holy Spirit. We're redeemed, restored, and loved. Our identity in Christ directly relates to how we approach friendships. Paul brings these two ideas together in his second letter to the church in Corinth.

In the section before the passage we're about to read, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the hope of eternity and he gives an appeal for himself and the other leaders of the church, saying it's the gospel that compels them to minister. Now, Paul explains how the gospel applies to the call of every Christian.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–21.

How do verses 14 and 15 describe what Jesus has done for us? What does it mean that we have “died”?

How does Jesus's death and resurrection communicate His love? Why would His love compel someone to live for Him?

What has been the difference between living for yourself and living for Jesus? How is your focus different? How does it change your actions?

Jesus's death and resurrection is at the core of our identity as Christians. When we put our faith in God, we die to sin and are made alive in Christ. When Paul says we no longer regard people by the flesh, he means we don't see people—or Jesus—from a worldly standard anymore. **What are some ways the world defines people? How does that differ from how God defines people?**

How would you describe your identity without Christ? According to Scott, does shame play a role in that identity?

Those who are in Christ, though, are no longer identified by the world's standards. We are completely free from sin and shame because of what Jesus has done for us. We are a new creation. **What do you think Paul means by a “new creation”? What's new about us? What has passed away?**

What does being a new creation mean for your identity? What is now true about you?

Leader: If time allows, this might be a good moment to talk with your group about identity in Christ. Discuss some of the ways Jesus changes who we are when we trust in Him. For example, we are redeemed (Gal. 3:13), adopted (Eph. 1:5), given life (John 10:10), seen as valuable (Matt. 10:31), loved (1 John 3:1), chosen (1 Pet. 2:9), given a purpose (Matt. 28:19–20), etc.

What do you struggle to grasp about your identity in Jesus? What lie do you think is at the center of that struggle?

What would it look like to fully embrace your identity in Christ? What would be different about your life?

What's stopping you from living like that now?

We can live out our identity in Christ right now. Take a look at the “Deeper Walk” section for ideas on how to express who you are in Christ this week. Consider how you could put it into practice over the next few days.

Look back to verses 18 and 19. Along with this new identity, God has also given us the ministry of reconciliation. **What do you think it means to be a minister of reconciliation?**

We are part of God's movement in the world. He chooses to use us in His salvation story. This passage goes as far as to call us His ambassadors. **How would you define the role of an ambassador? What does it mean to be an ambassador of Christ?**

These verses say that Christians are to be “ministers of reconciliation.” In other words, we're called to be the ones who carry the message of the gospel that says God has made a way for us to be at peace with Him. We take this message of peace to all we meet. **How might our role as ministers of reconciliation relate to our friendships?**

We carry Christ into every relationship. We should represent Him whenever we interact with anyone. Take a moment to consider your answer to the following question. **If you examine your closest friendships, how would you say you're doing in representing Christ in those relationships? Why do you think that is?**

Leader: The previous question can be used for reflection rather than group discussion. Consider allowing a minute or two for your group to think about their answer to this question.

What do you think a godly friendship looks like? How does that description compare to the lesser forms of friendship Scott talked about?

What's one practical way you could pursue God in one of your friendships? How could you put that into practice this week?

LAST WORD

The rest of the series is going to unpack the idea of being a minister of reconciliation—of being people who carry the truth of the gospel and live it out. Now that we're in Christ and called to be His ambassadors, there are practical ways we can pursue godly friendships. Each session will walk through a principle of befriending, which will equip us to carry Christ to whomever we encounter.

But for now, let's think about our identity in Christ. This week, consider spending time investigating how Jesus has transformed who we are. There's always an area of our identity in Him that we can grow in. Pray that God reveals any ways you can better realize how He sees you.

Let's close in prayer and ask God for these things.

DEEPER WALK

Leader: *Encourage your group to pick at least one of the following suggested applications to put into practice this week. You may even invite them to circle the one they choose. Follow up at the beginning of the next session to see how it went.*

Read: Read chapters 1–2 of Scott Sauls’s book *Befriend*. As you read, consider what it means to befriend yourself and others.

Pray: Praise God for saving you from sin and death this week. Take a few minutes each morning to thank Him from making you a new creation.

Write: On a sheet of paper, write a list of some of the lies you believe about yourself. Write a truth from Scripture to counter each lie and carry that list with you this week. Psalm 139, 1 John 1–5, and Romans 8 are great places to start.

Sing: Choose a worship song or two that reflects your new identity in Christ. Play those songs on your commute or while you get ready in the morning as a reminder of who you are in Him.

Memorize: Pick one verse (2 Corinthians 5:17, for example) from this session and memorize it this week.

Session 2: Befriend the God Who Embraces You

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: In order to have meaningful friendships as Christians, we should first befriend God.

Head Change: To know what God thinks about us and how that impacts our relationship with Him.

Heart Change: To feel God's love for us to prompt seeking a deeper relationship with Him.

Life Change: To operate out of God's love in our relationship with Him so we can grow closer to Him and form deeper relationships with others.

OPEN

Leader: *Open the session with prayer. Pass out the Participants' Handout to everyone in the group. Begin by following up with the Deeper Walk section from session one. What exercise did everyone choose? How did it go?*

Describe a favorite memory with one of your good friends. What makes that memory special? Would it be as memorable if it were with another person? Why not?

Sharing an experience with someone is one of the essential elements of friendship, which is the focus of this series. Scott Sauls talked in the last session about the problem of shallow and “lesser” friendships. Scott also explained how we need to befriend ourselves before we can befriend others. In this session, we're going to learn about the most important relationship in each of our lives: our relationship with God.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Scott's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Scott answers the following questions.

Why does our relationship with God matter to our friendships?

What is God's attitude towards us?

What's the difference between striving to be like Jesus and being with Jesus?

Show Session 2: Befriend the God Who Embraces You (16 minutes)

REVIEW

The session began with Julian's story—he wandered far from God and his life fell into pieces. But when he decided to give up his reckless life and follow God instead, he began to change. His story shows us how important it is to have a relationship with God. **How has knowing Him changed you? How is being in a relationship with God different than not being in a relationship with Him?**

Scott reviewed the gospel story to remind us how much God loves us. The story of how God rescued us from sin and death is the key to knowing Him. **In your relationship with God, what has been the most poignant point of the gospel for you? Why is that aspect of the story particularly moving for you?**

Is it easy or difficult for you to recognize God's love for you? Why do you think that is?

Scott talked about how God knows us completely— the good and the bad. He said, "We are in Christ exposed but never rejected, known and always loved." **How does the idea of being fully known and fully loved settle with you? Is it exciting? Frightening? Moving? Why?**

Once we've entered into relationship with God, we can sometimes lose sight of what God says about who we are. We fall into the perfectionism trap, like Andrea did, and think we have to be perfect to earn God's favor. **Have you ever fallen into the perfectionism trap? How did it affect you and your relationship with God?**

Scott told the story of Mary and Martha. You can read their story in Luke 10:38–42. While Mary slowed down and sat at Jesus's feet, Martha rushed to make food and serve her guests. **Was Martha wrong to want to serve her guests? How did Scott diagnose her problem?** (He said she had a busy heart. She was preoccupied with achievement rather than focusing on what really mattered—being with Jesus.)

What things preoccupy your time, thoughts, and energy other than Christ? Would you say your focus is ultimately on Jesus, or on one of the things you just listed? How do you think those things impact your relationship with God?

Scott said, "Your first step is to stop striving to be like Jesus and instead invest your energy in being with Him." **What does it look like when you strive to be like Jesus in your own strength? What's different about simply being with Jesus?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Our relationship with God is critical. We often complicate it by making a list of to-dos or setting expectations for ourselves and other Christians. But relating to God begins with the simple truths of the gospel.

In 1 John, John writes to believers to draw them back to the basics of the gospel. He answers the question, "What does it mean to be a Christian?" in these short chapters. We're picking up in chapter 4.

Read 1 John 4:7–12.

How does John describe God in these verses? (God is love. He loved us first by sending Jesus to cover our sins. No one has seen God.)

What is the correlation between God's love and the love of Christians? Why do you think John connects the two?

Using these verses, how would you define love?

God expressed His deep love for us by sending Jesus to earth not only to pay the price for our sins, but to also offer us a new way of life. God has poured out His love so that we could be in relationship with Him.

What should be our motivation for loving others, according to John? (Our motivation should be God's love.)

We see in these verses that there's a clear connection between God's love for us and our love for others. John elaborates on this connection in the next section of verses.

Read 1 John 4:13–21.

What are the characteristics of those who abide in God? (They have the Spirit, confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and abide in the love of God.)

What does it mean to abide in God or in His love? (It means to constantly soak yourself in God, His love, and His truth.)

What can you do to abide? (Some examples include: reading Scripture, personal prayer, corporate prayer, daily visual reminders of God's love, etc.)

Abiding in Christ is hard to define because it often looks different for every believer. Though we should all be doing things like reading the Bible and praying, even the practice of those two habits differs from person to person. In Christian circles, we often impose our idea of what following Jesus should look like. We create checklists or set unattainable standards—both for others and ourselves. **Have you ever turned abiding in Christ into a checklist? What did it do to your relationship with God?**

When we make our relationship with God about achievement or pleasing the expectations of others, it's as if we're dousing a campfire with water. Instead of focusing on God's love—all that He's done for us through Christ—and loving Him, our relationship with Him becomes about other people's expectations. **What are potential personal and relational consequences of focusing on what people think rather than on God? How has this played out in your life?**

How do you feel when following God feels more like a duty than a delight? What helps you remember His love?

Reread 1 John 4:17–18. **Aside from love for others, what else does God's love produce in us?** (Confidence for the day of judgment and no fear of punishment.)

God's love covers more than just our sin. He dealt with the penalty of sin too. We no longer have to fear the punishment of death—we are free. When we look to the future day of judgment, we don't see despair, we see hope. **Why do you think John includes this truth in this passage? How might it relate to our relationships?** (John gives us an eternal perspective in these verses. He reminds us that God's love is not only for today but for all eternity. When we put our relationships in perspective, we can freely love others today while hoping for the future return of Christ.)

Reread 1 John 4:19–21. **What do these verses say about how our relationships with others connect to our relationship with God?**

We see in this passage what Scott talked about in the teaching: we cannot be a good friend to others if we are not first abiding in the love of God. These verses were written to Christians in the early church. John knew how critical it was for Christians to be unified in the love of Christ. But the only way they could have relational peace was for them to first remember the love of God.

What about God's love compels you to love others?

These verses show us that our relationship with God fuels our relationships with others. As His love fills us, it overflows into every nook and cranny of our lives. As we abide in Him, we know Him better. When this happens, we understand His love deeper. And His love drives us to do the same to the people in our lives. **Looking forward to this week, how could you practice abiding in Christ? What's one practical step you could take to being with God and enjoying His love?**

The love described in these verses is unlike any worldly love. It is selfless and sacrificial. It casts out fear and reflects the character of God. **When has someone extended this kind of love to you? How did it make you feel?**

Who could you love with God's love this week? Practically speaking, what could that look like?

LAST WORD

The relationship you have with God impacts much more than your heart and actions. Knowing God and steeping in His love changes the way you relate with other people. With God as our source and focus, He gives us the ability to love others well. He gives us the Holy Spirit who teaches us what it means to be like Christ in all of our relationships. We have everything we need to be a good friend. All we have to do is take a step of obedience.

The rest of this series is going to focus on what it looks like to pour out the love of God to others. But as we close this session, let's take a moment to reflect on our relationship with God. **How are you doing? What's going well?**

Where do you see room for growth? How would you describe your attitude towards God? How are you doing in accepting His love?

Leader: *Give your group a few minutes to reflect on these questions. Encourage them to write them down and go over them throughout the week. If it fits the culture of your group, consider breaking everyone into pairs to discuss these questions together.*

Take a few minutes to reflect on these questions. Pray through them this week, and ask God to reveal Himself to you.

DEEPER WALK

Leader: *Encourage your group to pick at least one of the following suggested applications to put into practice this week. You may even invite them to circle the one they choose. Follow up at the beginning of the next session to see how it went.*

Read: Read chapter 3, 4, and 21 in Scott Saul's book *Befriend*. As you read, consider what God might be telling you about loving others with His love.

Pray: Take a few minutes this week to talk to God about your relationship with Him. Lay down any expectations you impose on yourself, confess sin, and ask Him to fill you with His love as you go about your week.

Abide: Spend a few minutes each morning thinking about how God has expressed His love to you through Jesus. Consider writing down your thoughts as you spend time with Him.

Memorize: Commit 1 John 4:19 to memory this week. Recite the verse to yourself throughout the day to remind you why we're to love others.

Love: Choose one person in your life to intentionally love this week. Do one loving action for them and pray for them. Ask God to express His love through you to this person.

Session 3: Recognize Our Weaknesses

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: When we recognize, confess, and repent from our sin, we are able to develop deep friendships and seek reconciliation.

Head Change: To know all of us fall short in our relationships and hurt those closest to us.

Heart Change: To feel the necessity of reconciliation and forgiveness because of the reconciliation and forgiveness brought by Jesus.

Life Change: To confess sin, repent, and seek reconciliation.

OPEN

Leader: Open the session with prayer. Pass out the Study Guide to everyone in the group. Begin by following up with the Deeper Walk section from session two. What exercise did everyone choose? How did it go?

Describe a time when you moved or helped someone else move. What did you do to help out?

Was there ever a point where you realized you needed help lifting or moving something? Were you quick to ask for help or more hesitant? Why do you think that is?

It can be hard to admit we're weak, especially in our relationships. In this session, Scott Sauls will walk us through how to recognize that we mess up and hurt others. He'll also share how to come about mending our friendships.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Scott's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Scott answers the following questions.

How does sin affect our relationships?

Is reconciliation possible? How?

Show Session 3: Recognize Our Weaknesses (17 minutes)

REVIEW

This session began with Matt's story. He kept his addiction to alcohol a secret, even from his wife. When he finally had to tell her, it devastated their relationship. **Why do you think hidden sin tears relationships apart?**

Like Matt, we often tend to hide our sin rather than acknowledge it openly. **Why do you think it sometimes seems better to hide our sin instead of being open about it?**

Scott explained how sin alienates us from God and each other. **How have you felt the relational isolation that comes with sin?**

Have you ever thought you might be the only one who struggles with the same sins as you? Why do you think we often feel like that is the case? Is it the truth? Why not?

Scott explained the importance of surrendering everything in our lives to God—every sin, every habit, every relationship. One way we can do that is by confessing sin to Him and to others. **How does it feel to confess your sin to a safe person?**

Caleb and Ashley's story reminded us that reconciliation is possible in relationships. When Ashley confessed what she had done, she and Caleb were able to begin the process of healing and forgiveness.

When have you experienced reconciliation? How did it feel to mend that relationship?

Scott taught that we're only able to seek reconciliation with others because of what Jesus has done for us. Reconciliation is part of the DNA of God's people. **Have the people of God been a source of reconciliation for you? If so, what happened and how did they bring about reconciliation?**

When have you fought for a friendship with another believer? What did it take to keep the friendship going?

Does being at peace with other Christians mean we have to be close friends with every single believer? What does it mean?

We're never expected to be friends with everyone, but we are called to be at peace with Christians. Often, being at peace with others begins in our own hearts with the confession of sin.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Admitting our sin can be one of the most difficult things we ever do. It puts you in a vulnerable position before God and the people who matter most to you. But, it's essential for us as Christians to fight against the sin in our lives. If we don't, it could have drastic consequences. Scripture speaks to the importance of admitting our weaknesses.

Read 1 John 1:5–10.

How does John describe God in these verses? (God is light. There's no darkness in Him.)

What does light do to something that was in darkness? (It reveals it, exposes it, brings it to sight.)

What might it mean, then, to live in God's light? What does God's light expose in us?

God is gracious enough to expose our sin. Before we knew Him, we were in darkness and sin suffocated us. Now, our sin is brought to light. And instead of facing God's wrath, we're met with His grace and forgiveness. **What's difficult for you about God bringing your sin to light? How does it feel to know you'll be met with His grace and forgiveness?**

Why is it untruthful for someone to walk in darkness—in sin—and claim to follow God? How does living with unexposed sin hurt someone's relationship with God?

How does claiming to be sinless make God a liar? Aside from God, who do we hurt when we say we're without sin?

We've all had sin that we haven't immediately brought to light. Maybe some of us are still hiding our sin because it doesn't seem that important or impactful to our lives. But any sin, no matter how big or small, affects us and our friendships.

Think about how unexposed sin could hurt you and your relationships as we move forward in our discussion.

Secret sin hurts your relationship with God and with others. We saw some of the severe consequences in each of the real life stories. But these verses also point us to the good that comes from our sin coming to the light. **How do these verses describe someone who walks in the light?**

When has a sin been brought out of the darkness in your life? What did God teach you in the process?

What does it feel like to experience God's forgiveness after confessing sin? What about forgiveness from others?

One of the fundamental elements of the Christian walk is acknowledging and confessing sin. If we let it fester in the dark, it has the potential to swallow us whole. That's why Scott emphasized how important it is to recognize our own shortcomings—if we don't, it can damage us and our relationship with God. We see hints of how it can affect our relationship with others in these verses, but there's another passage that drives the point home.

Read Matthew 7:1–5.

What point does Jesus make in the first two verses of this passage? (We should not judge others because that same measure of judgment will be applied to us.)

What is someone doing if they cast judgment on another person? (They're comparing that person to a certain standard to see if they measure up.)

Why do you think Jesus didn't want His followers to judge others? (We are just as sinful as anyone else. When we judge someone, we put ourselves above that person but the reality is we are just as evil as they are.)

The kind of judgment Jesus is talking about fuels our pride and puts others to shame. We often cast judgment on others without taking a look at our own sinfulness first. The next few verses give an illustration of what it's like to judge someone without acknowledging your own shortcomings. **What's hypocritical about finding the faults in others without first examining yourself?**

Sin that lives in the darkness not only has the potential to destroy us, but also our relationships with others. **When have you felt judged by someone else because of something you did? How did their judgment make you feel?**

This passage isn't saying we should let sin slide. It is saying we should be careful before we judge someone else's sin. **Have you ever confronted someone about a sin issue? How did you go about doing it? Would you say you did a good job of examining the "plank in your eye" beforehand? Why or why not?**

Leader: Make sure to monitor how your group answers the previous question in order to avoid gossip. If the temptation to gossip is an issue for your group, consider asking the questions hypothetically instead.

What principle about sin can you pull from this passage? What would it look like to apply it to your life this week?

LAST WORD

Whether we realize it or not, our sin affects the people around us. It has a way of seeping into the crevices of life and hurting people in ways we never intended. As we've discussed in this session, none of us is sinless—we all have something God needs to work on in our lives. As we move forward in our discussion on friendship, let's pause to consider how our sin might be affecting those around us. Take a moment to reflect on the following questions.

Leader: You can choose to leave these as reflective questions or, if your group feels comfortable sharing, consider opening the questions up for answers.

What sin or sins are unexposed in your life? How might they be damaging your relationships?

What objections do you have to confessing that sin? How do these objections compare with the consequences of leaving it in the dark?

What's one step you could take this week to bring that sin to light before God and others?

Let's close in prayer for each other and for our relationships.

DEEPER WALK

Leader: *Encourage your group to pick at least one of the following suggested applications to put into practice this week. You may even invite them to circle the one they choose. Follow up at the beginning of the next session to see how it went.*

Read: Read chapters 5–8 of Scott Sauls's book *Befriend*. As you read, ask God to expose ways you might be sinning against Him and your friends.

Pray: Take five minutes to pray for God to reveal your sin this week. Ask Him for the strength to confess your sin and thank Him for forgiving you.

Remind: Write out one of the passages from this session (1 John 1:5–10 or Matthew 7:1–5) on a 3X5 notecard and place it somewhere you'll see it often. Use it as a reminder of the principles from this session.

Ask: If a situation arises this week where you know you've hurt someone else, ask them for forgiveness. If appropriate, consider sharing with the person why admitting to sin is important to you.

Confess: Consider confessing a sin this week. Whether that looks like writing it down in a journal or telling a spouse or trusted friend, choose to bring a sin into the light this week.

Session 4: Overcome Fear and Prejudice

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: Christians should recognize and fight against fear and prejudice in order to befriend others.

Head Change: To know the impact of fear and prejudice on ourselves and others in order to push past those barriers in our friendships.

Heart Change: To feel the destructive weight of fear and prejudice in relationships so that we can choose to fight against it in our friendships.

Life Change: To identify, confess, and repent from prejudice and to seek reconciliation with those we've hurt.

OPEN

Leader: *Open the session with prayer. Pass out the Study Guide to everyone in the group. Begin by following up with the Deeper Walk section from session three. What exercise did everyone choose? How did it go?*

When you were in high school, what group of friends did you belong to? What was their reputation on campus? How did others see you?

Were their judgments about you correct? What was your group of friends actually like?

In this session, we're going to be talking about the prejudices we hold against other people. We started off the conversation with the light topic of high school, but we know that prejudice carries a heavy weight in our world. Before we begin, let's pray that God would soften our hearts to what He has to say to us in this session.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Scott's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Scott answers the following questions.

How does prejudice damage relationships?

How did Jesus act towards others? What do His actions say about how we should treat others?

Show Session 4: Overcome Fear and Prejudice (15 minutes)

REVIEW

Before we get started on our conversation about fear and prejudice, let's clear the air. **How do you feel about talking about fear and prejudice? What hesitations do you have? What makes you nervous?**

This session has the potential to push some buttons, and rightly so. Let's make this a safe place for us to wrestle through this issue.

Jerri shared her story of having a prejudice against Muslims. She asked God to never ask her to read the Bible with them out of fear for her life. But God moved in a miraculous way in her life and she now ministers to Muslims daily. **Like Jerri, are there any prejudices in your heart that you know exist? How do you talk to God about those prejudices?**

Scott listed off several kinds of prejudice: racial, religious, political, gender, cultural. **What are other forms of prejudice you've encountered?**

Have you ever been the object of someone else's prejudice? How did it make you feel?

Scott encouraged us to ask God to show us our blind spots when it comes to prejudice. **How do you feel about asking God to reveal your prejudices?**

Nervous? Intrigued? Uncomfortable? Why do you think that is your reaction?

Scott shared a few examples from Jesus's life and teaching to show how Jesus is our perfect example of how to handle prejudice. Instead of responding with judgment, Jesus extends compassion. **What about Jesus's response to people resonates with you? How do you think you'd respond if someone treated you that way?**

Tom's story offered an incredible picture of what it means to extend compassion to another person. Tom befriended Joe and met a very practical need—he washed Joe's feet. **How do you think Tom's actions affected Joe?**

Could you ever see yourself doing something like what Tom did for another person? What would be difficult about serving someone in that way? What would be fulfilling about it?

Has someone ever lovingly told you about a blind spot in your life? How did it feel for your friend to call you out? What—if anything—changed as a result of your conversation?

Scott used the example of Nathan confronting David about his sin to illustrate how we should respond when someone confronts us in love. **What's your gut reaction when someone confronts you about sin? What might a Christlike response look like?**

Sometimes fear and prejudice blind us so much that we don't even recognize it in ourselves and someone else has to show us. Let's see how this reality played out in the early church.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Fear and prejudice has plagued humanity since sin entered the world. Jesus confronted it in his own ministry and the early church had its own set of tensions because of it. One of the biggest issues in the early church was the separation between Jews and Gentiles. The division was racial, social, religious, and political. Before Christ's death and resurrection, Jews avoided Gentiles because they were considered unclean—or not holy. This issue cropped up in the early church in several ways, one being food. Jews had specific dietary laws passed down from Moses, so eating with Gentiles or eating the food they made was shameful.

We're going to examine part of Peter's life to see what God and His gospel have to do with prejudice.

Read Acts 10:9–16.

What did God tell Peter through his vision? (God told Peter all foods are now clean. There isn't a division between what Jews eat and what Gentiles eat for those who believe in Jesus.)

God makes it clear to Peter the division between Jews and Gentiles because of food should no longer exist for the people of God. After Peter received the vision, a centurion named Cornelius—who wasn't Jewish— asked for Peter to meet him because of a message he received from God. You can read more in Acts 10:1–8 and 17–27. We'll pick up the story after Peter arrives at Cornelius's house.

Read Acts 10:28–35.

How do these verses show a change in Peter's perspective on Jews and Gentiles? (He associates with a Gentile by entering his house and realizes he should not call anyone common or unclean.)

What does Peter conclude about God in verses 34 and 35? (God shows no partiality and anyone who fears Him is acceptable to Him.)

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God now offers the gift of salvation to all people. He brings anyone who puts their faith in Jesus into His family—He shows no partiality. **Since God shows no partiality, what does that tell us about how we should act towards others?** (It shows we also should not show partiality.)

The gospel breaks down every dividing wall that once stood between us and other people. Our actions should reflect that truth and we see Peter personify what that could look like in this story—sharing the gospel with people much different than you. But Peter didn't always act as he did in this story.

Read Galatians 2:11–14.

Paul writes to the church in Galatia about his experience with Peter—also called by his Aramaic name, Cephas—at Antioch. **What did Peter do before the visitors arrived?** (He ate with the Gentiles.) **What did he do when they arrived?** (He separated himself from them.)

Why would Peter separate himself from the Gentiles? What was he concerned about? (He was concerned about how he appeared to the visitors. His focus was selfish and not on the Gentiles or even the good of the Jews.)

How do Peter's actions display fear? Prejudice?

How would you have felt if you were a Gentile in that story? How would have Peter's actions hurt you?

How does Paul describe Peter's actions in verse 14? (They were not in step with the gospel.) Why was what Peter did a gospel issue? What had he forgotten?

Prejudice and fear are gospel issues. God revealed as much to Peter in the vision—in Christ, there is no division and nothing unclean. Jesus unifies us through His sacrifice and to live in a way contradictory to that essential truth results in hypocrisy.

What do you feel when someone's actions don't match the gospel message? How have you been hurt by those actions?

As we close this session, consider how you might be out of step with the gospel truth. Pray God would reveal the ways you've acted that contradict the gospel message. **What could be one step of obedience you could do this week in response to the teaching in this session?**

LAST WORD

We learn from Peter's example how easy it is for fear and prejudice to crop up in our lives. None of us is above it. We should be diligent about asking God to reveal those blind spots in us and to teach us to keep in step with the gospel truth. Paul shows us our responsibility to keeping others accountable for their actions, especially when they contradict the gospel. If we are to confront others, we must remember the principles from the last session: begin by removing the log from your own eye before removing the speck in your friend's.

As we close this session, let's all consider whether or not fear and prejudice appear in our lives. Maybe you have prejudice against a certain group of people, type of person, or income bracket. Set aside intentional time this week to talk to God about fear and prejudice. Ask Him to reveal the gospel truth to you and to show you a practical next step to overcoming fear and prejudice.

Let's close in prayer.

DEEPER WALK

Leader: *Encourage your group to pick at least one of the following suggested applications to put into practice this week. You may even invite them to circle the one they choose. Follow up at the beginning of the next session to see how it went.*

Read: Read chapters 9, 13, and 14 of Scott Sauls's book *Befriend*. As you read, consider the biases you might have against the groups talked about in each chapter.

Pray: Spend time in prayer this week about fear and prejudice. Ask God to reveal any sin in your heart and ask for Him to provide the next practical step of obedience.

Discuss: Sit down with a friend you know has been a victim of someone else's prejudice. Ask them how the situation made them feel and pray for them.

Study: Read all of Galatians 2 this week and take note of how the gospel radically changed how Jews and Gentiles related to each other. Consider ways you could live out the gospel truth in your life this week.

Research: Maybe this session sparked your interest in racial, social, or political prejudice. Take time this week to research the issue that interests you and pray for practical opportunities to use what you learn to further the gospel.

Session 5: Seek to Understand

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: By seeking to understand people we don't easily get along with, we can begin to form deeper connections with people and better friendships.

Head Change: To know why seeking to understand the people in our lives is important so that we can deepen our relationships with others.

Heart Change: To feel the weight of misunderstanding others and its effect on friendships so we can grow to seek to understand others.

Life Change: To take intentional steps to seek to understand the people in our lives so that our friendships will be characterized by deep understanding.

OPEN

Leader: *Open the session with prayer. Pass out the Study Guide to everyone in the group. Begin by following up with the Deeper Walk section from session four. What exercise did everyone choose? How did it go?*

What are some of the unlikely friendships portrayed in movies, TV shows, or books? (Sherlock and Dr. Watson, Legolas and Gimli from *The Lord of the Rings*, the characters from *Remember the Titans*, etc.)

What bonds the characters together? Would you say they understand each other?

Characters in our favorite stories often connect over a common experience, a mutual understanding, or a shared interest. In this session, we'll be discussing what it means to seek to understand others. We can be a bridge of connection to unbelievers and believers alike.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Scott's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Scott answers the following questions.

What does Scott mean when he says we should "seek to understand" others?

What does it mean that everyone in our lives is fighting a "hidden battle"?

What bond do Christians share? How should that affect our friendships with Christians?

Show Session 5: Seek to Understand (16 minutes)

REVIEW

Karena told her story to start off this session. She experienced an unexpected and unwanted divorce and when she needed her friends the most, they weren't there for her. **Have you ever been through difficulty and felt alone, like Karena felt? What got you through that hardship?**

If Karena were your friend, what would you have done for her? How would you have shown her love during her divorce?

Scott reminded us that everyone we meet is fighting an unseen battle—there's always more to the story. We sometimes tend to make snap judgments about people without knowing the full story. **How have people made snap judgments about you without knowing you or the full story? How did it make you feel?**

How would you have felt if someone tried to understand you and your situation before jumping to conclusions?

This session is about seeking to understand others. Scott used the negative example of Job's friends to illustrate how important it is for us to try to understand what others are going through. Job's friends grieved with Job for a time, but then they brought him more pain when they opened their mouths. **Without turning to gossip, what are particularly unhelpful things people have said to you during a difficult time—such as a death, chronic illness, or loss of a job?**

What would have been more loving and helpful for people to say or do instead?

Scott talked about creating safe environments where people feel welcomed and allowed to be themselves. **What are the qualities of a safe, welcoming environment? How would you describe a safe, welcoming person?**

Elise shared her story of befriending Almaz. Though they are from completely different worlds, they've formed a strong bond of friendship by learning each other's stories and spending time together. Scott used their story to talk about how when we enter the family of God, we now have a deep connection with people we'd never normally be friends with because of Christ. **Thinking about your close Christian friends, how has Christ bonded you together in a unique way?**

How has Jesus created a bridge between you and other Christians you wouldn't normally befriend?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

Scott's principle from this session is to seek to understand others, which means to move beyond our assumptions about someone to learn about them and develop a relationship with them. But it begs the question, why? Why should we seek to understand others? And why don't we always do it?

We find the answer to the first question in the opening chapter of John. John sets up the verse we're about to read with a poetic introduction to Jesus—He's the word and the light of the world.

Read John 1:14.

What does John mean when he writes Jesus "dwelt" with us? Why is that significant?

When Jesus came, He entered into our sinful and evil world. He crossed into enemy territory and, instead of fleeing for the hills, He stayed. He befriended people and ate with them. He, above any other person, knows what it means to seek to understand.

Read Hebrews 4:14–16.

According to these verses, why is Jesus able to sympathize with us? (He was tempted in every way, so He knows what it's like to live in this world and to experiencing pain.)

Do you think He would have been able to sympathize with us in the same way if He hadn't come to earth?

Jesus offers us an image of what it means to seek to understand others. It means entering into their world and walking around in it. It means staying and listening without judgment. **What does it feel like to be truly understood by another person?**

As we know from the Gospels, Jesus didn't simply come and enter into our pain. He came so that through His life and sacrificial death, He could bring salvation to us all. As His followers, we have been called to the same sacrificial life. Paul brings up this idea in Romans.

Read Romans 12:1–2.

What do you think is involved in being a living sacrifice?

Living as a sacrifice begins in our own hearts with our relationship with God. But it doesn't stop there.

Read Romans 12:3–8.

Scott mentioned the truth of this passage in his teaching—we are part of a unified body of Christ. **What appeals to you about how Paul describes the Church in this passage?**

What does it mean to associate with the lowly? When have you seen this lived out?

If you look back on these verses, which commands do you think would be particularly difficult for you to obey? Why do you think that is?

What would be different about the church if everyone in it lived out the truths in Romans 12? How would you be different?

Look through the commands in this passage again.

Which ones would you associate with seeking to understand?

What, then, are some of the elements of seeking to understand someone? How does it involve sacrifice?

As we saw with Jesus in John and Hebrews, seeking to understand requires sacrifice. Jesus humbled Himself to be a human and walk among us. He gave His life for us. If we are to seek to understand others, the same element of sacrifice applies to us.

What often keeps us from seeking to understand other Christians?

How might fear be involved? (Fear of what people would think of you, fear of learning too much, fear of getting hurt, fear of hurting others, etc.)

In what ways is seeking to understand an inconvenience? (It takes time, energy, intentionality, etc.)

Would you say living sacrificially for the sake of others is worth it? Why?

This passage shows us that sacrifice for God and others is worth it. When we all set aside our selfishness and pride, we can experience true unity in Christ. **Which command from this passage would you like to see lived out in your life? How could you implement that truth this week?**

Using the principles from this passage, what could you do this week to seek to understand one brother or sister in Christ?

LAST WORD

Bearing with our brothers and sisters in Christ by seeking to understand them and their situation is an essential element of the Church. When we love each other sacrificially, as Paul described in Romans 12, we can also experience unity. But entering into someone else's world is difficult. It will require giving up something—time, energy, or resources. It's worth it though because loving someone in this way not only promotes unity, it makes us more like Christ.

You never know what someone is going through until you ask and choose to respond. As you go about your week, ask God to put other Christians in your path whom you might not immediately understand. Pray for opportunities to ask intentional questions, meet their needs, or spend time with them.

DEEPER WALK

Leader: *Encourage your group to pick at least one of the following suggested applications to put into practice this week. You may even invite them to circle the one they choose. Follow up at the beginning of the next session to see how it went.*

Read: Read chapters 15–18 in Scott Sauls's book *Befriend*. As you read, consider how Scott's perspective helps you understand the people he writes about.

Pray: If there's another Christian in your life you don't understand, pray for them this week. Pray for that person's spiritual walk, family, job, etc.

Reflect: Reflect on a friendship you've had with someone. Write down three ways they've personified the Romans 12 passage from this session. Thank them this week.

Study: Take 30 minutes to study Romans 12 further. Write down one way you could sacrificially love someone this week and put it into action.

Listen: Listen to a worship song about Jesus's sacrificial love. Reflect on what it might mean to love someone else in the same way.

Session 6: Love

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: In order to befriend someone, we must live out the love of Christ in all relationships.

Head Change: To know the love of Christ should infiltrate everyone of our friendships.

Heart Change: To feel the love of Christ so profoundly that it pours out to others.

Life Change: To love others the way Jesus loves us.

OPEN

Leader: Open the session with prayer. Pass out the Study Guide to everyone in the group. Begin by following up with the Deeper Walk section from session five. What exercise did everyone choose? How did it go?

What is one of the most loving things a friend has ever done for you? What made that action so loving?

What's your relationship with that person? How did the relationship make the gesture meaningful?

We've been talking about the principles of being a good friend. The most important quality of a genuine friend is love. Jesus exuded love to all He met and He asks us to do the same. We're going to discuss what love looks like lived out in our friendships.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Scott's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how Scott answers the following questions.

What does Scott mean when he calls some friends "underdogs"?

What kind of love should we extend to others? How can we practically love those in our lives?

Show Session 6: Love (16 minutes)

REVIEW

Cheryl's story reminds us what it means to extend love to someone who is struggling. In the midst of her divorce, her friends supported her, encouraged her, and stayed by her side. **Describe a time when your friends were there for you.**

What happened? How did they handle your situation? How did you react?

Scott said one type of friend we all need in our lives sometimes is the underdog—the person who needs our support and encouragement. **Do you agree with Scott's assessment that we all need "underdog" friends? Why or why not?**

Jesus tells us to love your neighbor as yourself. **With this truth in mind, how do you love your "underdog" friends as yourself? How would you want to be loved if you were in their situation?**

Scott told the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. He didn't condemn her for what she had done, but He also told her to leave her life of sin, acknowledging her sin blatantly. **What do you think the balance is between not condemning someone but also not whitewashing their sin?**

Jesus was willing to risk His reputation to hang out with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners. **What do you think Jesus was more concerned about—His reputation or the people He ministered to? What would it look like for us to have the same attitude?**

Ron's story gave another example of Christlike love. He ministered to homeless women as an outward expression of his faith in Jesus. His journey all began with a friend telling him about a need at the homeless shelter. **Have you ever met practical needs or served as Ron did? What did God teach you?**

Scott mentioned 1 Corinthians 13, which is commonly read at weddings. He said this chapter, though, is for the Church—it challenges Christians, teaching them how to love one another.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–7.

What do these verses say about how we're supposed to love each other?

Does the standard of 1 Corinthians 13 seem impossible? Why or why not? If we look to Jesus for strength, what do we know to be true?

Scott ended by reminding us that loving others begins with being near Jesus—by following Him, knowing Him, and becoming like Him. He's the one who empowers us to love others as 1 Corinthians 13 describes. He fills us with His Spirit so that we can share His love to all we meet.

BIBLE EXPLORATION

We've talked about how love is a characteristic of God and His people in this series. Jesus often reminds us of this reality in the Gospels. Right before His death and resurrection, Jesus knelt to serve His disciples by washing their feet. After serving them and predicting His betrayal, Jesus issues a new commandment.

Why do you think Jesus told His disciples to love each other rather than something else? What's significant about loving each other?

Jesus told His disciples to love others as He had loved them. **What are some specific examples of Jesus loving the disciples during His ministry?** (Some examples include: feeding them [John 21:1–14], teaching them about the kingdom [Matt. 5–7], healing their family members [Luke 4:38–39].)

Jesus loved His disciples by taking care of them, providing for their needs, and teaching them truth, among countless other things. When the disciples received the Holy Spirit in Acts, they led the church in loving each other as Jesus loved them.

Read Acts 4:32–37.

How do these verses reveal the love the people in the early church showed to each other? (They met each other's physical needs. They took care of each other. They didn't count their possessions as their own.)

What role did the apostles play in the early church? (They gave the testimony of the resurrection and distributed money and possessions to church members as they saw need.)

How are their actions also an extension of love to the Church?

In your experience, when has the local church done a good job at being a people who loves each other?

Looking back to John 13, Jesus wanted His disciples to be characterized by their love for each other. **Would you say the Church is generally known for our love for one another? Why or why not?**

Sadly, we've all seen times when the outside world perceives the Church as unloving and sometimes hostile. **What keeps Christians from loving other**

Christians in the ways highlighted in these verses? (greed, selfishness, personal agenda, money, etc.)

What do you think it communicates to those outside Christianity when we're not loving towards each other? What about when we are?

Our love for other Christians isn't just for the sake of Jesus and His people, it's also for those who do not yet know Him. When they see us loving each other, it gives them a glimpse of the love of Jesus. This love we have for Him and each other should overflow to touch everyone in our lives. We see this play out in Peter and John's lives.

Read Acts 3:1–10.

How do Peter and John's specific actions throughout this story communicate Jesus's love?

Again, we see the disciples meeting someone's physical needs. In the passage after this one, Peter and John share the gospel, reaching the once crippled man's spiritual needs. **How is sharing the gospel with someone an act of love?**

Looking at these two examples of what love looks like in the context of the early church, **how should we be extending love toward other Christians and outsiders?** (We should be meeting needs, sharing the gospel, and supporting each other.)

When we turn to conversations about the early church, it's easy to see how our local church might fall short of the standards set in Acts. We can be tempted to point fingers at others and say, "It's their fault. They're the unloving ones." But as we've discussed in this series, none of us is without sin. We've all been the cause of division in the church. **In what ways could we be part of the solution instead of the problem?**

Leader: Consider opening this question up for discussion. If you feel led, share your response to this question to start off the conversation.

As we realize our shortcomings in loving each other and others, we can take practical steps forward in the way of love. **In what ways are you already meeting people's needs at church and in your community?**

What are some practical ways you could get involved in meeting the needs of those in your church? If you're in leadership, how could you play a role in facilitating service and teaching truth?

LAST WORD

As we've discussed the topic of friendship, we've hit on some of the larger ideas in Scripture: what it means to be the Church, how to pour out the love of God, what it means to confess and repent from sin. **What's one thing you want to take away as we finish the study?**

How is God prompting you to obedience? **What's one practical thing you could do this week to put what you've learned from this series into practice?**

Being a good friend begins with our relationship with Jesus. He's the reason we're able to love others in the first place. Let's finish our time together thanking God for Jesus's death and resurrection and asking Him to empower us to be good friends.

DEEPER WALK

Leader: Encourage your group to pick at least one of the following suggested applications to put into practice this week. You may even invite them to circle the one they choose. Challenge them to follow up with someone in the group to talk about how it went.

Read: Read chapters 11, 12, 19, and 20 of Scott Sauls's book *Befriend*. As you read, consider what it might look like for you to extend love to the people described in these chapters.

Pray: Pray for your local church every day this week. Ask God to strengthen its leaders and bring unity between members. Pray your church would be a light to those who don't yet know Him.

Befriend: Ask God to bring one person into your life you could befriend. Practice the principles discussed in this study as you get to know that person.

Reflect: Write down three things you've learned or been convicted by through this series. Pray throughout the week for God to show you how to put each of those things into practice.

Illustrate: Pick one verse covered in this series or in Scott's book *Befriend* and write it out in a creative way. Draw a picture and overlay it with the verse or use calligraphy. Display your work in a prominent place to remind you of what God's taught you through this study.

