



Thank you for your interest in Among Friends—a thirteen-week study of relationships in the body of Christ.

The pages which follow include:

An overview of this series (1 page)

A sample handout (2 pages)

Again, thank you for your interest in our material. If you have questions or want to place an order, contact us at:

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AMONG FRIENDS

The subject you are about to explore with your class is a vital one to the health of the church today. Thank you for your willingness to teach this material. If the members of your class can be persuaded to think more carefully about the importance of relationships in the church, you will have done a great service to the kingdom.

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THE CHURCH IN CRISIS

Unless the church changes its form and gets back to community and the sharing of lives personally, the church is done.

Why would Dr. Francis Schaeffer, one of the church's most able defenders, issue such a dire warning about her future? Because the greatest challenge facing the church today is neither doctrinal nor moral. It is relational. In too many churches, we have lost our sense of family. We avoid sharing lives personally. We no longer see ourselves as a *community* of believers. The independence and isolation that afflict our society have now infected the Kingdom of God. As a result, we find ourselves less and less comfortable with the Christ who calls us to love one another as he has loved us.

But if that is a common reality in the church today, it is not her ideal. A desire is growing to rediscover the meaning of fellowship and to reestablish a sense of community. Much of the motivation behind this renaissance of concern for a deeper fellowship in the Christian community is born of simple desperation. As relationships disintegrate in every other sphere of our society, Christ's followers are increasingly convinced they must offer a clear alternative.

If Christians cannot provide vivid and compelling alternatives to decaying relationships in the world, the church *and* the world are in serious trouble. It doesn't take a prophet to suggest that unless the church influences relationships in the world, the world will determine the nature of relationships in the church.

Fortunately, the God who intended the world to be a relationship place did not leave us without an instruction manual. The Bible is filled with practical tools for making local churches gardens where relationships can grow. Page after page encourages us to learn the beautiful art of relating to each other in godly ways. All that needs to be added is a willingness in God's people to look carefully at God's plan for getting back to community and the sharing of lives personally.

For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1Jn 4:20-21



AMONG
FRIENDS

CLASS HANDOUT 1

[These studies are excerpted from *Among Friends*, James Hinkle and Tim Woodroof, NavPress, 1989.]

TALK IT OUT

*One of them,
an expert in the law,
tested him with this question:
“Teacher, which is the greatest
commandment in the Law?”*

*Jesus replied:
“Love the Lord your God with
all your heart and with all your
soul and with all your mind.”
This is the first and greatest
commandment.
And the second is like it:
“Love your neighbor as
yourself.” All the Law and the
Prophets hang on these two
commandments.”*

Mt 22:35-40

Like many of us, the Pharisees defined religion solely in terms of their relationship with God. Faith was a vertical business conducted between Heaven and earth. Not even a bleeding brother at the side of the road kept them from proper religious observance. Love of God was first, all else a distant last.

The radical implication of Jesus' teaching is that authentic Christianity, unequivocal in its command to love God, is equally a matter of how we relate to each other. Religious life has a horizontal aspect. We must exercise both a love for God and a love for people to avoid a crippled religion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Jesus gave this expert in the law more than he had asked for. Not the greatest single command, but the *two* greatest commands. Why didn't Jesus simply say, "Love God"? Why did he add "the second"?
2. Don't we wish that religion were more a matter of the first than the second of these commands? We do find the second command more difficult than the first. God is so *lovable*, you can depend on him, he is always constant. That's not always true of people.
3. I wonder if Jesus ever shakes his head and wants to tell us, "Read the rest of the passage!" What do you think?
4. Think about *1John 4:20-21* and *James 9:1-9*. What do these passages contribute to the discussion?
5. Do you experience the church as a "community?" What images does that rather old fashioned word bring to mind? Is our society getting better or worse at community? What about the church?
6. What could this class do to make the church more of a community? What could *you* do to be more obedient to Jesus' second command?

