

## SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS

**Darren Wright**

**“In the Habit” session for devozine meditations for January 27–February 2, 2014.**

### MAKING THE CONNECTION

“I have a suspicion that many kids in church have way too many church friends. I know I do. After all, we fill our weeks with church stuff, youth group, Bible study, **devozine**, kids club, holiday camps—the list goes on. Or perhaps, the young people you work with have few church friends; and the time you have with them is one of few times they meet with people of faith. Either way, I wonder how many of us have friends that we feel comfortable talking to about our faith and our doubt, our sense of call, our sense of loss, our questions and our certainties.

“I have often found that my non-Christian friends are easier to talk with about faith than my friends in the church, possibly because I don’t have the feeling that I am being judged.

“So the question for this week is this: Do we have spiritual friendships? Who are the people we can be honest with about who we are and what we believe? If not, how can we nurture spiritual friendships in our community?” —Darren

### MEET THE WRITER

**Darren Wright** is a Uniting Church Youth Worker, serving in the Riverina Presbytery in New South Wales, Australia, as the Presbytery Youth and Children’s Ministry Worker. Darren has previously worked in congregational ministry, high school chaplaincy, and local government as a youth worker. He has also been a petrol station attendant, supermarket employee, dairy manager, and furniture salesperson. His interests include music (Moby, Radiohead, Ben Harper, The National, Muse, All India Radio), film (*MegaMind*, *Harry Potter*, *How to Train your Dragon*, *Scott Pilgrim*, *The Avengers*), TV (*Chuck*, *Doctor Who*, *Big Bang Theory*, *Community*), theology, pop-culture, and working with young people in at-risk areas. He is particularly interested in how the church and theology connect with pop culture. Check out Darren’s blog at [www.digitalorthodoxy.com](http://www.digitalorthodoxy.com).

### STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- snacks and drinks
- candles and matches
- pens

- people cutouts (make your own or order from “Riot: Art and Craft for Creative Hearts” <http://riotstores.com.au/teachers-choice-boy-cut-outs-25pcs-white.html> and <http://riotstores.com.au/teachers-choice-girl-cut-outs-25pcs-white.html>)
- Bibles
- paper
- markers
- (optional) music and a way to play it (choose some music from “Plugged In”)
- flowers
- copies of the closing prayer from *The Prayer Tree*, by Michael Leunig; Harper Collins, 1992. (<http://www.amazon.com/The-Prayer-Tree-Leunig/dp/1863710345>)

## PLUGGED IN

If you want to develop this session in other ways, here are a few resources that may be of assistance.

### Books

- + *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*, by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter; Upper Room Books, 2002 (available at <http://www.practicingourfaith.org>). See especially the chapter “Friends” beginning on page 187.
- + *Way to Live Leader’s Guide*, by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, (<http://practicingourfaith.org/way-live-leaders-guide>). The lesson on “Friends” begins on page 82.
- + *On Our Way: Christian Practices for Living a Whole Life*, edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Susan R. Briehl; Upper Room Books, 2010. The chapter on “Friendship and Intimacy,” by Stephanie Paulsell, begins on page 71. The book, study guide, and video are available at “Practicing Our Faith”:  
 Book: (<http://practicingourfaith.org/our-way>)  
 Study Guide: (download PDF at <http://practicingourfaith.org/our-way-study-guide>)  
 Video: ([http://practicingourfaith.org/videoclip\\_paulsell](http://practicingourfaith.org/videoclip_paulsell))
- + *Friending: Real Relationships in a Virtual World*, by Lynne M. Baab; Intervarsity Press, 2011 (<http://www.lynnebaab.com/books/friending.htm>)

### Music

To expand this session, ask people to compare the different images of friendship in the lyrics of these songs. Be sure to listen to the songs before you choose to use any of them.

- + “Would You Be My Friend?” by Paul Kelly, from the album *Nothing but a Dream* (<http://www.paulkelly.com.au/music>)
- + “Friend,” by Bob Evans, from the album *Suburban Songbook* (<http://www.last.fm/music/Bob+Evans/Suburban+Songbook>)

- + “Your Friend,” by Denison Witmer, from the album *The Ones Who Wait*  
(<http://vimeo.com/38248714>)
- + “Your Friends Will Tell You Who You Are,” by Kate Miller-Heidke, from the album *Nightflight* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Qu2fSK5Tm4>)
- + “Lucky to Be Your Friend,” by Liz Frencham, from the album *You and Me*  
(<http://lizfrencham.bandcamp.com/track/lucky-to-be-your-friend>)
- + “Why Can’t We Be Friends?” by Smash Mouth, from the album *Fush Yu Mang*  
(<http://www.last.fm/music/Smash+Mouth/Fush+Yu+Mang>)
- + “You’ve Got a Friend In Me,” by Randy Newman, from the soundtrack of *Toy Story*  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXjeh5NOYpQ> or  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x50fVVzUI0>)
- + “With a Little Help From My Friends,” by The Beatles, from the album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*  
([http://www.last.fm/music/The+Beatles/\\_/With+a+Little+Help+from+My+Friends](http://www.last.fm/music/The+Beatles/_/With+a+Little+Help+from+My+Friends))  
Or by Joe Cocker, from the album by the same name  
(<http://www.amazon.com/With-Little-Help-From-Friends/dp/B00001X590>)
- + “I’ll Be There For You,” by The Rembrandts, from the album *L.P.*  
(video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUSXZAtCaRQ>)  
(lyrics: <http://www.therembrandts.net/lyrics3.html>)
- + “Friends,” by Michael W. Smith, from the album, *Change Your World*  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbPKaIozS-c>)
- + “We Are Going to Be Friends,” by Bright Eyes, featuring First Aid Kit, from the album *Cool for School: For the Benefit of the Lunchbox Fund*  
(<http://shelby.tv/video/youtube/oRAIIHKkH5I/bright-eyes-first-aid-kit-we-re-going-to-be-friends-the-white-stripes-cover>)
- + “That’s What Friends Are For,” by Dionne Warwick and Friends  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xGbnua2kSa8> or  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V22ahe9xzC4> )
- + “My Friend,” by Spirit, from *The Adventures of Kaptain Kopter & Commander Cassidy in Potato Land* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4OoiWBSiPs>)
- + “How Can I Be a Better Friend To You?” by 1 Giant Leap, from the album *What About Me?*  
(<http://www.1giantleap.tv/#home> or <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW-Te0nJF8s>)
- + “We Used to Be Friends,” by The Dandy Warhols, from the album *Welcome to the Monkey House* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4iUibbj-7w>)

## Films with a Theme of Friendship

You might spend some time comparing the various forms of friendships in these films.

- + *Toy Story* 1, 2, and 3 ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114709/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0114709/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *The Kite Runner* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0419887/>)
- + *Juno* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0467406/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0467406/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *Madagascar* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0351283/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0351283/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *Ice Age* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0268380/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0268380/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *The Lion King* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110357/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110357/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0914798/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0914798/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*  
([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0403508/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0403508/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *The Breakfast Club* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088847/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0088847/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *Mean Girls* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377092/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0377092/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *Whip It* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1172233/>)
- + *Harry Potter* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0241527/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *The Bucket List* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0825232/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0825232/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))
- + *Remember the Titans* ([http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0210945/?ref=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0210945/?ref=fn_al_tt_1))

## CHECKING IN

Create a welcoming space. Provide snacks and drinks. Place on a table in the center of the space a number of candles (tealights) with one larger candle (taper) in the center. Before people arrive, light the center candle.

Invite group members to name their best friends and, as they do, to use the central candle to light one of the tealight candles. (They may name more than one friend and light more than one candle.) As an alternative, provide paper cutouts of people (see “Stuff You Will Need”) and invite people to write on the cutouts the names of their best friends.

Bring the group together to discuss these questions:

**What qualities do you look for in a friend?**

**How do you keep friendships strong?**

**What do your friends see in you that makes them want to be your friend?**

**What causes you stress in friendships?**

**Have you had a friendship that struggled but survived?**

## EXPLORING THE WORD

**Scripture: Hebrews 10:24; Ecclesiastes 4:9–10; 1 Samuel 3:1–10**

Distribute Bibles. Invite people to read along as you or members of the group read aloud the three scripture passages above.

Invite discussion:

**Do you feel comfortable talking with your friends about your faith, doubts, family, struggles, vocation, or love? Why? Why not?**

**With which of your friends can you discuss your faith, doubts, or personal issues? Whom do you ask to pray for you?**

**Do you have a friend you can go to when, like Samuel, you hear a voice in the night?**

**What are some ways that we can help cultivate friendships within our community or church?**

Invite group members to spend some time discussing ideas about how to create spiritual friendships in their community. Make a list. Perhaps the group would like to take a lead in creating a plan for the church.

## **SHARING IN PRAYER**

Give each person a flower. Invite people to look at their flower and to reflect on its beauty.

Read aloud this quotation from Georgia O'Keefe:

*"Nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small—we haven't time—and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time."*

from her contribution to the exhibition catalogue *An American Place*, 1944  
([http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Georgia\\_O'Keeffe](http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Georgia_O'Keeffe))

After some time passes in silence, invite each person to name two friends with whom they would like to spend some quality time. Encourage group members to ask for God's help in finding the time this week to truly see their friends and to find out how they are doing.

Encourage group members to spend a bit of time in prayer for their friends this week as well. Suggest that they use this prayer from *The Prayer Tree*, by Michael Leunig, which you will read together to close this session:

**"We give thanks for our friends.  
Our dear friends.  
We anger each other.  
We fail each other.  
We share this sad earth, this tender life,  
this precious time.  
Such richness. Such wildness.  
Together we are blown about.  
Together we are dragged along.  
All this delight.  
All this suffering.  
All this forgiving life.  
We hold it together. Amen."**

## **TAKING IT FURTHER**

- Look at the group's list of ideas about spiritual friendships. Perhaps they would like to begin planning and take on a few tasks to follow through on their plan.
- Perhaps you'd like to use the chapter on "Friends" in *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens* and the *Way to Live* Leader's Guide to explore friendship in a worship setting.
- Use the *On Our Way* video, book, and study guide to delve deeper into the idea of friendship.
- Host a movie night or several movie nights. Watch and discuss movies that explore various levels and forms of friendship.

—from **devozine** *In the Habit* (January/February 2014). Copyright © 2014 by The Upper Room®. All rights reserved.