From the beginning God said that it’s not good for a man to be alone, and he wasn’t just talking about marriage. “Two are better than one,” the Bible tells us. “If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up” (Eccl. 4:9–10). Jesus had a friend named Lazarus, and when Lazarus died Jesus wept. Paul wrote to his friends in Thessalonica, “You are our glory and joy.”

When we go through life without friends, it’s not just our experience of life that’s diminished; we are diminished. We are less than we could be, and that’s especially true for Christ followers, because God uses friends and friendships to shape us into the people he created us to be.

Scripture: Ruth 1:1–22
Based On: The PreachingToday.com sermon series “Living Close,” by Bryan Wilkerson
PART ONE
Identify the Current Issue

Spiritual friendships turn the journey of life into a journey of faith. They lead us to God and his purposes. Do you have the kind of friend who will call at just the right time with just the right words—someone who can find you where you are and gently lead you to a better place? Apparently many of us don’t. Seventy percent of Americans say they have few close friends. Forty-three percent say they have only one person or no one in whom they can confide.

The reasons for this decline of friendship in our society are varied: longer working days, constant job relocation, technologies that isolate us, woundedness from childhood that cripples our relational abilities. But knowing the reasons doesn’t change the reality.

Most of us don’t have enough friends—or any friends. And that’s not good.

In this series, we’re going to see what the Bible has to say about friendship, but not just any kind of friendship. We’re talking about spiritual friendships. What we’re going to do is simple. We’re just going to sit in the shadows and watch and listen and see what we can learn about how God uses friendship in our lives. Why are friendships so important? What is the role of a friend? Where can I find a friend? How can I be a better friend? And what makes a friendship “spiritual” anyway?

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Who was your very best friend growing up? What attributes made him or her such a good friend?

[Q] What do you think is the biggest reason for the societal decline in friendship today? Why?

- Longer working days
- Constant job relocation
- Technologies that isolate us
- Woundedness from childhood that cripples our relational abilities
- Other: ________________________________
- I don’t think there is a societal decline in friendships. It’s all bunk.

[Q] What do you think makes a spiritual friendship unique?
PART TWO
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Friends are on a journey of faith.

Teaching Point Two: Friends accompany one another.

Teaching Point Three: Spiritual friendships have five characteristics.

PART THREE
Apply Your Findings

Lois found herself in a challenging season of life. She was raising a houseful of boys, her husband was working long hours, and she was grieving over the recent loss of her sister and then her mother. Lois was part of a women’s group, and she was very grateful for the leaders, teachers, and mentors that she had, but she felt like she needed someone else in her life—someone she could just talk to, someone who could relate to what was happening in her life. She needed a friend. So she asked God to show her one, and she began to look around.

One day, looking around the Bible study group, she felt drawn to a woman named Charlotte. Charlotte was about her age and had a godly spirit, but that was all Lois knew about her. When the study ended, she took a risk and asked Charlotte if she would have coffee. Charlotte said yes, and they quickly discovered they both were raising kids, both were eager to grow in their faith, both wanted to pray, and both had husbands who were not very spiritually engaged. They began to meet every week to pray. They became friends, spiritual friends. That was 30-some years ago, and they are still friends today.

Both have talked about how this friendship has shaped their faith. One said of the other, “She’s brought healing to my life.” The other said, “She’s helped me grow as a friend, because I didn’t have that kind of pattern.” Each of them said in separate conversations, “I can’t imagine my life without her.” When asked what made the friendship work, they said things like: “We listen to each other”; “I can say anything to her”; and “We made a commitment never to let go.” And along the way, they’ve not only grown in their faith, they have seen God do remarkable work in their husbands’ and children’s lives and in the lives of many others they have served over the years.
**Action Point:** How do you find or develop a spiritual friend like this? This week, ask God, look around, and take a risk. Look at the people you’re around right now, the people in your small group. Put yourself in a place where you’ll meet likeminded people. Join a ministry team. Go on a mission trip. Go on a marriage retreat and meet other couples.

Remember, you’re not looking for a mentor. You’re not looking for a role model. You’re not looking for a counselor. All you’re looking for is someone to talk to, someone to be with for this season of your life. And when God puts that person on your heart, take a risk. Ask the person to have coffee. Invite him or her to sit with you in church. Ask someone to go skiing, maybe. Because spiritual friends turn the journey of life into a journey of faith that leads us right to God and his purposes.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with Michael C. Mack
Finding a drafting buddy

Do you have the kind of friend who will find you in a dark place and remind you of who you are and what you're about? Someone who will speak courage into your life and get you going again? We all need friends like that. Spiritual friends help each other find and follow God in all the seasons of life. Your friendships are as important to your spiritual development as your daily devotions and your weekly worship.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1–4; 20:1–17; 23:15–18
Based On: The PreachingToday.com sermon series “Living Close,” by Bryan Wilkerson
PART ONE
 Identify the Current Issue

Drafting on a bike is an amazing experience. The rider in front literally breaks the resistance of the wind, so it’s much easier for the one who is drafting to make progress. Not only that, the front rider creates a vacuum that literally pulls the other rider along. You don’t have to pedal nearly as hard or as fast to keep up the same speed. And so two riders taking turns pulling each other can ride a lot farther and faster than they could ride alone.

In this study, we will look at the friendship between two great men: David and Jonathan. As these two men make their journey together, they take turns riding in front, breaking the wind’s resistance and pulling each other along.

Spiritual friends help each other find and follow God by setting the pace for one another. We all have days and seasons in our lives when it’s harder to find God, when we can’t hear him that well, when we don’t see him at work around us. Maybe we’re discouraged or afraid. Maybe we’re disappointed in God. Maybe we’re just distracted by the cares of life—raising a family, making a living, getting an education. And then someone comes alongside and tells us a story about something God has done in his life. He shares some insight from his Bible reading that day. Maybe he just points out the beauty of the day that God has made. And suddenly we’re aware of God again. We remember that he’s present and that we’re his children and that we want to follow again. We get pulled along in the wake of our friend’s momentum. We need friends like that.

Discussion Starters:

[Q] How would you describe your drafting experience?

- I’ve been cycling with a group and drafted with other riders.
- I’ve watched bike racing on TV.
- I’ve driven race cars and experienced drafting.
- I’ve driven close behind big trucks on the freeway to save gas.
- I’d never heard of drafting before.
- Other: ____________________________

[Q] Without mentioning names, describe a relationship in which one person seemed to do all the “pulling” (doing all the work in the relationship) while the other did all the drafting. How does that kind of relationship feel?

[Q] Briefly describe an example of a mutual friendship in which both friends took turns “up front,” taking the wind head on for a while so the other could catch a breath—a friendship in which you set the pace for one another.
PART TWO

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Spiritual friends set the pace for one another.

Teaching Point Two: Spiritual friends stay faithful.

Teaching Point Three: Spiritual friends speak faith into one another’s lives.

PART THREE

Apply Your Findings

Artie and Kevin are longtime friends. When asked for a good picture of the two of them, Kevin said, “Well, that’s going to be a problem.”

“How come?”

Kevin responded, “There are no good pictures of Artie.”

That statement tells you something about the kind of friends these guys are. They grew up in the same town together. They went to the same schools and knew each other as kids. Over the years they lost track of each other but bumped into each other again in the hospital maternity ward, when both of their wives were giving birth on the same night. While their wives were in labor, they caught up with each other and decided they should get together again. They discovered that they had all sorts of things in common: they were both in the same line of work, worked in the same office building, and recovering alcoholics. So they began going to AA meetings together, supporting each other.

After a while Artie began sharing with Kevin that Jesus Christ was his higher power. Kevin was an active churchgoer but had never developed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. So Artie talked with him along the way, invited him to some things at his church, and eventually Kevin and his wife came to know Christ in a personal way. But other things happened along the way. At one point Kevin’s sister became terminally ill, and so Kevin called Artie and said, “Would you come over and tell her what you told me about Christ?” Artie did, and he prayed with her to receive Christ just before she died.

Then it was Kevin’s turn to help Artie when Artie came down with cancer. Now Kevin was the one who came to encourage and speak hope and faith and hope into his friend’s life. Then one of Kevin’s sons was struggling with anxiety and panic attacks, so Artie came over, because Artie had struggled with panic attacks and anxiety, and he talked the boy
Fostering Faith-Shaping Friendships  
The Pace and Pull of Spiritual Friendships

Participant’s Guide

through it. That’s what friends do for each other. They take turns setting the pace. They’re there for each other. They stay close. They speak faith and hope and courage into each other’s lives.

**Action Point:** Who in your life is traveling alongside you? Who are you intentionally travelling with? Send a quick note of thanks to a friend who has been encouraging you and speaking faith into your life. Look for ways to begin speaking faith into someone’s life this week because that’s what friends do. They help each other find and follow God in all the seasons of life.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with Michael C. Mack
Spiritual friendships are significant because they form the deepest parts of who we are. Most friendships do their work over time—moment by moment, encounter after encounter, conversation after conversation. But it doesn’t always work that way.

Sometimes God uses a friend to transform us seemingly overnight. A friend speaks a word of challenge that, if responded to favorably, has the potential to help us grow exponentially. The tricky part is that a challenge like this also has the potential to test the limits of the friendship. It often comes as an intervention, a conversation, a letter, an interaction that challenges us to move beyond our comfort zone and step into an area of living that we’re not accustomed to. It tests us and it tries our patience or our selflessness.

Scripture: Philemon

Based On: The PreachingToday.com sermon series “Living Close,” by Bryan Wilkerson
PART ONE
Identify the Current Issue

Nestled in the pages of the New Testament is an interesting little document. It’s a six-paragraph letter that gives us a window into a compelling story about a friend who challenged another friend, asking him to take a bold step, asking him to make a fundamental change in the way he naturally operated. He knew he was testing the limits of this friendship. As we read the story, we can feel the tension in this relationship.

The author of this letter is the apostle Paul, who was getting older and wrote this letter under house arrest in a Roman prison. The letter was to his friend, Philemon, a wealthy man who owned a large home in the small town of Colossae, somewhere in current-day Turkey. It’s likely that Paul led Philemon to Christ through his ministry when both men were in Ephesus. Philemon was now one of the leaders of the church that met in his home.

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Do you tend to be the kind of person who usually ends up helping to mediate other people’s disagreements or the type that stays out of the middle? Why do you think this is true of you?

[Q] When is the last time you confronted someone?

• Why did you feel you needed to challenge or confront the person?

• What means did you use? A carefully worded letter? Face-to-face conversation? Intervention?

• How did this confrontation go? What were the results?

[Q] Share a time when you were confronted or challenged by a friend. How did it feel? Were you open to the person’s challenge? What did you learn?

PART TWO
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Spiritual friends challenge one another.

Teaching Point Two: Spiritual friends test the power of the gospel.

Teaching Point Three: Spiritual friends help reorient each other to the gospel.
PART THREE
Apply Your Findings

Cisco and Jauron were once rival gang members, one a former Crip and the other a former Blood. While in prison, Cisco attended a three-day conference with a program that brings restoration and reconciliation to rival gang members.

When he was released, Cisco began working across gang lines. He enrolled in college and started to get his life back on track. One day Cisco was in a van doing outreach to homeless folks, and Jauron showed up to help. He had been a Blood since he was 11 years old, and he was slowly making his way out.

When Jauron entered the van, tension filled the air. It turns out that Cisco and Jauron had once been involved in an incident that included a brawl and a stabbing. They made it through that day, and over the next few months they continued to work in silence side by side. Eventually, things came to a head during a staff meeting. They had to stop everything so that Cisco and Jauron could meet with someone for a time of reconciliation. As they talked, they both realized that what they thought had happened years ago wasn’t exactly the case. They discovered that their friends had put them up to fight each other. They experienced reconciliation that day.

Today, both young men are on a ministry team together. Jauron is an intern at the gang reconciliation program, and Cisco is on staff. They support each other at the community college they attend and are being discipled by a leadership discipleship group. Once they hated each other; now they’re brothers in Christ and partners in ministry.

That’s the kind of thing the gospel does when it gets hold of a person’s life. Christ’s love turns combatants into comrades, enemies into friends, gang members into ministry partners. That’s what it means to let the gospel live large within you.

**Action Point:** We don’t know exactly what happened between Philemon and Onesimus, but we do know this: when a spiritual friend challenges another friend with the gospel, anything can happen. Do you have a friend like that? Are you a friend like that? Are you someone who lovingly and carefully tests the limits of your friendship so that you might test the limit of the gospel’s force in your life, the life of your friend, and in the world? Identify a friend in your life who can confront you and speak truth into your life. Then identify people for whom you can do the same. Is there truth that you currently need to speak into your friend’s life?

—Study by Tom VanAntwerp, with Michael C. Mack
The Common Causes of Spiritual Friendships

PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

Friends serve one another and side by side.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother.

Those words come from a famous speech, given the night before an epic battle in Shakespeare’s play Henry V. They live on these many centuries later because they speak so eloquently of the bond that is formed between people when they are enlisted together in a common cause.

It was that phrase, “band of brothers,” that inspired a World War II book and then mini-series. The story follows the soldiers of Easy Company from their jump training in Georgia to the landing at Normandy to the Battle of Bastogne and then to the defeat of Hitler’s army. Those soldiers enjoyed intensity in their relationships, an intimacy and camaraderie that civilians can never fully understand. Something happens when people serve together. When they struggle side by side, when they make some shared sacrifice in pursuit of some worthy goal, they form a special bond and are shaped forever by that experience. And what’s true of soldiers on the field of battle is true of Christ followers in the service of our King.

Scripture: Philippians 1–2

Based On: The PreachingToday.com sermon series “Living Close,” by Bryan Wilkerson
PART ONE
Identify the Current Issue

Something unique happens when brothers and sisters in Christ serve alongside each other. In this lesson, we’ll consider Paul and his band of brothers and sisters in a place called Philippi.

Of the 13 letters we have from the apostle Paul, Philippians is the friendliest. You sense it in the language right from the beginning. This is not the task-driven, type A, take-the-next-hill Paul we often imagine. He sounds mushy in this warm and fuzzy letter. But it’s not just the words of this letter; it’s the actual form of the letter that is friendly.

Back in grade school or junior high, most of us learned how to write different kinds of letters—personal letters, business letters, and so forth. Each one was formatted a bit differently. The same thing was true in the ancient world. Scholars have found ancient manuals for letter writing in the Greco-Roman world, and it turns out there were 21 different types of letters in the first century. One was called “the friendly letter,” and Paul’s letter to the Philippians follows that format. The language and style of the letter suggests that Paul had a very close relationship with these believers in Philippi, a closer relationship than he had with the believers in all the other places he had been. In fact, in modern language you might say that the Philippians were Paul’s BFFs—best friends forever, in text speak. You can LOL if you want.

Discussion Starters:

[Q] What is the best team you’ve ever been on (any kind of team)? What made that team so special to you?

[Q] There are many great movies set in the sports world in which teammates also become strong friends. Which of these is your favorite, and why?

- Rocky (I, II, III, IV, V, or Balboa)
- The Blind Side
- Chariots of Fire
- Talladega Nights
- Brian’s Song
- 42
- White Men Can’t Jump
- Other(s): __________________________

[Q] What cause are you presently most passionate about?
PART TWO  
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Spiritual friends have commonality.

Teaching Point Two: Spiritual friends serve each other.

Teaching Point Three: Spiritual friends serve others side by side.

PART THREE  
Apply Your Findings

Kelly and Alison are high school students who met on a mission trip to Trinidad one summer. They didn’t know each other before that—Kelly is a junior in high school, and Alison a lowly freshman. But something happened between them on that trip. Something about serving together, being on the road far from home in another culture, sweating under the hot sun, giving themselves away to others, and worshiping together knit their hearts together in a unique way. This is how Alison described it:

We bonded in Trinidad after an emotional night for the team. The group had been reflecting on what God was teaching us through the trip. Kelly and I had a heart-to-heart conversation after the team gathering. We discussed everything from how we came to God to the current boy situations in our lives. On the trip, we became close by working together, keeping each other accountable, and writing encouraging notes to one another. We both now realize that God was working through us during this trip. Since then we have held each other accountable and feel comfortable discussing where we are in our faith today. We love serving together, and we are so thankful that we met on the trip to Trinidad. Our lives would be totally different if we didn’t have each other.

Action Point: Kelly and Alison and many others like them have grown closer not just to each other but to God. They have forever been shaped by their friendship. Consider how well you serve your friends. How often do you serve side by side for a common cause? Brainstorm ways you can better serve your friends and serve side by side with them this week. If you don’t currently have a friend like this, consider joining a ministry team, a missional small group, or a mission trip to serve alongside other believers. You may find a new friend in the midst of your service. Something happens when believers serve together, when they struggle side by side. When they make a shared sacrifice in the service of the King, they form a special bond, and they are shaped spiritually by the experience.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with Michael C. Mack
Reflecting on true friendship

Where are you on your spiritual journey? Are you exploring Christianity? Are you beginning to grow in your relationship with Christ? Would you consider yourself close to Christ? Are you spiritually mature? Research has shown that these are the four discernible stages of our journey of faith. Wherever you are on the spiritual journey, spiritual friendships will take you farther and deeper than you could ever go alone.


Based On: The PreachingToday.com sermon series “Living Close,” by Bryan Wilkerson
PART ONE
Identify the Current Issue

One of the most popular TV shows in recent history is *Friends*. The final episode in 2004 was the most-watched TV episode of the decade. Regardless of the many things you could find wrong with the show, you can’t deny its cultural resonance and impact. A whole generation of young adults came of age under the influence of that show.

It had a simple storyline: six young adults trying to make a way for themselves in New York City. So what was it about this show, about these characters, that made them so appealing to so many people? These six friends had a comfort with each other. In the high pressure, image-conscious, unforgiving environs of Manhattan, these six friends could be themselves with each other. Joey was a goofball. Phoebe was ditzy. Monica was controlling. But it didn’t matter. They were still friends. They could come home cranky or giddy. They could be juvenile and it didn’t matter. They were still going to be friends. The theme song said it all: “I’ll Be There for You.” They had this understanding that no matter what happened, no matter how things turned out, no matter who they turned out to be, they would still be friends. And there’s something powerful and liberating about that, about the freedom to be yourself in the company of another person—because if you’re free to be who you are, you’re free to become someone better, someone you long to be. And for everything that the show got wrong, that part it got right.

I’ll be there for you, when the rain starts to pour.
I’ll be there for you, like I’ve been there before.
I’ll be there for you, ’cause you’re there for me too.

And, for some reason, we need these kinds of friendships to help us grow spiritually.

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Many TV shows (most of which are now in reruns) focus on the friendships of a small cast of characters. Some also have memorable theme songs. Which of these shows and theme songs bring back the best memories for you? Why?

- *Friends*: “I’ll Be There for You”
- *Cheers*: “Where Everybody Knows Your Name”
- *Three’s Company*: “Three’s Company”
- *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*: “Love Is All Around”
Fostering Faith-Shaping Friendships
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Participant’s Guide

- Welcome Back Kotter: “Welcome Back”
- Other(s): __________________________

BONUS: Who would be willing to sing their favorite theme song?

[Q] Pick one of the TV shows above or think of a popular show like these today. How have you seen characters grow over time because of the friendships they’ve had?

[Q] If we were to write a theme song for this group, what would the title be?

PART TWO
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Spiritual friends allow us to be ourselves.

Teaching Point Two: Spiritual friends talk about difficult issues.

Teaching Point Three: Spiritual friends are attentive and responsive.

PART THREE
Apply Your Findings

One small group of friends has been together for only a couple of years, but they have been there for each other through funerals, weddings, new babies, military deployment, job loss, relational breakdowns, and sickness. They’ve also helped each other grow through those experiences. Listen to some of their comments:

“We’ve been sharing our life stories with each other, and it’s helped me to hear other people affirm how God is working in my life.”

“I have never been so confident that a group is praying for me, and they’re always careful to follow up and ask how I’m doing.”

“We talk about how God is part of our lives.”

They compiled a list of all the hard questions that they and their friends are struggling with, and week by week they try to find biblical answers to those questions. Recently they studied the Prodigal Son and discovered, to their disappointment, that most of them are like the older brother. One of them said, “I’ve been challenged to grow beyond an obedience based on fear to an obedience springing from love.” One of the older women in the group
has become kind of a mentor to some of the others. She says, “At a time when our youngest will be leaving for college, God has given us a whole new family to encourage, listen to, pray for, and feed.”

Isn’t this what we’re all asking for—for friends? And that’s why the show Friends was so popular. It wasn’t Joey’s jokes about Rachel’s hair. It was the friendships. We all want people who will be there for us. We want people who will let us be our true selves. We want people with whom we can talk about the important issues of life, friends who will pay attention to what God is doing in and around us. We want people who will be there for us in a way that allows God to be there for us as well.

**Action Point:** These kinds of relationships can’t be programmed. They’re found by people who are seeking them, by people who take some initiative, by people who join a group or serve on a team, who introduce themselves to somebody. So if you are saying to yourself, *I wish I had friends like that,* don’t sit around waiting for someone to call you and don’t wait for the church to start a new program. Look around you. This week, ask God to direct you and then take a risk. Introduce yourself to someone. Invite someone for coffee. Open your home. Make yourself available. Make a phone call. Pay attention to the people around you.

Consider how well you allow your friends to be themselves. Brainstorm ways you can better empower them to be themselves and drop any masks they may be holding up. And take the risk to be authentic in front of your friends, too.

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with Michael C. Mack
The Witness of Spiritual Friendships

PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

Interfaith friendships can be powerful.

For the past five sessions, we’ve been talking about how God uses spiritual friendships to form our faith, to shape us spiritually. We’ve talked about the things spiritual friends do for each other: we pray for and with each other; we speak God’s Word into each other’s lives; we serve alongside one another; we hold each other accountable. Those are wonderful things, but they sound like things that Christians do for one another. What about all the people in our lives who aren’t Christians—people of other faiths or no faith at all? Is it possible to be spiritual friends with them?

Scripture: John 1:43–51

Based On: The PreachingToday.com sermon series “Living Close,” by Bryan Wilkerson
PART ONE
Identify the Current Issue

David Benner says, “Spiritual friends nurture the growth of each other’s inner self and help each other become whole people.” In other words, spiritual friends care for each other’s souls. They take an interest in each other’s spiritual well-being. That may seem obvious, but it’s an important place to start, because it’s the spiritual dimension that sets these kinds of friendships apart from ordinary friendships. It’s this dimension that makes this kind of friendship deep and long-lasting.

Spiritual friendships with people of other faiths or no faith are not only possible, they’re powerful. God uses them to shape us and to accomplish his purposes in our lives and theirs.

That doesn’t mean that friendships with people of other faiths are always easy. Unfortunately, relationships can go sour because of religious differences. Sometimes people get pushy. Sometimes people get offended and feel judged. Religious differences lead to fights as often as they lead to friendships. So how do we cultivate spiritual friendships that lead to growth in both of our lives?

Discussion Starters:

[Q] Who are one or two of your friends who are from other faiths or have no faith at all?

[Q] How would you characterize those friendships?

- Cordial, surface-level
- Awkward, tense
- Difficult, judgmental, or in conflict
- Friendly, but non-religious
- Deep, spiritually nurturing
- Other: ____________________________________________

[Q] If you’ve ever had an opportunity to discuss spiritual beliefs, how did those conversations go?
PART TWO
Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching Point One: Spiritual friends care for each other’s souls.

Teaching Point Two: Spiritual friends are honest and invite each other to explore their questions and doubts.

Teaching Point Three: Spiritual friends know how to trust God.

PART THREE
Apply Your Findings

Lisa and Hal are spiritual friends who met at an interfaith dialogue between a church and a nearby synagogue. People from both congregations gathered together for six weeks and discussed a variety of spiritual topics. Lisa talked about meeting Hal:

When he walked into the room, he brought joy and laughter with him. Hal was 74, and I really enjoyed hearing about his Jewish heritage and their traditions. I became fast friends with him and his wife Mary Danna. We got together often and talked for hours about food and travel and spiritual topics. Hal was honest; he didn’t believe in Jesus, but he loved to study the Bible. He knew what I believed, and he respected my views.

One day I got a call from Hal. He told me that he had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Though he didn’t believe in God, he asked if we could pray for him, and I said, “Of course.” When I visited, Hal was the same mischievous, joyful, funny guy, and he seemed resigned to his fate.

One Sunday Hal and Mary Danna attended Lisa’s church. At the time, Lisa said, he seemed strong. Soon after, however, when Lisa was out of town on business, Hal called her at six in the morning. He said, “I miss you. I want to visit as soon as possible.” So they arranged a visit when she returned home. When she saw Hal, he looked frail but still joyful. Lisa says about this experience,

We spent most of the day talking about spiritual things, and Hal said he had experienced God’s love through me, through many in his family, and through many of the friends he met at our church. We talked about death, and we talked about Jesus. He was oddly excited to tell me all the plans for his funeral. And he talked passionately about the causes he believed in. He said he wanted people’s money to go to those causes; he didn’t want them to buy flowers.
Hal died two days later. I miss him terribly, even today. Hal made me a better person through our friendship. He gave me a greater love and respect for those who come from different cultures and backgrounds and those who believe differently than I do. Knowing Hal changed the way I follow Christ.

**Action Point:** Think about the friends God has placed in your life, maybe friends who still are far from God. This week, be especially attentive to what he might be doing in their lives, to which friends might need to hear some good news or get an invitation to come and see. Identify at least three ways to invite people to come and see. How might you invite a friend to come and see this week?

—Study by Bryan Wilkerson, with Michael C. Mack