Lesson 3—Choosing Good Friends

Unit Summary
The ability to choose good friends is an invaluable skill for children to possess. Few things will shape their futures more significantly. The friends that children select will dramatically influence their character, their choices, their interests, their conduct—and the direction of their lives!

In this unit, you will help children become thoughtful and intentional about their friendship choices—yielding dividends that will last throughout their lives. You will guide your children to understand that friendships are not merely gifts from God, but lasting treasures that they must intentionally seek.

Lesson Summary
Most children (and adults, for that matter) are passive in their selection of friends. They often form friendships simply by proximity or coincidence. The Bible is very clear that believers are to be intentional and thoughtful when it comes to establishing friendships. The company we keep has a profound impact on our character, our choices, and therefore the outcomes of our lives. In this lesson, you will challenge and equip your children to be thoughtful and prayerful as they develop friendships.

Paul’s Power Principle: Good friends are great treasures in life.

In this lesson, your children will...

**KNOW**
- How to choose good friends and avoid unhealthy relationships

**FEEL**
- Confident that they can make wise choices in their friendships

**DO**
- Evaluate their current friendships and decide to strengthen those that are healthy
**Welcome!—Prize Drawing**

**Supplies:** numbers on chairs, two sets of paper slips with matching numbers (one to give to kids and the other for drawing prizes), several small prizes to give away.

For today’s service, we recommend shuffling the kids’ usual seating to force them to meet new people. One way to do this is to attach numbers to all the chairs. As the children arrive, hand out numbers and let them know that this is their assigned seat for the morning. Let them know that you will be drawing some numbers for prizes after the singing time. They must be in their assigned seat to win! (This will encourage children to keep the number they were given and to occupy their assigned seat.) You may want to allow them to select another seat at some point later in the service, or after small group time.

**Let’s Meet-n-Greet!**

Greet three kids around you. Find out their middle names and if they know why they got that middle name.

Leaders, be sure to stop whatever you are doing to move through the audience and greet the children, especially those you do not recognize. Announce any birthdays for the week. (See the How to Use DiscipleTown guide for quick and easy ways to acknowledge visitors and birthdays.)

### Supplies

**General Supplies**
- Bibles, puppets, video projection (optional)
- Pencils, pens, paper

**Spark Interest**
- WELCOME!: small prizes
- LET’S PLAY!: blindfolds, notecards
- CONNECT WITH YOUR KIDS: none

**Explore Scripture**
- KEYVERSE: none

**Inspire Action**
- DRAMATIZE THE POINT: actors

**PowerPoint Presentation**

As you plan your lesson, select PowerPoint slides that correspond to the lesson elements you choose. In the “Slide Sorter” View, you can rearrange and/or delete the slides as necessary. For descriptions of the included slides and tips on their use, see the notes accompanying each slide.
Let's Worship!
Reinforce the lesson by praising God for the great fellowship that believers in Jesus enjoy. Thank Him for the opportunity to worship Him together.

Recommended Song: *I Have Decided to Follow Jesus*, public domain

Puppet Intro
Leader & puppet introduce today’s lesson. You will find a scripted version of this intro at the end of the lesson. **Supplies:** puppet, leather jacket, baseball cap, earring

Puppet shows up looking very different! He has an earring, leather jacket, baseball cap on backwards and talks with slang. Puppet says he has joined the “Bubble Gum Gang.” Leader asks about it and learns that they do practical jokes with bubble gum—sticking it in other kids’ books, girls’ hair, on doorknobs, etc. They are so cool! They don’t do homework, and they like to pick on little kids and shoot spit wads at old people. Leader is appalled and asks where puppet met this gang. Puppet says a new kid at school named Bubba started it—a transfer from “Juvey Elementary School.” Leader asks, “You mean Juvenile Detention Center?” Puppet says, “Yeah, that was it!” Leader explains that is a jail for minors, that this Bubba is not a good kid, and that puppet should not hang out with him. Bubba has already been a bad influence! Puppet admits he feels sort of bad. Leader encourages puppet to get out of this Bubble Gum Gang right away—and to be wiser in his choice of friends!

Let’s Play!—The Friend Factor Game Show
Select two boy and two girl volunteers from the class to compete in a game-show style competition. The audience participates by rooting for their team and guessing who will win. Set up the stage with four chairs, two on each side, and a sign that says “The Friend Factor.” Ask each child two questions, one at a time, and have him or her write each answer on a notecard that they give to the emcee. Blindfold their partners and give them three options as to the answer (only one of which is correct). While the blindfolded partner guesses at the correct answer, have the non-blindfolded partner hold up a card with the number 1 or 2 or 3 (the number of the partner’s answer) as the emcee reads them. In this way, the entire class can see the correct answer. If the blindfolded partner answers incorrectly, the opposing team gets the opportunity to guess which of the other two answers is correct. Then the emcee reveals the correct answer. If the team that was up answers correctly, award 100 points. If not, and the opposing team answers correctly, award the opposing team 50 points. Repeat this process for the opposing team, and then switch roles/blindfolds.

Question Suggestions:
1) My favorite cartoon character or show is…
2) My favorite fast-food restaurant is…
3) My most embarrassing moment was when…
4) My best talent is…
5) If I could drive, my car would be a…
6) When I get married, I want this many kids…
7) My grandmother’s name is…
8) My favorite toy is my…
(or make up your own!)

**NOTE:** You will want to plan ahead to make up other possible answers so that they sound plausible.
Connect with Your Kids

This object lesson primes the kids to think about value.

Have you ever had a bad experience with a friend? Perhaps you made a poor choice in a friendship and needed to back out! What did you learn? Obviously, you don’t need to give details and shouldn’t use names, but perhaps you can allow the children to see that even their beloved leader has made costly mistakes. I lost a job in high school at a hardware store because some co-workers taught me a way to “borrow money” from the register for lunch or a snack and pay it back the next day. Even though I would sincerely pay the money back the next day, I was stealing. When the boss caught me, nothing I could say saved my job. He just told me to go home because he could no longer trust me. I was devastated, because I loved that job. My dad even tried to talk him into getting my job back. But it was over. Listening to those boys cost me a job that I loved. I should have been wiser in choosing my friends and listening to their “advice.” It was a hard lesson, but I’m glad I learned it at a young age. It’s a story I’m embarrassed to tell, but if it helps a child avoid a similar fate, it is worth repeating!

DiscipleTown Visitor

Find a script version of this segment at the end of this lesson.

Firefighter Francisco: Play a siren sound effect. Firefighter Francisco hurriedly enters, carrying a large hose or fire extinguisher. He frantically looks around, as if for a fire. Leader looks puzzled, and asks, “Are you looking for a fire? There’s no fire here.” Francisco says, in a hurry, “Hello! I’m Firefighter Francisco—YES! I’m looking for a fire, but not the type you are thinking of—not the flame type. I’m looking for friendship fires. Got a call that there were some friendship fires at this location.” He looks at all the kids. “Aha! There! Must be out there! With all these kids, the fire must be close!” Leader looks at the kids and then back at Francisco, “What do you mean, fire in these kids’ friendships?” Firefighter Francisco rather excitedly answers, “Yes! How many of you kids have friends? Raise your hands!” Encourage kids to respond. “Well, how many of you are in the midst of spats with some of your friends? Okay, you don’t have to raise your hands, but I know some of you are—friendship fires break out every day! Sometimes they are little candle flames that you can blow out. Other times they are small brush fires that take a day to blow over. And other times, they are huge towering infernos that can burn a friendship to the ground and turn it to ashes!” Leader says, “Oh, dear, I think I’ve seen some of those in my lifetime.” Francisco says, “Please take friendship fires seriously! Some are natural, but some are started by arsonists—bad people who are out to destroy friendships. You gotta watch out for those. You can put others out just by using the extinguisher.” Leader asks, “The extinguisher?” Francisco replies, “Yup, everyone’s got an extinguisher—just saying you’re sorry. Works nearly every time—if used sincerely.” Leader says, “Well, thank you for the advice Firefighter Francisco. Sounds like we need to be careful not to start friendship fires, and to put them out as fast as possible when they start.” Francisco replies, “And be careful when choosing your friends. Some are more explosive than others.” Leader says, “Thank you. We’re learning about choosing friends wisely today.” Firefighter Francisco, “Glad to hear it. I gotta get going. I smell smoke over in one of the adult classes… gossip! Oh, boy, that’s like a chain-reaction fire! Gotta snuff that out. Later!”
Let's Search!—Bible Dash

Supplies: Bibles

Ask all kids with Bibles to participate, or invite a few volunteers to come to the front. As children hold Bibles closed with hands on covers, state the Bible reference twice, then on the command “SEARCH!” have the students race to locate the verse. Once they have a finger on the verse, they can stand and call out, “FOUND IT!” Have the first child read the verse aloud while you project the verse on a screen via PowerPoint. See suggestions below for comments on each verse. Keep your comments brief and to the point of the lesson.

- Proverbs 12:26  
  Be cautious in friendships—or be led astray.
- Proverbs 22:24-25  
  You adapt the ways of your friends.
- Mark 12:29-31  
  Second greatest commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.
- 1 Corinthians 15:33  
  Bad company corrupts good character.

Paul’s Power Principle: Good friends are great treasures in life.

Let’s Learn!—Choosing Good Friends

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Supplies: leg bindings, game music, beanbags

Choose two children from the audience who are friends to come up and compete in a race. (It is important that they are close friends.) Explain that they are going to compete in a three-legged race. Have them stand beside each other and use Velcro strips, a pair of sweat pants that they each put a leg through, or a large, strong belt. Have them link arms as well. Then, have each child race in the opposite direction (perhaps toward two beanbags on opposite sides of the stage). Tell them that the first person back to you will receive a big candy bar. Don’t allow time for questions or further explanation. Just say “GO!”—play recorded game music, and start cheering them on! The friends will either start going in opposite directions, or they may stand there baffled and confused. Or, they may start arguing with you because they thought they were going to race together. Allow some time for confusion and chaos—until the game breaks down and does not work—that is the point you want the kids to make. Either they will never play the game, or one will end up winning and the other losing. Either way, they cannot both win. Finally, have the music stop, and get out another candy bar and reward them both for helping you illustrate your point. Or, have the two children go together in one direction or the other. Allow them to share the prize. Then have the children sit down.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14. What does it mean to be “yoked”? In our game, two friends were “yoked” together but had different goals—and it didn’t work. There were only two possible outcomes: neither person could win, or one person had to lose. Christians have different goals in life than non-believers do. We can, and should, be friends with non-believers so we can be a witness to them, but our close friends should be those who share our life goals.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. When it comes to our close friendships, we are to be separate from non-believers. Why? Let’s see what Proverbs has to say about selecting friends. Proverbs is a Bible book that is filled with wise advice.
Read Proverbs 22:24-25 and Proverbs 12:26. **Why is making a judgment about potential friends so important?** (Friends have a large influence.) **Think about the friends you have right now.** Tell me some phrase, style, or mannerism that you have learned from them. What have they learned from you? Can you see any positive influence you have had on those around you? Think about a negative influence maybe?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:33. **Who can tell me what this verse means?** (If you choose your friends poorly, they will have a negative effect on you. You will slowly become a bad person.) **The good news is—the opposite is also true!** Who can tell me 1 Corinthians 15:33 in reverse? (Good company creates/improves good character.) **If you choose good friends, you will slowly become a better and better person because your good friends will rub off on you and influence you—making you a better person!**

**Suggested Bible Narrative**
Zacchaeus the Tax Collector—Luke 19:1-10

Zacchaeus was a man who at some point in his life chose to become friends with the Roman Empire and with other people who were bad. These people influenced Zacchaeus and eventually corrupted him, too. But when Zacchaeus encountered Jesus and became His friend, this new friendship changed Zacchaeus completely. Soon he became a new man and repaid all those people he had cheated and wronged. Bible scholars believe that Zacchaeus became a leader in the early church. The people we choose as our friends impact our character, our conduct, and therefore the direction of our lives!

**Dee’s Disciple Tip:** Here’s a good way to evaluate your present friendships—or a potential new friend. Remember—a True Friend C-A-R-E-S.

- **C**—Challenges you
- **A**—Accepts you
- **R**—Respects you
- **E**—Encourages you
- **S**—Sticks with you
**KeyVerse**

**Topic:** The Secret to Friendship  
**Reference:** Philippians 2:3-4

The KeyVerse for this unit does not directly mention friendship, but it is a wonderful verse that reveals a secret about forming strong friendships. Encourage the children to memorize this verse, and consider giving a small prize during the final week of this series to every child who can recite this verse perfectly. Read the entire verse together a few times.

This week’s key phrase is: OWN INTERESTS. Point out to the children that this Bible verse is not saying that it is wrong to look out for our own interests. It says that when we concern ourselves with ONLY our own interests, we ignore the interests of others. Good friends make sure to ALSO consider the interests of their friends. Good friends care about others. They do things to meet the needs, concerns, and desires of their friends and the people around them. Instead of being selfish, good friends often set aside their own interests for others.

Let’s suppose you want to go to McDonald’s, and your friend wants to go to Burger King. Which restaurant should you choose? Obey Jesus’ Golden Rule: “Do to others what you’d have them do to you.” If you’d like them to go your way, Jesus would have you go their way!

When was the last time you set aside what you wanted so your friend could have his or her way? When you do that, then you ARE being a good friend!

Invite enough children on stage to assign one word of the verse to each. Line them up and have each child say ONE word of the verse as they go down the line. Use a watch to time how fast they can say the verse. Try to improve the time. Keep having the last person go to the beginning of the line, so the word assignments shift each time! Have some fun with it. The children in the audience can say every word, trying to beat their own fastest time. The repetition will help them memorize the verse.
Dramatize the Point

Act this out or read as a story. Supplies: game show host, four contestants, four friends dressed to their roles

Show host introduces the “Choose Your Friend” Game Show and presents contestants with four options to choose from. Each “Friend” gets to describe the kind of friend he or she will be, and then the contestants get to make their choices. The game show host then gives the results.

- Friend #1—This friend promises you popularity and the fast track to the “in” crowd. You will soon be invited to all the best parties, and everyone will wish they were you!
- Friend #2—This friend has the goodies! He will treat you to lunch, slip you stuff he gets at the mall, and soon you will own more expensive stuff than you ever imagined possible!
- Friend #3—This friend knows how to have fun! Your life will become a constant party, and the good times will never end!
- Friend #4—This friend may not be that popular, or rich, but he or she will challenge you to be a better person.

The contestants each choose a friend. The first contestant chooses #3, and the game show host announces, “You’ll definitely have a lot of fun—the only problem is, you stop doing your homework, your grades suffer, and come graduation, you have to sit and watch your friends graduate. Years later, you are still working at a hamburger joint wondering why life isn’t fun anymore. You chose poorly.”

The second contestant chooses #1, and the game show host announces, “Your fame lasted only two weeks because this friend dumped you for a new friend who had a backyard pool. Too bad—now you are known as a “has-been” and a “wannabe.” Your old friends feel betrayed; they don’t want you back, either. You chose poorly!”

The third contestant chooses #2, and the game show host announces, “Turns out that the good stuff this friend slipped you at the mall was stolen! You get arrested, your house is searched, and all the ‘hot’ merchandise is confiscated. Now you have a criminal record. You have chosen poorly!”

And then the fourth contestant chooses #4, and the game show host announces, “This friend accepts you just the way you are, respects you, encourages you, and sticks with you through thick and thin. You have fun times, but you also work together during the tough times. Years later, you’ll still be friends because time and experiences keep drawing you closer together. You have chosen… wisely.”

Object Talks—The Choose Your Friend Show

Supplies: video projection

The video clip for this lesson features Karl, the Kidologist, performing a short “game show” with toys on the importance of choosing friends carefully. The video features an interactive element and allows kids in the audience to respond by choosing which friend they would select toward the end. Encourage the children to respond aloud during the video when asked to do so. Use this short teaching video to show the kids or to train a leader to do the talk “live.” Featured verse: Proverbs 12:26
Let’s Talk!—Small Group Discussion
Play a modified version of “Heads Up—Thumbs Up.” All the small group members close their eyes and put their thumbs up. The leader then taps one child who gets to open his eyes and tap the thumb of another child. The leader then says “Heads Up—Thumbs Up!” All the kids then open their eyes. The one who had his or her thumb tapped tries to guess who tapped the thumb. Have some fun and play a few rounds.

Small Group Questions:
1) In our game, how did it feel when you were picked? (good)
2) How did you feel when you weren’t picked? (disappointed)
3) How should we choose our friends?
4) How do we break off friendships that aren’t good for us?
5) Does anyone need prayer about a friendship situation?

DiscipleTown Super Citizen
Choose a child to reward who brought a friend to church.

Let’s Pray!
Dear Jesus, we live in a world where a thousand voices call out to us for attention and allegiance. Give us the wisdom and discernment to make good choices in the friendships we choose. We want friends who will please You and who will draw us closer to You. Help us to be able to tell which friendships are healthy and which are not. Enable us to see which friendships will challenge us and who will accept us just as You do. Lead us to encouragers and show us people who will respect us and stick by us through thick and thin. And in return, help us to be the same to them. We know that bad company corrupts good character, so help us form friendships that will help us make wise choices that please You in every way. In Jesus’ Name, amen.

Cy’s Challenge: Think of someone you know who would make a good friend and reach out to him or her this week.

Let’s Review!
If you have extra time, use these review questions to keep the kids focused on the lesson until time to dismiss. A handful of candy will help you keep their attention. After each question, take a minute to reiterate the lesson point related to the question.

1) What did Firefighter Francisco say is the “extinguisher” to put out friendship fires?
2) What word does the Bible use to describe being tied to someone, like in a three-legged race?
3) Why is it important to choose good friends?
4) What can happen if you are friends with a bad person?
5) A good way to evaluate friends is to use the acronym C-A-R-E-S. What do the letters from C-A-R-E-S stand for?
For the Home

DiscipleTown Table Talker: Give each child a copy of this week’s DiscipleTown Table Talker. Be sure to show them how to put it together and encourage the kids to ask their parents to lead family devotions three times this week.

Parent Email: Copy and send the email below to help your parents connect with their kids during the week. Send them early in the week, but not on Sunday. As a courtesy, be sure parents have opted to receive these emails. Review and edit as necessary to reflect the lesson elements you have used. You can also find this email as a Microsoft Word document in your download bundle.

Dear Mom and Dad,

Few things will have greater influence on the rest of your child’s life than his or her friendships. That is why we have been learning about How to Make Good Friends. Helping children be intentional and thoughtful about their choices in friends is a skill that if gained as a child can have lifelong benefits.

Most children (and adults, for that matter) are passive in their selection of friends. They often form friendships simply by proximity or coincidence. The Bible is very clear that believers are to be intentional and thoughtful when it comes to establishing friendships. The company we keep has a profound impact on our character, our choices, and therefore the outcomes of our lives. In this lesson, we challenged and equipped your child to be thoughtful and prayerful as he or she develops friendships.

We also looked at what the Bible says about being careful in our selection of friends. We equipped your child with an easy-to-remember mental tool for evaluating friends, “A true friend C-A-R-E-S.” The letters stand for:

C—Challenges You
A—Accepts You
R—Respects You
E—Encourages You
S—Sticks with You

Feel free to quiz your kids on these letters. Also, prayerfully think about your own friendships and how you measure up as a friend. We all have room for improvement!

Partnering with you to form young disciples,

[Your Name]
Chip’s Snack Time!
Supplies: colored tortilla chips, candies, snacks

Give each child a bowl of multi-colored tortilla chips. Let them build their nachos with a variety of different candies. Then enjoy eating together. (Choose snacks that will go well with tortilla chips—M&M’s, pretzel sticks, Cheez-Its, etc.) Friendships are made up of a variety of types of people and flavors. Each one is oh so sweet and makes life so delicious! This can be a yummy and rare treat!

Group Activity
Supplies: black pencils (with soft, #2 lead), wet wipes for cleanup

Have each child write the word FRIENDS in large block letters, filling in the letters completely and very dark with the pencil. This may take several minutes. After the kids are finished, have them rub their fingers over the letters to see that the graphite from the word “friends” rubs off on their hands.

Explain that in the same way, the friends they choose can have a big impact on the way they act. Friends influence what type of clothes we wear, the type of music we listen to, what we believe about God, the way we treat others, and on and on. In other words, friends rub off on us. As Christians, we need to be careful whom we choose as friends.
DIRECTOR’S NOTES
The words in italics are notes for you and your puppeteers; they are not to be read aloud.
Puppet* is dressed in a leather jacket with an earring and a baseball cap on backwards.

Leader: Hey, [puppet name]. You’re looking...different.

Puppet: Yo. I joined the Bubble Gum Gang, yo.

Leader: Well, that sounds like fun. What kind of things does your Bubble Gum Club do?

Puppet: Gang, not club. It’s sick! We joke on peeps with bubble gum.

Leader: [Having trouble following.] Come again?

Puppet: Y’know—jokes. Like sticking it in other kids’ schoolbooks, girls’ hair, doorknobs. It’s high-larious!

Leader: Um...

Puppet: We have so much fun! We don’t do homework, we pick on little peeps, and we shoot spit wads at geezers, yo.

Leader: I have to say, [puppet name], I’m shocked! Where did you meet this gang?

Puppet: A new kid at school started it. His name is Bubba. He transferred from Juvey Elementary School.

Leader: You mean Juvenile Detention Center?

Puppet: Yo! That was it!

Leader: [Puppet name], that’s a jail for minors. Bubba must have done something bad to be sent there.

Puppet: Really?

Leader: Really. And it sounds like Bubba is still being bad. You should not hang out with him.

Puppet: [Confused.] Why not?

Leader: Bubba is already a bad influence on you. The [puppet name] I know wouldn’t put gum in little girls’ hair.

Puppet: Yeah, I actually felt bad about that. But I wanted to go along with my friend.

Leader: Well, Bubba is not a good friend if he makes you feel like you have to do bad things.

Puppet: You’re right, I guess.

Leader: I’d get out of the Bubble Gum Gang right away—and be wiser choosing your friends!

Puppet: Okay.

Leader: And, [puppet name]?

Puppet: Yeah?

Leader: Please don’t ever say “yo” or “peeps” around me again.

*PUPPET: Develop a puppet character to use regularly. The children will get to know the personality and enjoy these regular visits. Dee, Cy, and Paul puppets are available at DiscipleLand.com
DIRECTOR’S NOTES
The words in italics are notes for you and your volunteers; they are not to be read aloud.

You will need a firefighter outfit, a large hose or fire extinguisher. If possible, play a siren sound effect in the background. Firefighter Francisco* hurries in, looking around frantically.

Leader: A firefighter! Is there a fire around here? [Looks around.] I don’t see one.

Firefighter Francisco: [Hurriedly.] Hello! I’m Firefighter Francisco—and YES! I’m looking for a fire, but not the type you are thinking of—not the flame type.

Leader: Then what type?

Francisco: I’m looking for friendship fires. Got a call that there were some friendship fires at this location. [Looks out at audience.] Aha! There! Must be out there! With all these kids, the fire must be close!

Leader: [Looks at kids and then back at Francisco.] What do you mean, fire in these kids’ friendships?

Francisco: Yes! [To audience.] How many of you kids have friends? Raise your hands! [Let kids respond.] Well, how many of you are in the midst of spats with some of your friends? Okay, you don’t have to raise your hands, but I know some of you are—friendship fires break out every day! Sometimes they are little candle flames that you can blow out. Other times they are small brush fires that take a day to blow over. And other times, they are huge towering infernos that can burn a friendship to the ground and turn it to ashes!

Leader: Oh, dear, I think I’ve seen some of those in my lifetime.

Francisco: Please take friendship fires seriously! Some are natural, but some are started by arsonists—bad people who are out to destroy friendships. You gotta watch out for those. You can put others out just by using the extinguisher.

Leader: The extinguisher?

Francisco: Yes! Everyone’s got an extinguisher—just saying you’re sorry. Works nearly every time—if used sincerely.

Leader: Well, thank you for the advice, Firefighter Francisco. Sounds like we need to be careful not to start friendship fires, and to put them out as fast as possible when they start.

Francisco: Yes! And be careful when choosing your friends. Some are more explosive than others.

Leader: Thank you. We’re learning about choosing friends wisely today.

Francisco: Glad to hear it. I gotta get going. I smell smoke over in one of the adult classes… gossip! Oh, boy, that’s like a chain-reaction fire! Gotta snuff that out. Later!

*CHARACTERS: These are suggested characters and names. Please feel free to change or adjust to suit your kids’ needs and tastes.
Each DiscipleTown Unit will teach your kids an essential "how to" skill to become victorious disciples of Jesus!