

WEEK 3
LESSON GUIDE



BIG IDEA

God can help us choose our friends wisely.

BIBLE

Romans 12:9–12; Psalm 1:1–6;
Proverbs 4:23

ABOUT THIS WEEK

This week, we'll hear from Paul about some qualities we can look for — and develop for ourselves—when looking for quality friendships. His words remind us how **God can help us choose our friends wisely.**

WHAT? What are we talking about today?

ILLUSTRATION | Deal Or No Deal

- Welcome to Week 3 in our series, *On Your Own*. We're talking about how friends can help us grow closer to Jesus.
- Lots of us have made friends because they happened to sit next to us in kindergarten or our parents are friends. Some of us have friends we picked, or they picked us. How we choose our friends can feel as random or intentional as this old game show called Deal or No Deal.
- **Explain the concept of Deal or No Deal, or play a quick round of the game live.**
- That game has a little strategy, but it is mostly luck. Making friends can feel similar to this game. We pick people to be our friends based on gut instinct, first impressions, or appearances. We cross our fingers, hoping they will be people we want to spend time with and also want to spend time with us.
- Are friendships always supposed to be random, or should we be more selective about the people we surround ourselves with? How do we choose?

- Have you ever had a friendship where you made a quick assumption about someone, and then, as you spent more time with them, you realized they were different from what you thought.
- Or maybe you've felt the pressure to appear a certain way. Maybe you work hard to mask the things happening on the inside so your friends wouldn't know.
- How can we see beyond the disguises others wear and drop the masks we use to hide ourselves? What does it look like to choose friends who help us grow closer to God, are honest with us, and are fun to be around?
- Let's look at a passage from Scripture that gives us insight into what it looks like to choose godly friends.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE | Romans 12:9–12

- Paul wrote a letter to the church in Rome for a lot of reasons but partially because they were entangled in conflict. They tended to focus more on their differences than on their common life together in Jesus. They kept choosing sides, and the divide grew deeper.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Romans 12:9–12.
- Can you imagine being part of the community that received this letter? Even with all the division happening, Paul says, "Love each other." Paul hoped the church in Rome could be bonded through a deep, sacrificial, Christlike love for one another. The kind of love that can only come from God.
 - He wasn't telling them to erase their differences. Paul invited people to experience deep friendships that showed care for each other despite differences and conflicts.
 - Paul encouraged the Roman church to honor each other over themselves. God's Spirit was in them, guiding them. They needed to learn to listen to God over the voices of their preferences.
- This letter wasn't designed to call out one specific relationship. It was intended to call in the entire church. Wisdom in relationships looks like building bridges and healing divides when you're in a community committed to following Jesus.
- The people in the Roman church may have wondered if there was hope for unity, and Paul told them there absolutely was hope! First, they needed to notice the ways they were contributing to the divide, then ask God to focus their attention on what was important—God's love and Jesus' compassion.
- When you hear, "Love must be sincere," what do you think Paul means? What is love, and what is sincerity? When we look at the original Greek language, this word means "undisguised" or "without hypocrisy."
- When Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, he wanted them to take off their masks and be honest. They needed to stop hiding behind false identities or people-pleasing facades if they wanted meaningful friendships. He was calling them to be authentic and vulnerable.
- Although this letter was not written to us, there's truth for us throughout the whole Bible. When it comes to making friends, the first step is to **show love in authentic ways**, even if they don't create a shiny surface we would like to portray.
 - Are you showing friends the real you or a version you think will help them accept you?
 - What about the popular kid in your school who thinks you're a nerd? Do you ever feel the need to change who you are in hopes that they'll accept you?
 - What about the guy in your class that all the girls talk about and want to be with? Have you ever considered changing your appearance so he'll like you?
 - What about that person who's really sweet, but gets picked on a lot. You want to be their friend and think they're nice, but it's the "cool" thing to make fun of them with other people so you do it so you can be accepted.
- This is not a healthy foundation for Godly relationships.
- The best thing you can do, if you want to honor God in your relationships is **show people the real you and trust God to take the next step.**

SCRIPTURE | Psalm 146:6–10

- Paul teaches people to choose friends that help them become more like the God they follow. But we don't need to do this on our own. God is with us, actively helping us choose friends that lead us to compassion, understanding, and wisdom.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read Psalm 146:6–10.
- In this passage, we read a few of God's defining characteristics. God keeps promises, seeks justice, cares for those in need, lifts others, loves selflessly, and looks out for the well-being of others. This is the God who knows us, loves us, and wants to be our friend. How incredible is that?
- Whenever we feel like we're "on our own," we can remember the God who made everything around us is the same God who is always with us. Not only is God with us, but God has also promised to care for us. Often, God cares for us by providing great friends for us. But how do we find those great friends?

- First, we ask God to help us take on the characteristics in this passage. We can keep promises, seek justice, lift up others, and live selflessly as best we can. Of course, we'll mess up, and we can't do it alone, but with God's help, we can strive to become the type of friends we seek in others.
- Secondly, we look for friends who embody the kind of love God displays. Do you want to find friends who will love you for who you are and spur you on to be who God created you to be? Then, let this description from Psalm 146 be your guide. Look for friends who keep their promises, seek justice, care for those in need, lift others up, love selflessly, and look out for the well-being of their friends. Of course, they will mess up sometimes, but when our focus is on God and not ourselves, we can keep our good friends close by.
- We don't have to try to establish and navigate through friendships mindlessly. **God can help us choose our friends wisely.**

NOW WHAT? What does God want us to do about it?

IMAGE | What Are Boundaries?

- Knowing **God can help us choose our friends wisely** means there will be times when some friends are better for us than others. We may need to set healthy boundaries around what it looks like to be friends with someone. This doesn't mean you cut out every person you disagree with from your life. It means talking to God about what it looks like to connect with friends in your life.
- Boundaries are necessary for friendships to succeed and help us experience everything God hopes for us. God wants us to have friends who help us follow Jesus.
- If we know who we are and what is important to us, we can look for friends who support us in that pursuit. When we reflect on what we value, we can use those values to help us set boundaries in our friendships.
- Boundaries may feel harsh, but clear expectations are best for you and your friends. Boundaries help protect us from guilt, resentment, and bitterness and allow us to live out our values and goals.
 - Think about the last time you played a board game. Whenever there's a question about how the game is played, you look at the written rules.
 - If everyone followed their own rules, it would be chaos! Before a game (or a friendship) starts, it's good to lay out the common rules you will follow. If there's a disagreement, you can revisit the boundaries you both agreed to. Healthy boundaries protect you and your friendships.
- Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you determine your boundaries.

Note to the Speaker: As you talk to each of these points, remember to consider ALL relationships, not just friendships (ex. Dating, parents, siblings, teammates, classmates, teachers, etc.)

- **WHO DOES GOD SAY YOU ARE?** God says you are loved and good but not perfect. God says you have a purpose, and you're secure and valued. Do your friends treat you in ways that align with who God says you are? What do you need your friends to know about who God says you are? Do you treat your friends like these things are true for them as well? Because they are.
- **WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?** What priorities help you follow Jesus, and what values are you unwilling to compromise? What boundaries do you want to set based on these values? Good friends will honor your boundaries and priorities. Tell them what is important to you.
- **WHEN DO YOU FEEL UNEASY?** Which specific scenarios or social gatherings give you a pit in your stomach, telling you you shouldn't be there? What boundaries do you want to set to avoid those moments that rob you of peace? Tell your friends about them and ask for their support.
- **WHERE'S IT DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW JESUS?** Are there specific spaces that pull you away from who God calls you to be? What scenarios or places in town, school, or online do you want to avoid? Tell your friends about them and ask for help finding alternatives.
- Think about characteristics and words you would like to describe you. Think about your dreams for the future. We may be tempted to shake off our boundaries, but when we think about the big picture and why they're important, we'll be more likely to prioritize boundaries in our friendships.
- What boundaries do you need to set with friends who follow Jesus and those who don't so that you aren't derailed from continuing to be who God calls you to be? How can you be that type of friend to others?

- "Friendships can have a profound impact on our lives, shaping who we are and who we're becoming. Tonight, we've looked at what it means to choose and be the kind of friends who honor God and help each other grow closer to Him. As we wrap up, remember that godly friendships are built on authenticity, love, and intentionality—not luck or random chance.
- We've also learned that we don't have to navigate friendships on our own. God is with us, guiding us as we set boundaries and make choices that honor Him. He provides wisdom when we seek it and friends who will help us stay focused on His plan for our lives.
- Now, let's take some time in our small groups to talk about what this looks like in real life. Here's what I want you to think about: How do your friendships currently align with what we've talked about tonight? What steps can you take to honor God in your relationships, and how can you help your friends do the same?
- Your small group leaders are here to guide you, but this is also a space for you to be open, ask questions, and encourage one another. Let's pray before we head into groups:
- 'God, thank You for the friendships You've given us and for the way You guide us in relationships. Help us to honor You in the way we choose, build, and maintain our friendships. Give us the courage to set boundaries, to be authentic, and to love others as You love us. Be with us in our discussions tonight, and lead us as we grow together in You. Amen.'
- Alright, let's split up into groups and start unpacking what this looks like in your lives!"