

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will do Bible study together about one important aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We will use a very easy Bible study method called the five steps method. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. The second series of 6 Bible studies is about 6 important relationships: Christian love, Christian friendship, the Christian men-woman relationship, the Christian marriage relationship, the Christian parent-child relationship and unequal yoke-relationships. Today's Bible study is: A DISCIPLE IS A REAL FRIEND. The fundamental question is "WHAT CHARACTERISES CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP?"

(S) STEP 1. READ

Let us read John 15:13-15. Let us take turns to read one verse each.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. **(T)** You are my friends if you do what I command. **(S)** I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

(T) STEP 2. DISCOVER

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in this Bible passage. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in John 15:13. Jesus says that the greatest love is to lay down your life for your friends. What touches me deeply is the fact that *Jesus calls me his friend*. In Romans 5, I read what I was before I became a Christian. At that time I was weak, ungodly, a sinner and an enemy of God. I was weak especially in my character and utterly powerless to change myself. I was ungodly: I did not believe that God existed; I did not think that I needed God; and I did things against God's will. I missed God's purpose with my life and I lived my life just like an enemy of God would do. I was an enemy and now Jesus calls me his friend! I only have a few friends on earth, but nobody compares with Jesus. As my friend, he really wants to be close to me and do things together with me. A very important truth for me is that I, a former enemy, am now called a friend of Christ.

(T) An important truth for me is in John 15:14. Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." I realise that friendship is not automatic. *Friendship involves responsibility*. I can only be a friend of Jesus if I obey his commands. Already in verse 9 and 10 he says, "Remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love." Only by constantly doing the will of Christ can I have the assurance that I remain in his love. It is my responsibility to know his commands and it is also my responsibility to obey his commands. A very important truth for me is that if I want friendship, then I have responsibilities.

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in this passage and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question from verse 13. What does it mean to lay down your life for your friends?

(T) I think that we must distinguish between the way Jesus laid down his life for us on the one hand and the way we should lay down our lives for others on the other hand. The love, which Jesus had for us when he died on the cross for us, is unique. The infinite value of his love, *the substitutionary character of his love* and *the redemptive consequences of his love* can never be a pattern for our love! In these respects the love of Christ is completely unique and cannot be copied. Jesus not only died *for our benefit* - he died *in our place*! Christ's love is a substitutionary love. His love causes him to pay the penalty for our sin and to suffer the agony of being forsaken by God in our place.

However, verse 12 and 13 together says, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." This shows that there is a way in which the love of Christ is a pattern for our love. This characteristic of Christ's love, which we should follow, is *the self-sacrificial nature of his love*. Jesus is saying, "Love each other self-sacrificially, as I have loved you self-sacrificially." We love self-sacrificially, when we deny our interests and ourselves in order to love one another. Self-sacrificial love always has a cost. It costs time, it costs money, it costs energy and it costs self-denial.

2nd Question from verse 14. If I fail to keep some commands of Jesus, am I still his friend?

(S) This is a very interesting question.

First. Let us consider what the disciples were like at that time. On their way to the Passover meal, which they were now eating, these same disciples had been arguing with one another about who of them should be considered the greatest (Luke 22:24). And when they arrived at the Upper Room, no one was willing to wash the other's feet (John 13). Soon after this meal, they would not be able to watch with him for one hour as he prayed. And when the mob came to arrest Jesus, Peter got violent, drew his sword and hacked the ear of somebody's head. Then all the disciples deserted Jesus and fled. During the next day, very early in the morning, Peter denied Jesus three times. In so many ways these disciples displayed their character deficiencies. But Jesus, who knew everything, still said, "You are my friends"! How condescending is the love of Jesus!

Second. Let us never forget that true friendship requires responsibility. *Friendship with Jesus is not on our terms, but on his terms.* Jesus determines what constitutes the friendship with him and what does not belong to this friendship. He is the one who makes the commands. He is the one who determines the boundaries of this friendship-relationship! This is important. Friendship with Jesus is not like friendship in the world. Friendship in the world is a certain chemistry of feelings, a set of mutual likes and dislikes, an excitement to be together and do things together. But friendship with Jesus is obedience to his commands. Jesus sets the terms as well as the boundaries of the friendship-relationship.

Third. How can we reconcile the disciples' responsibility to obey with Jesus' condescending love for them? How can disciples with so many shortcomings be the friends of Jesus? The answer is in verse 19, where Jesus says, "I have chosen you out of this world". Jesus chose these disciples with all their shortcomings to be his own. Then he saved them out of the dominant rule of the devil and sin. Soon after his death on the cross for his disciples, he would pour his Holy Spirit out on them. Only through the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit would the disciples with all their natural shortcomings be able to obey the commandments of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ commands all the people that he saves to obey him. But Jesus Christ also sanctifies them through the Holy Spirit, so that they CAN and WILL obey him (1 Peter 1:1-2).

3rd Question from verse 15. In John 13 the disciples are called "servants" and here in John 15 they are called "friends". Why are the disciples of Jesus no longer called "servants"?

(T) First. Jesus teaches that *with respect to position* his disciples never stop to be *servants*. John chapters 13-17 all happen during the Thursday night before he was crucified. Earlier in that evening, Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover meal. And Jesus taught his disciples the importance of humble service. First he washed their feet and then he taught them what it means to be a servant. He said that a servant is never greater than his master. The Christian disciples are never greater than their Master, Jesus Christ. But if their Master, Jesus himself, washed their feet, how much more should they not wash one another's feet? Jesus spoke about *the position of the disciples in relationship to Christ*. With respect to *spiritual position*, Jesus Christ is always the Master, the King, the Lord, the One who reveals the invisible God to them and the Christian disciples are always servants. But the characteristic of Christ and Christians is that they do not lord it over people, they do not rule people with force and legal commands, but that they serve one another in love. Like Jesus Christ, all Christians should be willing to serve in tasks that no one else could do or no one else wanted to do!

Second. Jesus teaches that *with respect to relationship* his disciples are always *friends*. Jesus had already told his disciples many important things, which he in his human nature had learned from God the Father. He told them why the Father sent him to earth: to seek and to save them. He told them why he was going to suffer: to pay the penalty for their sin. He told them why he had to leave the earth: he was going to pour out the Holy Spirit on them and prepare a place for them in heaven. Now in general, a master never tells such things to his servants. Jesus had told his disciples these things, because they had become his friends. When Jesus places the emphasis on *the closeness of the relationship* between himself and his disciples, then the name "servant" is no longer the proper term, but "friend" is the proper description of their relationship. Moreover there is another distinction between "servants" and "friends". The Jewish religious teachers had made the Jews "slaves" of human made religious laws. Originally it was God's law, but by their many interpretations and applications, the Jewish religious leaders had turned God's law into human religious laws and put them as "burdens" on the necks of their followers. In contrast, the followers of Jesus Christ received the light and easy "yoke of Jesus" to carry (Matthew 11:30). The disciples of Jesus Christ were no longer "servants" of human religious rules and human religious traditions. They had become the friends of Jesus Christ that gave themselves to the cause of Jesus.

A summary. Jesus calls those people for whom he lays down his life substitutionally and self-sacrificially his friends. Jesus calls those people that put his teachings into practice his friends. Jesus calls those people with whom he shares what he has learned from God the Father his friends.

4th Question. What does John 15:13-15 teach us about human friendship?

(S) John 15:13-15 teaches three very important principles about human friendship.

The first principle comes from verse 13. "You make friends by loving someone self-sacrificially."

Do not wait for someone to be your friend. Take the initiative and make a friend! People in the world ask, “Who are my friends?” But a Christian should ask, “To whom am I a friend?” Jesus took the initiative and made friends out of people who were his enemies before. Like Jesus, Christians should take the initiative and go to loveless people and show self-sacrificial love to them. Go to unfriendly people and show friendliness. Go to lonely people and be a friend for them. Go to the lost people and bring them to Jesus.

The second principle is from verse 14. “You maintain friendship by drawing one another up to live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ”. Do not pull one another down into sin or to a worldly life-style. Pull one another up or push one another up to a life-style of obeying Christ’s teachings. Real friendship can never exist in an atmosphere of lies or deceit, of living in defeat and the mud pool of sin. True friendship can only exist and flourish in an atmosphere of loving Christ and doing Christ’s teachings. People in the world expect other people *to lower themselves* to unbelief and a life-style of defeat before they would accept them and call them so-called “friends”. But Christians make every effort *to pull such people upwards* towards faith in Christ, towards the truth and values of Jesus Christ, towards a life-style of victory over sin and squalor and towards meaningful and lasting friendships. Christians are friends, not by *conforming* to the people of the world, but by *transforming* one another to become like Christ.

The third principle is from verse 15. “You deepen friendship by sharing with one another what you learn from God.” Do not limit your talk to material things and the news of the day. Talk also about God, the Bible and the things that God is teaching you day after day. People in the world often are afraid to talk about spiritual things, because they are ignorant. Christians should help them to discover spiritual truths in a way that does not embarrass them.

A summary. I am a friend to another person when I take the initiative to love him self-sacrificially; when I draw him up into the boundaries of Christ’s teachings, values and life-style; and when I open myself and share with him what I learn from God.

(T) STEP 4. APPLY

Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of *possible applications* from John 15:13-15.

(S) Take the initiative and make friends with a person who opposes you, or who is lonely, or who is loveless and lost.

(T) Pull all your friends up into the standards and boundaries of Christ’s commands and up into a life-style according to Christ’s teachings.

(S) Share what you are learning from God with your friends.

(T) Afterwards consider which possible application does God want you to turn into a *personal application*.

(S) My personal application is the following. The Gospel of John has taught me how to make friends.

Instead of always wondering who are my friends, I want to take the initiative and make friends by loving others self-sacrificially. I want to be a friend for others, instead of wanting them to be my friends. I really want to learn more about self-denial and self-sacrifice. I am going to study the Book of Proverbs, which teaches very much about true friendship. The three words I want to remember are: self-denial, self-sacrifice and self-discipline.

(T) My personal application is the following. I want to continue to develop my responsibilities as a friend. The Gospel of John taught me that it is my responsibility to pull my friends up into the standards and boundaries of knowing Jesus Christ, obeying his commands and living according to his teachings. I want to share with my friends what I learn from God. The book of Proverbs teaches me that it is my responsibility to sharpen my friends so that they may become their best for God and their best for other people. The one word I want to remember is “influence”. I want to influence my friends in the right and best way.

(S) STEP 5. PRAY

Let us take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in Luke 8:4-15.

Dear Father in heaven, I ask you for the grace to make friends by self-sacrificial love and self-discipline. Help me especially to make friends with people who need it desperately and who are lonely and helpless.

(T) Dear Father in heaven, I pray that you give me so much love for my friends, that I will persistently have good influence on them. Help me to graciously resist their bad influence, and instead draw them up into the circle where Christ’s teachings are obeyed.

(S) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Prepare next week’s Bible study. The Bible study topic is “A disciple has self-control”. And the Bible passage is 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

Second. Prepare next week’s Bible study from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks “Go and make disciples” and Internet on www. etc

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to “Discipleship training on the air”.