



STUDY GUIDE

January 8 -
February 5

HOW TO NEIGHBOR



HOW TO NEIGHBOR

A STUDY

on friendship

January 8 - February 5

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Beijing, China

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Written by TJ Johnson

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How to Be a
Better Friend
John 15:12-17

How to Be a Better Friend

John 15:12-17

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

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# How to Be a Better Friend

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so take a moment and envision a few of your best friends. People that have brought you joy. People that have comforted you in your darkest days. People that have pushed you closer to Jesus through incarnating the presence of Jesus. People that have asked you challenging questions, not leaving your sanctification to chance. Do you have them in your mind? Now just hold those images in your head for a moment...REALLY!

What a blessing is God's gifting of a friend! St John Chrysostom once wrote, "It would be better for the sun to be extinguished than that we should be deprived of friends. Better to live in darkness than to be without friends." This week we begin a sermon series on, "How to Neighbor." It is our desire in 2023 that City Church would create a culture that resembles the fellowship found in the early church, a multi-generational, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse community of Christ-Centered, Spirit-led, God lovers who crave Christ's community so much that we inconvenience ourselves to be physically present with one another in order to stir one another up to love and good works.

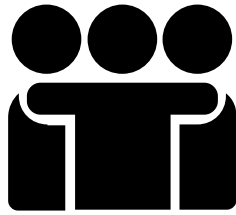
We begin this endeavor by asking one simple question,

How can I be a better friend in 2023?

Of course, this answer must be found in God Himself, who initiates friendship with us, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, who calls us, "friend," and in the Holy Spirit, who, as Augustine once wrote, "binds friends fast to one another through the love which is sown in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." In John 15 we are commanded to be the type of friend that Jesus is to us (love one another AS I have loved you). Join us this Sunday as we learn about Jesus' friendship and in turn learn to be better friends...that God may get the glory.

Friending with you,

Pastor TJ

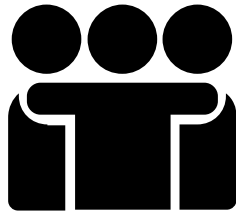


*Love one another*

## Discussion Questions

1. Share with the group ONE really good friend of your and why that relationship is meaningful to you.
2. Read John 15:1-17. Take some time to discuss how God's friendship toward us influences our friendship toward others (the connection between The Father and the Son, The Son and His disciples, disciple to disciple).
3. Read John 15:2. Give examples from the Old and New Testament where God "takes away" unfruitful branches in order to care for His community.
4. The sermon suggested that in order to go deep in your friendships you have to be selective with whom you spend time ("take away" unfruitful branches). How do we balance having healthy friend groups without removing ourselves from people that need to hear the gospel?
5. What are some examples of friend relationships that are so unhealthy that those branches need to be "taken away"?
6. Read John 15:2. Give examples in the Old and New Testament where God and Jesus pruned believers.
7. Read Hebrews 3:13. What are some ways that we as friends can "prune" one another that we might be more fruitful for God's glory?
8. Read John 15:4. In what ways did Jesus "abide" with people and in what ways today do we abide in Him and He in us?

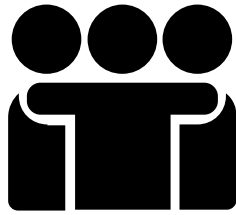




*Love one another*

## Discussion Questions

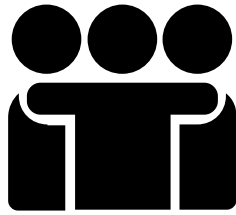
9. Read 1 Thess. 3:10, 3 John 1:14, and Hebrews 10:24-25. What are the things that keep us from being physically present with one another in 2023 and how can we overcome these obstacles?
10. Share of a time when a friend's physical presence was particularly meaningful to you.
11. Read John 15:13 and Philippians 2:3-5. Give examples (plural) when Jesus displayed selfless love toward us.
12. In what ways did the early church mimic the selfless love of Jesus for the community of faith?
13. List different areas of life where friendship can be demanding (aka time, finances, emotionally, etc), then share which areas are most difficult for you to be selfless, and finally discuss examples where friends have selflessly loved you selflessly.
14. Read John 15:15. In what ways has Jesus' friendship toward us been open, vulnerable, and intimate?
15. What are some things you can do in 2023 to be more open and vulnerable in your friendships?
16. Read John 15:16. Give examples in the Old and New Testament where God and Jesus initiated a relationship with a person or people.



*Love one another*

## Discussion Questions

17. What do you find most difficult about initiating a conversation or friendship and what are some strategies and tips for developing new friendships?
18. Take some time to pray for one another as friends and thank God for the friends in your life, lastly ask God to empower you to be more intentional in your friendships this year.



*Love one another*

## Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

### Prayer Requests

### Praise Reports





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## HOW TO NEIGHBOR

Sunday is Not  
Enough for  
Friendship  
**Acts 2:41-47**

# Sunday is Not Enough for Friendship

Acts 2:41-47

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. 42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

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Sunday is Not Enough for Friendship

Church.

What comes to mind when you hear the word? For some, a building. For others, a service. But Jesus didn't die to purchase a property or particular hour of the week. Jesus's blood was shed to purchase for Himself a people. If the church is a people, then it matters what we do, how we live, and how we interact with one another not just on Sunday's only, but also Monday through Saturday.

As we continue our series on Neighboring, this week we turn our attention to the early church practice of DAILY gatherings TOGETHER. Last week we looked at how to be a better friend. This week we will discover what that friendship can look like, "day by day."

May we be a people that loves one another so much, we discover that Sunday is NOT enough for fellowship.

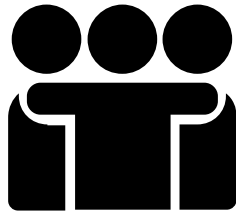
Ps TJ Johnson



They devoted themselves

Discussion Questions

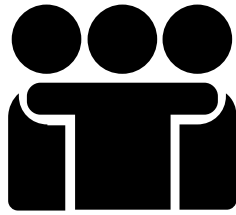
1. Read Acts 2:41-47. What difficulties do you think the early church faced with thousands of new believers and only twelve apostles?
2. Read Acts 2:42, 46. In what ways did awe and joy (glad hearts) contribute to the church's desire to meet daily?
3. Why do people lose the awe and joy of their salvation and what might be done to rekindle that awe and joy?
4. The sermon suggested that the early church met daily because of their need for daily Christian community. What needs might have driven them together daily and what needs do we have today for regular Christian community?
5. Read Acts 2:42. What opportunities does City Church offer for regular teaching, which opportunities do you participate in, and why?
6. Give examples from both the Old and New Testament for corporate prayer, then discuss why corporate prayer is needed when we have private prayer.
7. What opportunities does City Church offer for regular corporate prayer, which opportunities do you participate in, and why?
8. Read Acts 2:42. How often do you think the early church took communion, where, and who administered it? Do you think small groups or families today should take communion at home? Why or why not?



They devoted themselves

Discussion Questions

9. What are some ways your community can do a better job of regularly remembering Jesus' death and resurrection?
10. What did fellowship look like in the early church?
11. What are some ways your community can do a better job of regularly devoting yourself to, "the fellowship"?
12. Read Acts 2:46. Why do you think the early church met in both the Temple and in their homes?
13. What are some ways your community can be intentional about being a corporate public presence in the city?
14. Share with the group a family that has practiced hospitality well and what you learned from them.
15. How do we "devote" ourselves to "day by day" meeting together without overcommitting, burning out, or neglecting other important God-given areas of our life?



They devoted themselves

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports



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HOW TO NEIGHBOR

How to Embrace
an Eclectic Friend
Group
Ephesians 2:11-22

How to Embrace an Eclectic Friend Group

Ephesians 2:11-22

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—
12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

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# How to Embrace an Eclectic Friend Group

Who are your closest friends? Why are you so close to them? Take a minute to think about it.

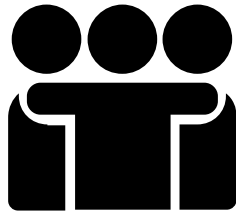
If we are honest, I think most of us will admit that we choose our friends based on similar interests, backgrounds, experiences and ways of seeing the world. Even in an international community like ours it is often the case that the North Americans hang out mostly with other North Americans, Africans with other Africans, Asians with other Asians, and so on. This is only natural, we may be tempted to say, but is this how God desires His church to be?

In Ephesians 2 Paul makes the shocking claim that in Jesus, the Messiah, Gentiles and Jews (two groups that hated each other) are now members of the same household and have become one new humanity. This means that as followers of Jesus we must embrace an eclectic group of friends — people who look different, sound different, think different, have different sized bank accounts, and are from different generations.

Does this sound a little stressful to you? Good! It should be stressful to us, because it is not possible through our own efforts alone. Ephesians 2:22 makes it clear that it is the Spirit who is building us together into a dwelling place for God. But we are not passive in this process! We must yield to the Spirit's work and be intentional in our cultivation of diverse friendships.

Cultivating with you,

Pastor Ben



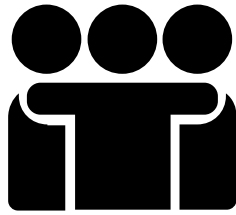
*Dwelling place*

## Discussion Questions

Ice Breaker:

When have you sought to be part of a new group, a new country, circle of friends, at school or work or club? Describe the difficulties you encountered and why.

1. Read v.11. List the two groups mentioned in this verse and the history of their division toward one another. What are some modern examples we find today (World, Home Country, Host Country)?
2. Read v. 12-13. Why does Paul first talk about fellowship and unity with God through Jesus before he talks about fellowship and unity with one another? (Note Jesus IS peace (v. 14) and then Jesus MAKES (v. 15) peace)
3. Read v. 11-13. What does, “therefore,” refer to and in what way does that explain HOW we have been brought near by the blood of Jesus and HOW those vastly different will be brought near to one another?
4. Read v. 11 and v. 14 noting the contrasting use of flesh. Give examples of human attempts of unity with God and man, why this is not enough, and Jesus’ superior way for us.
5. Read v. 14. Give examples from the Bible and in the world today where Jesus has reconciled enemies/people at odds with one another.

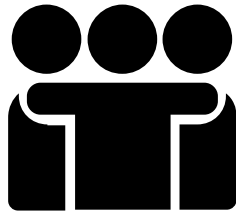


*Dwelling place*

## Discussion Questions

6. Read v. 14 noting the words, “dividing wall” (that which separates, prevents two from coming together). What are some common “dividing walls” that keep people from loving one another?
7. Read v. 15. What is the difference between creating unity between two peoples and creating “one new man” out of two peoples? How is the “one new man” experienced today in the church?
8. Read v. 16. How does the cross kill hostility? What would you say to a person who claims to be a Christian but holds hostility toward another person?
9. Is there a broken relationship in your life where unity is difficult to maintain on your own efforts? How does Ephesians 2:11-22 challenge and encourage you in that relationship?
10. Read v. 18, 22. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us reconcile with God and man?
11. Read v. 19-20. What three illustrations does Paul use to describe our unity? What specific truth is each teaching about how we should view any brother or sister in Christ? Which is most meaning to you and why?

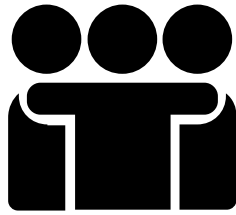




*Dwelling place*

## Discussion Questions

12. Read v. 20. Why does Paul call the Apostles and Prophets the foundation? (Note: think of the role of both as writers of Scripture). How does Scripture help us with unity and in what ways have you personally seen it transform you and others in terms of unity and love?
13. What does it mean that Jesus is the cornerstone of the universal church and what are some things we can do today to seek more unity across denominational lines?
14. What type of diversity might be missing in our church, your small group, etc.?
15. Are there any types of people that might find it difficult to be a part of your small group? If so, who and why?
16. End by discussing the ways in which our church or your small group are faithfully living out this section of Scripture and pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God.



*Dwelling place*

## Prayer & Praise

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## HOW TO NEIGHBOR

From Neighbor to  
Neighborhood

**Jeremiah 29:4-7**

# From Neighbor to Neighborhood

Jeremiah 29:4-7

4 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

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From Neighbor to Neighborhood

Beijing / beɪ'dʒɪŋ / the capital city of China. Population 25.36 million.

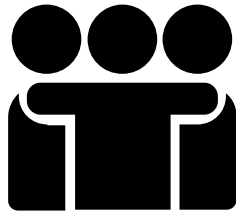
We call it home. We labor here. We love here. We lose here. I wonder what brought you to the city. An educational opportunity? Your heritage? A work transfer? A bit of adventure? A tragedy you're trying to escape? A hope for a new start?

Take all the possible reasons for finding yourself in Beijing and for all of us there is one undeniable truth: God has sent us here. In Jeremiah 29 the Israelite exiles now in Babylon are faced with two seemingly opposite but nevertheless equal truths: Nebuchadnezzar had carried them off into captivity AND God had led them to Babylon. God's plans was for His people to settle down and love the city where He placed them. For by loving the city, the city would learn to love God.

This week we are reminded that God calls US to love the city. Neighboring MUST cross Christian lines and Church walls to spill over into our neighborhoods, for only then will our city find the peace it is desperately searching for.

Neighboring with you,

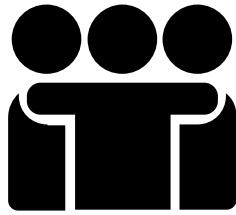
Pastor TJ



Seek the welfare of the city

Discussion Questions

1. What is the historical context of Jeremiah 29 (see 2 Kings 23:36-24:17)?
2. Read Jeremiah 29:1-7. Try to summarize the big idea (factual interpretation) of this passage in one or two sentences.
3. What parallels do you see between the exiles in Babylon and your life in Beijing these past (three) years?
4. Read Hebrews 11:13-16 and 1 Peter 2:9-12. In what ways can all of God's people relate to God's command to build and plant and seek the welfare of the city where God has placed them?
5. Read Jeremiah 29:7. Explain to the group what welfare/peace/Shalom is and is not.
6. What are some areas (if any) in your own life where Shalom is lacking (God, others, self)?
7. What are some areas in Beijing where Shalom is lacking (God, others, self)?



Seek the welfare of the city

Discussion Questions

8. Read Jeremiah 29:1-2 and 2 Kings 24:14-17. After listing the types of people that were addressed in this letter (ages, status, occupation, etc.) discuss why God desired to use people from all walks of life to bring Shalom to Babylon.
9. List the walks of life represented in your small group or church and discuss how these varied positions and roles can help bring Shalom to Beijing.
10. Read Jeremiah 29:7. Do you think it would have been difficult for the exiles to desire to seek the welfare of Babylon? Explain.
11. What difficulties might we experience today in desiring to seek the welfare of Beijing?
12. Read Jeremiah 29:5-7. What are some examples from Scripture of how this command was obeyed (see Book of Daniel as a case study)?
13. What are some specific ways we as a church, small group, or family can be intentional to seek the welfare of Beijing this year?
14. Why does Jeremiah command the people to PRAY for the welfare of city in addition to SEEKING the welfare of the city?
15. What are some specific ways we can pray for Beijing?



Seek the welfare of the city

Prayer & Praise

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Friendships Are
Like Digging Wells

Genesis 26:1-35

Friendships Are Like Digging Wells

Genesis 26:1-35

1 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. 2 And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. 4 I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, 5 because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

6 So Isaac settled in Gerar. 7 When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance. 8 When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. 9 So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'" 10 Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." 11 So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

Friendships Are Like Digging Wells

Genesis 26:1-35

12 And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, 13 and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. 14 He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. 15 (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) 16 And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

17 So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. 18 And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. 19 But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, 20 the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. 21 Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah. 22 And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

23 From there he went up to Beersheba. 24 And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." 25 So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

Friendships Are Like Digging Wells

Genesis 26:1-35

26 When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, 27 Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" 28 They said, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, 29 that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord." 30 So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. 31 In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. 32 That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." 33 He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

34 When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, 35 and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

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# Friendships Are Like Digging Wells

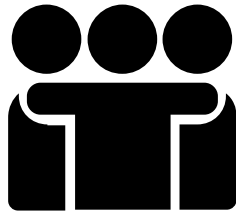
Have you ever dug a well? I don't mean with some modern machine that does all the work for you, I mean with a pitchfork and shovel. It's not exactly easy work...it's actually quite exhausting and time consuming. So, why do people do it? People dig wells because of the reward that comes in the end. Wells are where communities flourish (think of ancient civilizations gathering around water). Wells are places teeming with life (think of desert watering holes). Hard work, yes, but worth it.

This week we turn our attention to Genesis 26. Seven times within this short passage wells will be mentioned. Isaac digging wells. The Philistines filling wells. Arguments over wells. And finally, a meal (and drink) followed by an oath at a well.

As we look at Isaac's persistence to keep digging wells we will remind ourselves that God's promises do not always come to us easily. God has promised us a flourishing community where our love overflows to the community...but as anyone who has ever had a friend knows, that is hard, time-consuming work.

Digging with you,

Pastor TJ



*Shall be blessed*

## Interpretive Questions

1. Read Genesis 26:3-5, 24. What promise does God give to Isaac and what significance does this promise have with previous and future generations (Adam-Jesus-Us)?
2. What are some ways we see God bless Isaac in this chapter. What does it teach us about God's character?
3. What are the difficulties Isaac faces in this chapter and what does it teach us about God's promise to bless Isaac?
4. Read Genesis 26:6, 17, 25. Why does Isaac keep settling in different places, how does it pertain to God's promise, and what personal difficulties might his family have faced with so many moves? In what ways can you identify with Isaac and his family?
5. List the parallels between Abraham and Isaac in this chapter and discuss God's purpose in highlighting those parallels?
6. Read v. 22, noting both Isaac's effort (digging wells) and Isaac's belief that "The Lord has made room for us." Does living under the promise mean God does the work, I do the work, or some form of both? (See: 1 Cor. 3:5-9; 15:10).

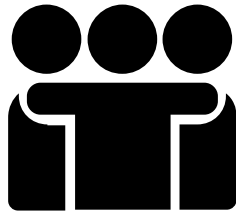




*Shall be blessed*

## Interpretive Questions

7. How many times does this chapter use the word, “well”? Why do you think there is such an emphasis on wells in this chapter?
8. Read v. 24, noting “for my servant Abraham’s sake.” Draw some connections between Isaac’s blessing through Abraham’s obedience and our blessing through Jesus’ obedience.
9. Read v. 26-28. How does Abimelech know that God was with Isaac and in what ways will the world today know that God is with us?

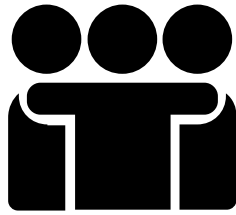


*Shall be blessed*

## Applicative Questions

*Genesis 26 is about God's faithfulness to keep His promises despite the circumstances we face. Today we will apply this truth to the topic of friendship (God's covenant community that He has promised to create for Himself which He has placed us in).*

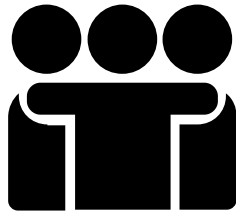
1. Read Mark 10:29-30, Genesis 2:18, Ephesians 2:18-22, Psalm 68:5-6, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Colossians 3:12-14, 1 Peter 4:7-9, and discuss God's promises (and commands) regarding friendships. (Does God expect us to live in community? Does God promise to place us in a community?)
2. In this chapter Isaac experiences the transient nature of life. In what ways does being an expat contribute to and hinder friendship?
3. What temptations and difficulties did Isaac face that might have led him to give up on the promise? Are you ever tempted to stop forming or maintaining friendships (to give up on the promise of friendship), if so why?
4. Who did God give to Isaac to help him live out the promise? Share with the group some people God has given you that have contributed to your faith.
5. As Isaac's faithfulness to dig wells contributed to human flourishing, in what ways (and to whom) do you hope your faith will contribute to others?



*Shall be blessed*

### **Applicative Questions**

6. God's command and promise to Isaac required Isaac's hard work (digging wells to stay in the land). As God has commanded and promised us a community (friendship), what effort is required of us for forming and maintaining those friendships?
7. How did Isaac deal with the conflict over the wells and why? What relational conflict do you face today and how do you deal with that conflict?
8. In what ways did Abraham's life contribute to both Isaac's faith and failure and in what ways have your friends and family formed you for better and worse? How can you take these experiences and use them to help you become a better friend?
9. What would you say (or do for) to a friend who is tired of putting forth the effort to form and maintain friendships (tempted to stop digging the wells of friendship)?



*Shall be blessed*

## Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

### Prayer Requests

### Praise Reports