

# © 11: The Friendship Factor

## Exploring the importance of choosing good friends

### Scripture:

- John 15:1-8—Parable of the vine and the branches.
- Matthew 7:15-20—Wolves in sheep's clothing.

<b>ACTIVITY OVERVIEW</b>		
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Pre-Session Prep</b>
Activity 1: Branch Out!	Compare a branch to a Christian.	You'll need a tree branch, pencils, paper, and a Bible.
Activity 2: Friend in a Bag	Learn that outside looks don't tell us what's on the inside.	You'll need ten paper sacks, ten small items, a marker, and a Bible.
Activity 3: Encouraging Friends	Thank good friends for their friendship.	You'll need art supplies.

### Main Points:

- The friends we choose can tear us away from God, or help us stay close to God.
- We can't choose friends by their looks. Instead, we must know what's inside.
- Be thankful for the good friends you have.

**LIFE SLOGAN:** "Choose a friend by his fruit, not by his suit!"

***Make it your own***

*In the space provided below, outline the flow and add any additional ideas to guide you through the process of conducting this family night.*

***Prayer & Praise Items***

*In the space provided below, list any items you wish to pray about or give praise for during this family night session.*

***Journal***

*In the space provided below, capture a record of any fun or meaningful things which happened during this family night session.*



## WARM-UP

**Open with Prayer:** Begin by having a family member pray, asking God to help everyone in the family understand more about Him through this time. After prayer, review your last lesson by asking these questions:

- What do you remember from our last lesson?
- Do you remember the Life Slogan?
- Have your actions changed because of what we learned? If so, how? Encourage family members to give specific examples of how they've applied past learning.

**Share:** Sometimes the people who tempt us are our own friends! That's why we're going to explore how important it is to choose our friends carefully.

## ACTIVITY 1: Branch Out!

**Point:** The friends we choose can tear us away from God, or help us stay close to God.



**Supplies:** You'll need a tree branch, paper and pencils, and a Bible.

**Activity:** Give each person a paper and pencil. Explain: Write down the qualities you look for in a friend.

Have older family members help those who can't yet write. Then have family members set these papers aside for a few minutes.

Hold out the tree branch and ask:

- From this branch, what can you tell me about the tree it came from? (*Most will observe the branch looks like the tree from which it came.*)
- Will this branch grow anymore? Why not? (*The branch will not grow because it is cut off from its food source.*)

**Share:** The branch can't grow because it's broken away from the tree. Jesus once talked about branches when he was talking with his followers.



Read John 15:1-8 aloud, then ask:

- What are the four key parts or people in this story? (*Vine, branch, fruit, gardener*)
- What does each of these represent?

## Age Adjustments

**YOUNGER CHILDREN** may not understand the whole branch analogy. Explain it to them as simply as possible. They will, however, be able to tell if certain friends are more likely to help them get into trouble or stay out of trouble. Discuss which friends are better to have, and what can be done to help those who lead your child into trouble. Is it worth having this friendship if it leads your child astray?

(In your discussion, be sure the following points are made:)  
**Vine:** This is the trunk that gives life to the branch. It represents Jesus Christ, who give us eternal life.

**Branch:** The branch produces fruit, but can't produce fruit if it's apart from the vine. It represents us and other Christians who have a relationship with God. Like the branch is attached to the vine, we are attached to God.

**Fruit:** Any fruit growing on a tree grows from the branch. The fruit represents qualities of Christlikeness such as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), or obedience, justice, and righteousness as referred to in another similar parable in Isaiah 5:1-7.

**Gardener:** A gardener cares for the trees. He trims away dead branches and throws them into the fire, and prunes the growing branches so more life will go toward growing new fruit.

In the same way God "prunes" or disciplines Christians so we can become more Christlike and grow more "fruit."


### Discuss:

- What does this story say we should be doing if we, like the branch, are attached to the vine, meaning God? (*We should show the "fruit" in our lives—Christlike qualities.*)
- What are some of the characteristics you think other people see in you that shows you're like Christ? (*We try to be loving and obey God's commandments.*)
- Now look at your paper where you listed what you look for in a friend. How many of these qualities are ones that reflect being like Christ?
- Do you think it's important to have strong Christians as friends? Why or why not? (*Strong Christian friends help us stay strong.*)
- How can a friend pull us away from God, and keep us from growing "good fruit"? Would a person like this be a true friend? (*We might end up trying to act like our friend, instead of following Jesus' example.*)
- What kind of friend helps us get closer to God? How does a friend do this? (*A true friend helps us grow "good fruit" by setting a good example in thoughts, words, and deeds.*)
- Which kind of friend do you want to have—one that helps

- you grow, or one that tears you away from God? Explain.
- Do you think the friends you have now are “attached to the vine”? How can you tell?

## ACTIVITY 2: Friend in a Bag

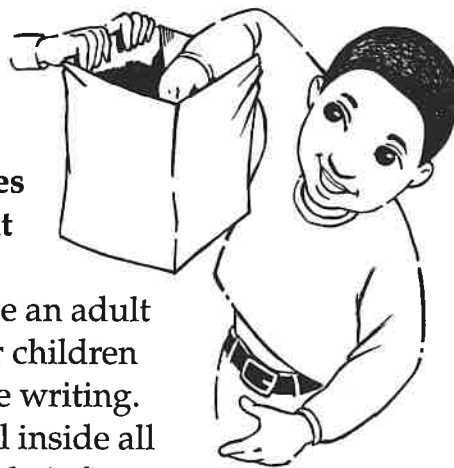
**Point:** We can't choose friends by their looks. Instead we must know what's inside.

 **Supplies:** You'll need ten paper sacks, a marker, ten small items, and a Bible. Before your time together, place the small items in different paper sacks, and number each bag from one to ten. Set these aside until you're ready to use them.

**Activity:** Bring out the sacks you've prepared ahead of time. Explain: **Reach into each sack and feel what's inside. Don't peek! Just feel the item, then use the blank side of your qualities of friendship paper to write down what you think is in the bag.**

For children who can't yet write, have an adult help, or pair older children and younger children into teams with the older child doing the writing.

When everyone's had a chance to feel inside all ten bags, have family members read off their first entry, then empty the first bag to see who was correct. Continue down the list until everyone's shared their findings and the true contents of each sack has been revealed.



### Discuss:

- By looking at the outside of each sack, was there any way to tell what was inside?
- Did you have any trouble figuring out what was inside each bag when you could put your hand inside? Explain.



Read Matthew 7:15-20, then discuss:

- Can you choose a friend by how he or she looks? Explain. *(People are not always the same inside as they appear outside.)*
- What kind of person dresses like a sheep but inside is a ferocious wolf? *(Some people are fake—pretending to be what they aren't.)*

- This verse talks about good fruit coming from good people. What does this mean? (*Good actions and deeds come from those who truly love God.*)
- Have you ever had a friend, or known someone, that looked good on the outside, but turned out to be bad inside? Explain.
- How is this like guessing what's on the inside of these bags? (*We can't know someone based only on outward appearance.*)
- What's the best way to choose a friend? (*We need to spend time with them and see how they act during different situations, to understand how they really are.*)

**Share:** We couldn't tell what was inside the bags without reaching in and touching what was there. In the same way, we can't tell what's on the inside of people until we feel or see their actions. You may meet someone who's handsome and dresses nicely, but turns out to be a liar. On the other hand, you might meet someone who is unattractive, or looks rough, but find out through their actions they love Jesus just like you do!

We've got to listen to what people say and see what they do. Then we can know whether they're true friends who will help us stay close to God, or if they're really wolves in disguise who are leading us away from God and into trouble.


### Age Adjustments

FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN, help them think of friends who help them do good and make them feel loved. Let children make cards for these friends, thanking them and encouraging them for their gift of friendship.

FOR OLDER CHILDREN, read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstien (check your local library) and discuss what kind of friendship this is. Are they more like the boy or the tree? Is this true friendship or a one-sided friendship? Does this story remind them of any of their friends? Is that good or bad?

### ACTIVITY 3: Encouraging Friends

**Point:** Be thankful for the good friends you have.

 **Supplies:** You'll need a Bible and art supplies such as construction paper, scissors, glue, and markers.

This activity is a supplement to Activities One and Two in this section.

**Activity:** Tell your family to look back at the qualities they wrote down earlier. They should cross out any that they don't think are as important anymore, and add any that they now think of as important. When everyone has done this, explain: Now go through this list of quali-

ties and think of one of your friends who demonstrates this quality in your friendship. For example, if honesty is on your list, you might think of a friend who has always told you the truth. If faithfulness is on your list, you might think of a friend who has never gossiped about you or who stood beside you and believed in you when others didn't. If you've named a quality that fits none or your friends, leave it blank.

When everyone has completed their lists, take time for each person to share about his or her friends.

**Share:** A true friend wants us to grow closer to God, helps us, loves us, and encourages us. We should let our true friends know how much we appreciate them, and encourage them back!

**Activity:** Use the construction paper, glue, scissors, and other craft supplies to create cards of encouragement to one or more friends. Have family members be sure to tell their friends, through the cards, what qualities they especially appreciate about them. Mail or deliver the cards right away!



### WRAP-UP

Gather everyone in a circle and have family members take turns answering this question: **What's one thing you've learned about God today?**

Next tell kids you've got a new "Life Slogan" you'd like to share with them.

**Life Slogan:** Today's Life Slogan is this, "Choose a friend by his fruit, not by his suit!" Have family members repeat the slogan two or three times to help them learn it. Then encourage them to practice saying it during the week so they can talk about it at your next family night session.



**Close in Prayer:** Allow time for each family member to share prayer concerns and answers to prayer. Then close your time together with prayer for each concern. Thank God for listening to and caring about us.

Remember to record your prayer requests so you can refer to them in the future as you see God answering them!

**Additional Resources:**

*Daisy Doddlepaws and the Windy Woods Treasure* by Michael Waite (ages 4-8)

*Hot Chocolate Friendship* by Nancy Simpson Levene (ages 8-12)

*In Grandma's Attic* by Arleta Richardson (ages 8-12)