

Godstuff 101:

1. God the friend

for a starter

What ingredients make up a good friendship between two people?
And what things lead to disaster?

into it

- Jesus was often called a friend of 'sinners'. And looking at the quote on the right side of the page in John 15, I guess he would call us his friends too. But what does God as a friend look like? Spend some time by yourself going over the proverbs on the other side of the page which speak about friendship. Read these verses, specifically viewing them as examples of ways in which God is a friend to us.
- Discuss together anything that particularly struck you from these verses on God as our friend.
- Read together Ruth 1:1-18
- Ruth made some big calls on the basis of staying loyal to Naomi. How far should friendship go for us? Where should you draw the line?
- God goes a long way to be a good friend to us. But what about us? Practically speaking, what would it look like to be a good friend to God?

has God been here?

What has this experience been like today as we've done this? It'd be great to share anything that has been said or read today that has impacted and/or challenged you – or even if you haven't been able to get into it, that'd be good to say too. This is a great chance to get real with each other

so what?

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Jesus calls YOU a friend

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends... I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

John 15:13-15

some wisdom on the proverbial friend

A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret. Pr 11:13

whoever covers over an offence promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends Pr 17:9

A friend loves at all times, and a sister or brother is born for adversity. Pr 17:17

Someone with many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. Pr 18:24

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses Pr 27:6

Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from their earnest counsel Pr 27:9

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Pr 27:17

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, her friend can help her up. But pity the one who falls and has no one to help them up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Godstuff 101:

2. Communicating with God

for a starter

Think of some times when you and another person have really communicated, whether about something trivial or meaningful...

- What does it mean to communicate and how does it happen?
- What ideally does communication do for the people involved?
- What are some of the problems a person might anticipate in communicating with God?

into it

- Read Psalm 19 together

For communication to happen with someone else, you need a meeting place which is common to you both (e.g. a telephone cable connecting your voices, a piece of paper carrying the words of a letter between you, or a café where you meet face to face)

- What are some of the 'meeting places' where we can connect with God?
- What works for you? We are all different! Some people like doing stuff with God by themselves while some like to include others. Some are arty and philosophical while others are practical and analytical. Such variety is good!
Share ways that have been particularly helpful for you in connecting with God. These may really help others out. (See also "give this a go!" for something that may help you)
- Read Mat 6:1-15 together
- Imagine you found an Internet website for God. So you make a list of everything you ever wanted to happen and sent the file to the God website. Would this constitute communication with God? Why or why not?

Some tough questions...

- Sometimes misunderstanding takes place in human communication. What steps do you think we can take to make sure we have correctly understood what God has said to us?
- Are there occasions when God may be silent?

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Give this a go!

All relationships take **time** to develop. Time to talk and listen. But also time to understand the other, to experience life together. Serious conversations also require some **privacy**. You know what it's like trying to have a D&M with someone who is totally preoccupied with something else or is rushing off to do little jobs every few minutes. With friends we usually make some **plans** to have coffee or do lunch, carving some time out of our life ahead of time because of the importance of the other person to us.

What about God? Why not plan to 'catch up' with God as part of a daily routine – either by yourself or with others? Here's one way you could do it...

Read a passage from the bible and talk to God about these kinds of questions:

- What does this say about **God's** character, purposes and relationship with people?
- What does this say about my **inner life** – my character, heart, attitudes, my identity and purpose?
- What does this say about my **relationships with other people**, my friends, family, 'neighbours'?
- What does this say about my **outer world** – my work, my studies, health, money, possessions? What does it say about the world I live in – the govt, environment, justice, arts...?

Where you sense some connection, talk to God more about your specific situation and re-read the important sections, perhaps even taking notes of any new insights or perspective. These might come from:

- Warnings...on things to avoid
- Promises...to claim
- Examples...to reflect on
- Commands...to follow
- Good thoughts...to stick in your memory

Godstuff 101:

3. God of the BIG things

for a starter

If you could have an audience with any one person alive today, who would it be and why?

Does the importance of a person affect the way you relate to them?

into it

- Does our view of God affect how we relate to Him and what we expect from Him?
- Read together Isaiah 40:9-31 and the passages on the right.
- These passages make a number of implicit and explicit claims about God. By yourself list as many of these as poss, describing these in ways that are meaningful to you e.g. v23 even heroes like Princess Diana and the All Blacks can be easily and quickly humbled by God. Spend about 5 mins doing this
- Compare what you came up with in the group
- Pick something about God that particularly struck you from this exercise. If you really believed this to be true, would it change anything about the way you live or how you relate to God? How?
- What can you do to make some of these things practically impact the way you live and think?

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"I am the LORD, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

Jer 32:27

He who forms the mountains, creates the wind, and reveals his thoughts to man, he who turns dawn to darkness, and treads the high places of the earth-- the LORD God Almighty is his name.

Amos 4:13

Then I (Nebuchadnezzar) praised the Most High; I honoured and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"

Daniel 4:35

David praised the LORD in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendour, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honour come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

1Chron 29:11-13

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,

Eph 3:20

Godstuff 101:

4. God of the little things

God is busy looking after stars and galaxies. And when he does getting around to looking at the world, surely he'll concentrate on the big things going on internationally (and let's face it, NZ is a long way away from the centre of things). Besides, we're all just like grasshoppers to him anyway, aren't we?
So what interest could God have in me?

for a starter

How much detail do you think God is *really* interested in? Do you think God's interested in things like your missing earring, your decision to buy the green or the blue shirt, your ingrown toenail? Personally for you, what is the most insignificant thing you can remember sensing that God was taking an interest in?

into it

- Read Psalm 139 together
- From this Psalm, what sort of involvement can you see God having in your life? Take 5 mins or so to go through this by yourself before comparing answers with others in the group
- Is it comforting or frightening to know how much God knows about you?
- Read Mat 6:25-34 together
- If you are all on your own you have to worry about a lot of stuff. What are some of the worries Jesus addresses and what are his responses?
- If I really believed God was interested in the smallest details of my life, understanding me better than any of my friends, would it make any difference to the way I lived or how I interacted with God?

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some little things that God is into

(God's rhetorical questions posed to Job...)
"Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth?"
Job 38:39- 39:2

(God's response to Jonah who wanted to wipe out the city...)
"But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"
Jonah 4:11

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, (Jesus) is able to help those who are being tempted
Heb 2:18

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."
Mat 10:29-31

Godstuff 101:

5. a God with passion!

for a starter

- What are some of the great passions in your lives? (e.g. food, music, relationships(!), sport,...)
- What sort of feelings and actions does your passion (food, music, etc) arouse in you?
- How do you feel/what do you do when things aren't going so well in that area (e.g. the All Blacks at the rugby World Cup, or you lose your prize music cd, ...)

into it

- Do you ever think of God as being very emotional?
- Read Hosea 11:1-11 together
- By yourself, spend a few minutes trying to place yourself in God's shoes, imagining the different emotions you would be feeling in this passage
- Discuss together the sorts of tensions and emotions this passage would bring out for God
- Read through the verses on the other side of the page

A big passion of God is people. He cares so much about us that he experiences the full range of emotions over us, depending on how things are going between us and God at the time. BUT his commitment to us is secure. He has engraved our names in the palms of his hands. And God's passion led him to sending Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). (Christ's suffering and death even gets a dictionary definition under the word 'passion')

- A question to think about by yourself sometime: how is your passion for God – especially when compared with your other passions in life?
- Some questions to consider together: how do you improve your passion for God? Is it just a feeling? How do we join with God in his passion for people?

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The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain

Gen 6:5-6

Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area... (saying) "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

John 2:13-16

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

Mat 23:37

Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice O earth; burst into song, O Mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me." "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

Isaiah 49:14-16

The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing."

Zep 3:17