



What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear
And what a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer

- *What a Friend We Have In Jesus*,
written by Charles Crozat Converse & Joseph Scriven

The four *Toy Story* movies contain timeless lessons on friendship, faith, and life together, but these stories have deeper roots. This month, as we worship together with our FaithWorks! kids, we'll have a little fun with *Toy Story* as we take a deeper look at what the Bible teaches us about friendship and faith.

Discussions highlighted in red can be used to skip through the lessons for Circles meeting monthly.

These lessons are adapted from a weekly sermon series and study by the same name from the United Methodist Church of Resurrection in Kansas City. Used with permission.

You've Got a Friend in Me

JULY 5: CONQUERING OUR INSECURITIES (1 JOHN 4:13-21)

Have you ever felt insecure? Wondered what others thought about you? Worried that you might be left out? The Bible has something to say about these questions and the very human tendency that causes us to ask them. **You belong in God's family, so you don't have to worry.**

July 12: THE NAME WRITTEN ON YOU (REVELATION 3:7-13)

In Revelation, John says that those who are faithful will have the name of God written on them. So what marks us as followers of Christ, as children of God?
You are forever a friend of Jesus!

July 19: THE ENDURING POWER OF LOVE (1 CORINTHIANS 13:11-13)

Have you ever heard someone say something like, "The only thing sure in this world is that things will change!" The apostle Paul knew that, spiritually, it is a good thing to change, to mature and "put an end to childish things." But he also reminded his readers that "faith, hope and love remain"—God-given realities we can always count on.
As life changes, God's love does not!

July 26: THE BIG QUESTIONS OF LIFE (EPHESIANS 2:1-10)

"Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" are questions everyone asks at some point in life. The apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Ephesus that God saved us *from* a broken, self-seeking life for a very specific purpose. God's mission, "the kingdom of God," is to restore not just individuals, but this whole broken world to its divine purpose. God saved us *for* a new life; joining in God's work to reclaim our broken world.
You are God's accomplishment, created to share God's love!

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DAILY QUESTIONS

July 6-11

Conquering Our Insecurities

Monday

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. What are the results of insecurity in your life?

Tuesday

Read Romans 7:7-10. When have you had moments of insight about things that needed to change inside you?

Wednesday

Read Romans 14:1-12. Whose opinion, or way of living out the faith, is so different from you that it upsets you? What does Paul teach?

Thursday

Read Luke 10:25-37. How secure are you in asking for, or accepting, the help of others when you need it?

Friday

Read 1 John 4:13-21. How does the love of God cast out fear?

Saturday

Read John 15:5-8. What are ways that you "remain" in Jesus?

July 13-18

The Name Written on You

Monday

Read Acts 11:19-30. What does it mean to be called Christian?

Tuesday

Read Isaiah 44:1-5. Do you think of your life as belonging to God? Why or why not?

Wednesday

Read Revelation 3:7-13. How does taking the name of Christ shape one's life?

Thursday

Read Matthew 18:12-14. Think about a time when you've been lost. How did God "shepherd you home" to again know His love?

Friday

Read Galatians 6:7-10. How much energy do you put toward your physical self? How much do you put toward your spiritual connection with God?

Saturday

Read John 15:9-17. In what ways do you accept, value, and nurture your friendship with Jesus?

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July 20-25

The Enduring Power of Love

Monday

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. What season of life are you experiencing?

Tuesday

Read Psalm 103:13-19. In your understanding, what in our lives is fleeting and what lasts?

Wednesday

Read 1 Corinthians 13:11-13. What do you think makes love "the greatest of these" in God's world?

Thursday

Read Luke 17:11-19. What blocks gratitude in your life?

Friday

Read John 17:6-11, 20-26. How does it feel to know that Jesus prayed for you twice on the night he was arrested?

Saturday

Read Psalm 136. How do we know and experience the enduring love of God?

July 27 – August 1

The Big Questions of Life

Monday

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. What is God's purpose for the lives of all followers of Jesus?

Tuesday

Read Romans 8:1-4. When have you felt Christ's power helping you get through a struggle?

Wednesday

Read Galatians 6:1-4. When has Christ inspired you to help carry another's burden?

Thursday

Read Philippians 4:10-14. In what ways are you able to be God's physical presence to bless someone else in need?

Friday

Read 1 Peter 2:1-10. How does your life declare the praises of God?

Saturday

Read Proverbs 19:20-21. How can you be more attune to God's purpose for your life?

You've Got a Friend in Me

CONQUERING OUR INSECURITIES

SERMON ON JULY 5, 2020

Part of the genius of the *Toy Story* movies is how the characters, while fun for kids, capture the real feelings and emotions that we have as human beings, even as adults. Insecurity, worry, loneliness, and feeling threatened by the popularity or success of others are all themes of the first movie. In fact, the lead character Woody's pull string says, "This town ain't big enough for the two of us." The Bible has some things to say about these subjects as well.

- What was your favorite toy as a child?
- To what or where did you turn as a child when you were scared or worried?

Read James 3:14-16 and 1 Corinthians 3:1-4.

Feeling threatened by, or jealous, of others is common. The apostle James said "bitter jealousy and selfish ambition" in no way come from God. They lead, he wrote, to "disorder and everything that is evil." Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote to Corinthian Christians saying plainly that jealousy and fighting are "unspiritual". Scholar William Barclay wrote in his *Daily Study Bible Series* on James, "There is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever, with acute brain and skillful tongue; but his effect, nevertheless, in...any group, is to cause trouble and to disturb personal relationships. It is a sobering thing to remember that the wisdom he possesses is devilish rather than divine."

- Have you ever known (or been) a person like that?
- When do you find yourself most likely to compare your life to others?
- Whose opinion, or way of living, is so different from you that it upsets you?
- How can you find the security needed to let go of jealousy, to turn away from useless conflict, or to avoid damaging personal relationships?

By the end of the first Toy Story movie, Woody realized that his security didn't come from competing with the new toy, Buzz, and trying to be better somehow. Woody's security came from the love that Andy, the young boy, had for him. Pastor Brian said this in his message: "You belong in God's family, so you don't have to worry."

Read 1 John 4:13-21 and Proverbs 19:23.

- Do you agree that hating others rules out genuine love for God? Why or why not?
- How does the love of God "cast out" fear?

You've Got a Friend in Me

Read John 15:5-8.

The Israelites would often use the language of a vineyard, seeing themselves as the vineyard that God tended. Jesus takes this image and adds another layer. He tells his followers that no branch grows and bears fruit unless it stays securely joined to the vine. A good and fruitful life comes from staying connected to Jesus.

- What choices or actions have other followers of Jesus taken to help them remain “connected to the vine”?
- What are ways that you “remain” in Jesus?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. Write “I belong in God’s family, so I don’t have to worry!” on a notecard or piece of paper. Put it on a mirror or on your refrigerator and say it every morning as a reminder.
2. Make a list of your fears and the things you worry about the most. For each fear or worry on the list, write down what you can control and what is beyond your control. In prayer, offer those things beyond your control to God.
3. With your family, or a spiritual friend, share a list of the things you worry about the most. Discuss how trusting God might help relieve those worries.

You've Got a Friend in Me

THE NAME WRITTEN ON YOU

SERMON ON JULY 12, 2020

In *Toy Story 2*, Woody is worried that he'll be left behind from going to camp if he can't find his hat. His toy friend, Bo Peep, tells him to look under his boot.

"Don't be silly," Woody protests. "My hat is not under my boot."

"Would you just look?"

"You see! No hat, just the word 'Andy.'"

"Uh huh. And the boy who wrote that would take you to camp with or without your hat."

Woody suddenly realizes that he belongs to Andy, and that Andy loves him too much to leave him behind or let anything happen to him.

Read and discuss Isaiah 44:1-5.

- What does it mean to "belong to the LORD" (NIV)?
- Do you think of your life as belonging to God? Why or why not?

Read Acts 11:19-30 and Revelation 3:7-13.

We learn in the Book of Acts that those who believed in and followed Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch. At the time, many languages were spoken in Antioch, but the most common language was Greek. In Greek "Christ" meant messiah, or God's anointed king. Thus the name given to followers of Jesus was "the king's people", or "people of the messiah."

- What does it mean to you to be called Christian?
- What do you think Christian means to non-Christians today?
- How does taking the name of Christ shape one's life?

Good friends make sure everyone feels like they belong. Good friends care for each other. Good friends don't leave anyone behind. In the *Toy Story* movies, again and again the characters rescue any toy that is lost or in trouble. In *Toy Story 2*, it is Woody's turn to be rescued.

Read Matthew 18:12-14 and John 15:9-17.

You've Got a Friend in Me

Jesus came to earth on a rescue mission. The disciples heard him tell this parable about a lost sheep, likely unable to know what we know. Jesus didn't want to leave any of his sheep behind, which includes you and me.

Scholar William Barclay says this about being called a friend by Jesus: "...no longer do we need to gaze longingly at God from afar off; we are not like slaves who have no right whatever to enter into the presence of the master; we are not like a crowd whose only glimpse of the king is in the passing on some state occasion. Jesus gave us this intimacy with God, so that he is no longer a distant stranger, but our close friend."

- Think about a time when you've been lost. How did God "shepherd you home" to again know His love?
- In what ways do you accept, value, and nurture your friendship with Jesus?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. Write "I am forever a friend of Jesus" on a note card or piece of paper. Put it on your mirror or on your refrigerator and say it every day as a reminder of who you belong to.
2. With your family, or a Bible study partner, make a list of your friends. Using a blank calendar for the next month or two, write one friend's name on each day. On that day, pray for that friend and give God thanks for him or her.
3. Share with a family member, or spiritual guide, one step you are ready to take each day to deepen your friendship with Jesus. After two weeks, report back to your family member or friend on your experience.

You've Got a Friend in Me

THE ENDURING POWER OF LOVE

SERMON ON JULY 19, 2020

Stephen Chbosky wrote in his book, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, "Things change. And friends leave. Life doesn't stop for anybody." In *Toy Story 3*, Andy has grown up, and the toys know that things are about to change. Will Andy still care for them? What happens next?

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Psalm 103:13-19.

The ancient Hebrews had a strong sense of how time's passage alters our experience in this world. Ecclesiastes 3 listed many of the "seasons" we experience in life. Psalm 103 speaks of how fleeting our time on earth is in the grander history of earth.

- What season of life are you experiencing right now?
- In your understanding, what in our lives is fleeting and what lasts?
- How can facing the truth that we do not have an unlimited supply of days change how you live?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:11-13.

"Oh, I hate all this uncertainty." Rex, the toy dinosaur in the *Toy Story* movies, shares his concern about what is going to happen to the toys. The Apostle Paul acknowledges in his first letter to the Corinthian Christians the same kind of concerns, not knowing what the future holds as he speaks of now "seeing in a mirror dimly" (NIV). While change is inevitable, and uncertainty part of our human existence, Paul also assures the church that some things do not change.

- When things are topsy-turvy in life, how can having faith in God help?
- What do you think makes love "the greatest of these" in God's world?

Don't need money, don't take fame
Don't need no credit card to ride this train
It's strong and it's sudden and it's cruel sometimes
But it might just save your life
That's the power of love
That's the power of love

- *The Power of Love*, Huey Lewis and the News

You've Got a Friend in Me

At the end of *Toy Story 3*, Andy gives his toys to a little girl named Bonnie. As he does, he says to her, "Now, you gotta promise to take good care of these guys. They mean a lot to me." Even when Andy's time with the toys was over, his love for them wasn't.

Read John 17:6-11 & 20-26.

When Jesus' time on earth was almost over, he assured his disciples that his love for them was eternal. Then as he prayed, he focused most of his prayer on asking God to guard his followers as they faced a hostile world. And this prayer of Jesus isn't time bound, only for those followers in the moment, but timeless. Scholar N.T. Wright, in his book *John for Everyone, Volume 2*, invites us to think about it this way: "Imagine some great figure of the past...who you respect and admire. Imagine that historians have just found a letter from the great man. And imagine that it was talking about—you! How would you feel? That is how you should feel as you read verse 20. Jesus is talking about you."

- **How does it feel to know that Jesus prayed for you twice on the night he was arrested?**

Read Psalm 136. In Brian's sermon, he said that God's love reaches to infinity and beyond, and he invited us to remember: "As life changes, God's love does not!"

- **How do you know and experience the enduring love of God?**

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. Write "As life changes, God's love does not" on a note card or piece of paper. Put it on your mirror or on your refrigerator and say it every day as a reminder that God's love for you is constant.
2. Make a list of the major changes you've experienced in life. Looking through the list, note how faith has helped you through those changes, or looking back, where God was at work in ways you didn't realize it at the time.
3. Think of someone you know going through a change in life right now. Write them a note of encouragement that shares the enduring power of God's love.

You've Got a Friend in Me

THE BIG QUESTIONS OF LIFE

SERMON ON JULY 26, 2020

In *Toy Story 4*, a new character is introduced, Forky. Bonnie made Forky in school, and she loves him. Forky is a spork, however, and he has trouble claiming his new identity as a toy. "I am not a toy. I was made for soup, salad, maybe chili, and then the trash," he says. As throughout the other movies, we again find a reflection of our own struggles as human beings, wrestling with identity, and where and how we belong.

- **Who is a movie or TV character that you have identified with, and why?**

Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

Forky: "Why am I alive?"

Woody: "You are Bonnie's toy. You are going to help create happy memories that will last the rest of her life."

You don't have to be a spork glued to a popsicle stick to ask, "Why am I alive?" Asking that, and wrestling with possible answers, is central to a fully human life. The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus, and in that letter he said that God saved us from a broken, self-seeking life for a very specific purpose. He then said we are God's "poema", in Greek. The word is the root of our English word poem. We are God's creation, God's handiwork, God's accomplishment, God's poem!

- **What is God's purpose for the lives of all followers of Jesus?**
- **To what extent have God's priorities become not just something you do at church but are woven into your everyday life?**

Read Galatians 6:1-4 and Philippians 4:10-14.

In *Toy Story 4*, Woody realizes that because he is committed to Bonnie's happiness, he now needs to care for Forky as part of the toy community. In Galatians and Philippians we find examples of how we live into God's purpose for our lives by caring for each other and for the world with "a spirit of gentleness" (NIV).

- **When has Christ become more real to you because a member of the greater church family has helped carry your burdens?**
- **When has Christ inspired you to help carry another's burden?**
- **In what ways are you able to be God's physical presence to bless someone else in need?**

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Read 1 Peter 2:1-10 and Proverbs 19:20-21.

1 Peter 2 is filled with metaphors for our purpose as faithful followers of Jesus. We are living stones, added to the cornerstone to build a place in our lives where God dwells among us. We are a chosen people, selected by God to share God's love. We are a royal priesthood, called to share good news and foster community just like the priests of the ancient Temple.

- What metaphor speaks to you of your purpose as a follower of Jesus?
- How does your life declare the praises of God?
- How can you be more attune to God's purpose for your life?

TAKE THE NEXT STEP!

1. Write "I am God's accomplishment, created to share God's love" on a note card or piece of paper. Put it on your mirror or on your refrigerator and say it every day as a reminder that you were created by God with a purpose.
2. Spend 15 minutes this week writing a list of specific ways in which you can live out, or intend to live out, your life purpose as rooted in Ephesians 2.
3. At the end of each day this week, take a few minutes and note how God may have blessed others during the day through your words, example, or deeds.