



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Real Friends / Week 2

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SERIES SUMMARY

A three-week series about friendship.

WEEK 1: Be the friend you want to have.

WEEK 2: Be wise about the friends you choose.

WEEK 3: Friends change, and that's okay.

SCRIPTURE

"The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray (Proverbs 12:26 NIV).

TEACHING SLIDES

*All scripture, bottom lines, and prompts that are bolded in this script are also provided as teaching slides.

OPTIONAL MEDIA

OPTIONAL MEDIA for this week available for purchase through the XP3 MS Media Package:

- Real Friends Countdown (10 minutes)
 - Real Friends Teaching Video – Week 2
 - Real Friends Integrated Teaching Videos
-

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- Tell a personal story about a time when you got in trouble because you acted on the influence of a friend. Focus on your motivation for your actions and the consequences that resulted.

TENSION

- Often, when people face negative consequences from their actions, they say, “It happened to me.”
- Some things in life do just happen to us. *[Give examples.]*
- Other times, what happens to us is a result of something we chose for ourselves. *[Give examples.]*
- While we ultimately decide what we do or don’t do, our friends can influence us and lead us to make good or bad choices.
- *[Give examples of how friends can influence middle schoolers to make unwise decisions.]*
- We’re all going to be influenced by our friends, so how do we surround ourselves with friends who will lead us to make choices that are wise and good for us?

TRUTH

- A lot of middle schoolers go to Google, YouTube, parents, and friends for advice, but there’s also another place that offers great advice on friendships: the Bible.
- Solomon, one of the wisest people who ever lived, had advice about friendship, and we can read that advice in the book of Proverbs in the Bible.
- *The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray (Proverbs 12:26 NIV).*
- Righteous people do the right thing and make wise decisions that focus on what’s best for them and others. They make choices that follow the way God wants us to live.
- Righteous people carefully choose friends who help them stay on the right path.
- Sometimes we’re just friends with the people we’re around: classmates, teammates, small group members, etc. And sometimes we feel like we don’t have a lot of friends to choose from.
- Choosing real friends might require asking, “Is this friend good for me right now?” or “Is their influence moving me toward what’s best for me?”
- As Solomon stated, *“The wicked [lead you] astray.”* While righteous people make good and healthy decisions, wicked people make bad decisions that often lead to trouble.
- The more time we spend with someone who is trouble, the more trouble we’ll likely find ourselves in.
- Who we choose to be friends with matters because they speak into our lives and influence our decisions.
- Be wise about the friends you choose.
- We all have different types of friends:
 - Our inner circle includes one or two friends who are closest to us.
 - Our next circle of friends includes good friends who are part of our bigger friend group.
 - And our outer circle of friends includes people who we aren’t as close to, but we hang out with them in our classes, neighborhoods, teams, small groups, etc.
- While all of our friends matter, those in our inner circle have the most potential to influence us.

APPLICATION

- We can be wise about the friends we choose by . . .
 - Choosing our real friends carefully. For your inner circle of friends, pick a few people who have proven themselves trustworthy and consistent and who will help you make wise choices.
 - Spending time with your real friends. That doesn't mean you can't be friends with others, but spend a lot of time with your real friends who will influence you toward good things and encourage you toward God's best.
- Be wise about the friends you choose.

LANDING

- Small groups are a place where you can encourage each other toward things that are good and wise. It's a place to have real friendships.
- Who is one close friend who influences your life right now?

THINK ABOUT THIS

This week, keep in mind the students in your group who are struggling for friends. There may be those who don't feel like they have any friends, and there may be those who actually don't have any friends at all. We want to be sensitive to that reality. This is a great opportunity to encourage your small group to see one another as a circle of real friends. For those who need friends, they can find them in your circle. And for those who want to be a better friend to others, they can work on that in your circle. Encourage your students to think about what it would mean to see their small group as their friends in this way! Finally, in a conversation about friends, remind students not to use names when they share. A great principle for students in any conversation is to avoid talking about people as if they're not in the room.

INTERACTIVE 1: YOUR FRIENDSHIP CIRCLES

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, you'll draw a diagram of concentric circles to help students visualize their own circles of friends.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- A large poster board (A large dry erase board would also work great!)
- A bold permanent marker
- A way to display the poster board, like an easel or chair

PREP

- Place the poster board and marker on stage before your talk.
- When cued in the Truth section of your Teaching Script, follow the prompts for when and how to draw the diagram on the poster board.



TEACHING SCRIPT

Real Friends / Week 2

PRELUDE SOCIAL WORSHIP STORY GROUPS HOME

BOTTOM LINE

BE WISE ABOUT THE FRIENDS YOU CHOOSE.

INTRODUCTION

3 MINUTES

Hi everyone! My name is _____. I'm so happy to be here because we're in the middle of our series on friendship called *Real Friends*. And the reason I'm so excited to talk about friendship is because I love my friends. Well, except for the friends who get me into trouble. You know what I mean?

TELL A PERSONAL STORY

Tell a story from your own life that illustrates the following ideas . . .

- Talk about a time (preferably in middle school) you got in trouble because you followed the lead or convincing of a friend. Just be sure what you're sharing is age and phase appropriate!
- Try to focus on how your motivation was to be noticed, included, or accepted by that friend.
- Be sure to admit what the consequences were!
- If you have a picture that supports your story, show it here!

That's what **happened to me**. [*Be sure to say this sentence as it sets up the Tension of your talk.*]

TENSION

3 MINUTES

Happened to me.

That's an interesting phrase, isn't it? Have you ever talked with a friend who was experiencing tough feelings, or big consequences, or major drama because of a choice they've made? If you have, you

might've heard them say something like, "It just happened to me," or "I can't believe that happened to me!"

And sometimes, yes, things happen to us that aren't so fun.

Your screen got cracked.

Your school bus broke down.

You got injured trying to score the goal or make the shot.

Someone threw up in the pool and now the swim meet will last forever.

[Insert other examples that are specific to your students or their context.]

But other times, **what happened to you is actually something you chose for yourself.**

Turn to someone next to you and tell them what you think I mean by that statement. *[After about 30 seconds, call students' attention back to you and take some ideas from the group. When a student chooses to share, it can be a big deal. Be sure to affirm them or their answer. If the answer is lacking, say to the rest of the group, "Who would like to add to that?"]*

Here's what I mean. A lot of the things that happen in your life (particularly in your middle and high school years) happen because of choices you make. Things aren't always just happening to you.

You got an A on that test because you studied really hard.

Or you failed a class because you *chose* not to do your homework.

You got the lead or the solo because you were brave enough to work hard and try out.

Or you didn't get a part at all because you *chose* to show up unprepared.

You didn't get in trouble because you decided to skip that party you weren't allowed to attend.

Or you got grounded because you *chose* to go and break the rules.

You got a starting spot on the team because you worked so hard at practice.

Or you got kicked off the team because you *chose* not to show up for practice.

This may not be true of *all* things, but I'd argue it is true in *most* things. Whether you're in middle school or even a grown up, the consequences you experience are usually because you made a choice that led you there.

And often, you don't make all of those choices alone. Maybe, just like I did, you have friends who are leading you toward those choices.

That's how friendship works! Our friends have the potential to lead us into **really great decisions or really bad decisions.** Sure, we're ultimately the ones who choose what we do or don't do, but our friends have a lot of influence on that choice.

Maybe you have a friend who told you to cheat on a test, or encouraged you to stay out later than you were supposed to, or helped you lie to your parents. Or maybe they pushed you to try alcohol for the first time, or encouraged you to leave someone out of your group text, or convinced you to do that one thing you swore you'd never do. And sure, it was ultimately your decision to do it, but you had a friend who was pushing you there every step of the way.

We're all going to find ourselves there at some point. We're all going to be influenced by our friends, whether it's a great choice or definitely not a great choice. So how do we surround ourselves with friends who are leading us in the direction we want to be going? Friends who influence us to make choices that are wise and good for us?

TRUTH

6 MINUTES

A lot of middle schoolers go to a bunch of different places when they need friendship advice: Google, YouTube, TikTok, sometimes their parents, and often to other friends. You can find really great advice in those places. But did you know you can find some really solid friend advice in the Bible written by real people like you and me?

There was a really wise person who lived a long time ago named **Solomon**. He shared a lot of wise things about relationships, friendships, and just life in general. If you've never heard of him, Solomon is considered to be one of the wisest people to ever walk the Earth (outside of Jesus, of course!). God gave Solomon all of this wisdom, and a lot of it was written down for us to learn from today. You can read a lot of what Solomon had to say in the book of Proverbs in the Bible.

In fact, that's where we're going to turn to today. Let's take a look at some of Solomon's wisdom about friendship:

The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray (Proverbs 12:26 NIV).

If you read more in Proverbs, you'll see a lot of comparisons similar to this. Often, one kind of person is compared to the opposite kind of person to make a point. The hard worker is compared to a lazy one. The wise person is compared to the fool. The hot-tempered person is compared to the one who speaks carefully. But Solomon and the other writers in the book of Proverbs seem to have a favorite comparison. It's the one we find in this verse: **the righteous to the wicked**.

So, what exactly do those two words mean? Well, simply put, righteous people are people who do the right thing. They are the makers of right decisions. And a right decision is a choice that not only focuses on what's best for you, but on what's best for the people around you, too. It's a choice that follows the way God wants us to live.

And as Solomon said here, one of the things that righteous people do—one of the right decisions they make—is to choose their friends carefully. They choose friends who are helping them stay righteous, or on the right path.

Now, in middle school, I get that sometimes you're just friends with the people you're around. You're friends with people you're in class with, or on the team with, or next to on the bus, or in small group with. You might even feel like you can't choose your friends because you simply don't have a lot of friends to choose from. And I get all that! But what I think we're really talking about is less about who you spend your time with and more about who influences you. It's about the people who you let influence your decisions and shape the direction of your life. Solomon said that if we want to be righteous, we have to choose carefully who we let influence us.

It's not about asking, "Are they good people?" I bet most of them are good people! I think there are better questions to ask. Questions like "Are they good for me right now? Is their influence moving me toward what's best for me?"

Why is this important? Look back at the rest of the verse:

"The wicked [leads them] astray."

The wicked. I know nobody really uses that word anymore, but here, let's think of it as the opposite of righteous. If righteous people make good and healthy decisions, wicked people make bad decisions. They are trouble. In fact, they're usually the trouble makers. And here's the deal: **Trouble leads to trouble**. The more time you spend with someone who is trouble, the more trouble you're going to find yourself in. That's just the truth!

This is why who you choose to be friends with matters. Who you let speak into your life matters. Who

you let influence your choices matters. You want real friends who will help you choose the right things and the wise things.

Some of you are probably thinking, *So you're telling me not to hang out with anybody who makes bad choices ever? That's basically impossible!* Don't worry, that's not what I'm saying! But what I am saying is this: **Be wise about the friends you choose.** Be wise about who your closest friends are. Be wise about the friends you allow to influence you. Be wise about who you let close enough to impact your decisions.

INTERACTIVE: Your Friendship Circles

This is where you'll draw a diagram of concentric circles to help students visualize their own circles of friends.

Think of it this way: This is you. *[Draw a large solid dot or stick figure in the middle of the poster board.]* You have different kinds of friends, right? Some you consider to be your best friends. These are the one or two people who you're closest to. *[Draw a circle around the dot/stick figure. Put one or two large dots in the ring you just formed.]* That's your inner circle of friends.

Then you have your good friends. These are people in your bigger friend group. *[Draw a circle around the "inner circle." Put about 4-6 medium-sized dots in the ring you just formed.]* That's your next circle.

And finally, you have everyone else you like to hang out with. These are friends you aren't as close to and don't hang out with as often. They're in your classes, neighborhoods, teams, small groups, and other activities you take part in. *[Draw another circle around your last circle and place many small dots in the ring you just formed.]* That's your outer circle of friends.

All of these friends matter *[motion to the entire poster board]*, but it's the friends who are closest to you in your inner circle *[motion to the inner friend circle]* who have the most potential to influence you. That's what makes it incredibly important to make sure the people close to you are the type of friends who will help you choose what's good for you. Who will encourage you toward the right things. Who will help you choose the best for your life.

That's why it's important to **be wise about the friends you choose.**

APPLICATION

1 MINUTE

So, what exactly do you do? How can you be wise about the friends you choose?

Well, for starters I think you have to . . .

1. **Choose your real friends carefully.** Not everyone deserves to be your best friend. The friends who are in your closest circle have the most influence on you, so choose people who have proven themselves trustworthy and consistent. Choose people who help you make wise choices in your life.

Now, your closest friends shouldn't be a huge list! In fact, it could be as small as one person! Even Jesus had only three friends He was closest to: Peter, James, and John. So, be wise about which friends you choose to be your real friends.

2. **Spend time with your real friends.** Not because you want to create some exclusive club or make someone else feel left out, but because you want the kind of encouragement, wisdom, and friendship that will influence you toward the best things for your life. Make the friends who bring those things to your life a priority. That doesn't mean you can't be friends with other people, but

when you spend time with your real friends, you surround yourself with people who influence you toward the best things for your life. And that's only going to help you in the long run!

Remember Solomon's words of wisdom: *Choose [your] friends carefully.* In other words, **be wise about the friends you choose.** Walk closely with the people who help you choose the best things in your life.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

That's actually why we have small groups! We want your small group to be a safe place where you can encourage each other toward things that are good and wise. A place where you can see glimpses of God working in each other's lives. A place where you can have real friendships! I know that this whole friendship thing can be difficult to navigate at times, especially when it comes to choosing your friends wisely. Your group and your group leader want to help you figure it out! So today, I want to challenge you to be real with your group as you wrestle with what it means to be wise about the friends you choose.

So, as you head to small group today, think about this: **Who is one close friend who influences your life right now?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
