



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Real Friends / Week 3

[PRELUDE](#) [SOCIAL](#) [WORSHIP](#) [STORY](#) [GROUPS](#) [HOME](#)

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

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:36-40 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 3
- Real Friends Integrated Teaching Videos

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

- It can be hard when friendships change, shift, and start to look different.
- *[Tell a personal story about a friendship you had (preferably in middle school) that changed or ended.]*

TENSION

- Friendships are important, and they have the potential to make your life feel balanced or off-balance.
- *[Give examples of positive and negative things that happen in friendships that can affect your students' day-to-day lives.]*
- While we only want healthy, positive things to happen in our friendships, not-so-great things happen in our friendships that can weigh us down.
- *[Give examples of negative things that happen to friendships that are relevant to your students.]*
- At some point, most of us have felt like our friendships were unbalanced, especially in middle school.
- The reality is that friendships change.
- What if changes in our friendships don't have to be negative? What if there was a different way to think about shifts that take place in our friendships?

TRUTH

- We can learn a lot about friendship from two friends in the Bible named Paul and Barnabas.
- Paul and Barnabas were great friends who spent a lot of time together traveling and spreading Jesus' message. *[Provide more context about Paul and Barnabas' relationship.]*
- Even though they were close friends, Paul and Barnabas got into a disagreement about one of their mutual friends, John Mark.
- *Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:36-40 NIV).*
- Even though John Mark had abandoned the work they were doing together in the past, Barnabas wanted to give John Mark a second chance, but Paul did not. Because of this disagreement, Paul and Barnabas decided to shift their relationship and part ways.
- In order to keep their goal of spreading Jesus' message, Paul and Barnabas chose what was best for them in the moment and stepped back from each other. This resulted in good things for them in the future.
- Paul and Barnabas didn't let their disagreement damage each other's mission or reputation; they simply moved on.
- When we're in a similar situation, we can remember that friends change, and that's okay.
- Stepping back from a friendship that's no longer good for us or is no longer working for us isn't wrong, bad, or negative. In fact, it can be a healthy and positive thing!
- Sometimes backing away from a friendship can be for big, negative reasons. But other times, like when our lives have gone in different directions, interests change, or we need someone else to encourage us, we may need to shift our friendships.

- When friendships change, it doesn't mean we have to shift our attitude toward the other person. We can still be kind and respectful to them, despite the change in friendship.
- Friends change, and that's okay.

APPLICATION

- Changes in friendships can be hard, but sometimes they are necessary for you and your friend to take a step toward what's good for you.
- You can handle friendships that need to change by remembering these things:
 1. It's okay to think about what friendships need to change. Do you have friends who aren't helping you make healthy and wise choices? Talk to a trusted adult to help you determine the next right step for your friendships.
 2. It's okay to step back from a friendship. It just means that something in your friendship has changed, and the friendship isn't the best thing for you right now.
 3. It's okay (and important) to be kind when a friendship has changed. You can choose to respect the other person, because you care about them and want what's best.
- Friends change, and that's okay.

LANDING

- Your small group has the potential to be a place where you find your real friends. Choose to be real with your group about real-life things like friendships changing.
- What's one friendship you have that probably needs to change?

THINK ABOUT THIS

Boundaries can be a hard thing for most people to understand and establish, but this is especially true for middle schoolers. While we may not use that word in conversation with them, this is essentially what we're talking about this week. The hope is that this conversation will not only plant the seeds for them to consider in relationships as they grow up, but also that it will spur some of your students to set healthy boundaries with some friends. Learning how to have hard conversations is a skill they'll need for the rest of their lives, and you're starting that for them now. This is so important for your middle schoolers as they grow up. Keep in mind that you'll have some students who need space from a friend, some students who may need to end friendships completely, and some students who may be the friend someone else needs to shift away from for a season. No matter what seat they're sitting in, this is a difficult reality, so be sensitive to the way they see themselves and their friendships. Remember, some students may be in situations with friends that are harmful to them and need more than a boundary. Be sure to pay attention to the students you realize need extra help stepping away from a friend who is harming them in some way.

INTERACTIVE 1: BALANCING ACT

OVERVIEW

For this Interactive, a volunteer will balance buckets as weights are added to each one to demonstrate shifts in friendships.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Two large buckets with handles
 - One bucket labeled with the word “Positive”
 - One bucket labeled with the word “Negative”
- 8 equally-weighted objects (Books are a great option!)
- A volunteer

TIP:

When choosing your volunteer, consider selecting someone who is somewhat strong, like a small group leader or other adult leader. This person will be holding two heavy buckets out at their sides for a portion of your talk, so picking someone who's up for this challenge is key!



TEACHING SCRIPT

Real Friends / Week 3

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

BOTTOM LINE

FRIENDS CHANGE, AND THAT'S OKAY.

INTRODUCTION

3 MINUTES

Hi everybody! I'm so glad you're here today! We've been talking about friendship the last few weeks, and this week, I want to talk about one of the hardest things about friendships: when they change, when they shift, and when they start to look different. You know what I mean! A friendship that once was great suddenly isn't so great? I know I've had a few of those!

TELL A PERSONAL STORY

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

- Talk about a friendship you had (preferably from middle school) that changed, shifted, or even ended altogether.
- Try to focus on the feelings surrounding the shift—the frustration, sadness, disappointment, anger, etc.
- Remember, it's okay if the ending isn't necessarily a happy one. We want students to understand that shifting within friendships is a natural part of life, and they'll make it through just like you did!

TENSION

3 MINUTES

Friendships are important. I think every person in this room can agree with that. And how your friendships are going has the potential to make your day great or not-so-great. When things in your friendships aren't going great, it can feel like your life is completely off balance, can't it?

INTERACTIVE: Balancing Act

This is where a volunteer will balance buckets as weights are added to each one to demonstrate shifts in friendships.

[Bring your volunteer on stage and instruct them to hold the buckets out at their sides.]

Here's what I mean. There are small things that happen day-to-day in your friendships that can make you feel good or bad. If your friend doesn't show up at youth group or school, it ruins your day, because you don't have them to sit with! *[Put a weight in the "negative" bucket.]* But when your friend wants to spend the whole afternoon hanging out with you? Day made! *[Put a weight in the "positive" bucket.]* When your friend posts a picture on social media of everyone hanging out without you? That's the worst! *[Put a weight in the "negative" bucket.]* But when they go out of their way to do something nice for you? That's the best! *[Put a weight in the "positive" bucket.]*

Now, of course we want only healthy, positive things to happen in our friendships, right? *[Motion to the "positive" bucket.]* But as you probably already know, that's not always the case. Things aren't always balanced when it comes to our friendships. And it can sometimes feel like the not-so-great changes in our friendships weigh us down.

Maybe you feel like you can't be yourself around your friend anymore *[put a weight in the "negative" bucket]*. Or you can't be honest with them about how you really feel *[put a weight in the "negative" bucket]*. Or maybe you can't trust them to keep your secrets *[put a weight in the "negative" bucket]*. Or maybe they did something to you that was really hurtful *[put a weight in the "negative" bucket]*.

No matter the reason, I think at some point, most of us have felt like our friendships were unbalanced *[motion to the buckets]*. And that can be especially true right now in middle school. If you haven't felt that way before, stick with me, because chances are you will experience this feeling at some point. The reality is friendships change.

But what if I told you that changes in your friendships don't always have to be negative? *[Motion to the "negative" bucket.]* What if there's a different way to think about shifts that take place in our friendships? *[Tell your volunteer to put the buckets down and return to their seat.]*

TRUTH

6 MINUTES

The good news for us is that we aren't the first people on Earth to experience this kind of friendship tension. Maybe you've never heard this story before, but there were two great friends in the Bible named **Paul and Barnabas**. These guys went through a big change in their friendship, and I think we can learn a lot from what they experienced.

Paul and Barnabas were a dynamic duo. I'm talking ride-or-die friends on a worldwide mission to spread the heart and message of Jesus. And honestly, they were a great team! Together, Paul and Barnabas spent most of their time traveling to start new churches. Remember, this was thousands of years ago, so there were no airplanes or great hotels to make for a fun trip. Traveling back then was very different! Mostly, Paul and Barnabas walked—a lot! They slept on the ground under the night's sky or in the home of a stranger who had welcomed them in. There was nothing glamorous about their road trips!

Even though they'd been traveling together for a long time as friends, Paul and Barnabas still argued from time to time. (Don't we all fight with our friends every once in a while?) But one day, they got into an argument that caused a change in their friendship.

Here's what happened:

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work (Acts 15:36-38 NIV).

So Paul and Barnabas basically had a disagreement about another friend in their friend group named John Mark. Even though John Mark had abandoned the work they were doing together in the past, Barnabas seemed to believe that John Mark deserved a second chance. But Paul, looking at John Mark's past actions, was certain that history would repeat itself. So, Paul and Barnabas had a bit of a conflict.

Two friends.

Two different people.

Two different perspectives.

Let's see what happened next.

They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:39-40 NIV).

Did you see that one coming?! Paul and Barnabas got into such a bad argument that they decided to go their separate ways! That's a huge deal! These two friends had so much history with each other. But then, their relationship shifted, and Paul and Barnabas had to focus on what was best for them *right then*. For them, the goal was always spreading the message of Jesus. In order to keep doing that, they had to take a step back from each other. They had to choose different paths. They had to shift.

Shifting their friendship didn't ruin their lives. In fact, it actually strengthened and helped other people's lives. Because they made the shift in their friendship, Paul and Barnabas were able to keep going in their mission to share the heart of Jesus with others. They were able to increase the faith of others tremendously, and that's a huge deal!

I'm sure it must not have been easy for Paul and Barnabas to shift their friendship in that moment. But doing so meant that they could keep moving toward good things in the future. And what I love is that these two best friends didn't let their personal disagreement start a war between them. They didn't ask their friends to take sides. They didn't throw shade. They didn't try to damage each other's mission or reputation along the way. Instead, they simply stepped back and moved on.

Here's what I think we can learn from Paul and Barnabas when we find ourselves in a similar situation: **Friends change, and that's okay.**

Sometimes even in our best, real friendships, or the friendships we've had for forever, things can shift. At first, changes in our friendships might seem scary or bad, but that's not always the case. Sometimes changes are totally okay!

- We meet new people to hang out with, and that's okay.
- We become interested in different things, and that's also okay.
- We experience new things separately for the first time, and that's okay.
- We've added new friends to the friend group, and it has made things different. That's okay, too!

See, changes in our friendships don't always have to be negative. I mean, they can be, depending on the situation. A lot of the times, it's normal for even the best friendships to change as you get older and go through new experiences.

Let's think back to Paul and Barnabas. They changed their relationship, because they knew it would lead to good things in their lives. I know we don't often talk about how to step back from a friendship, like Paul and Barnabas did. We don't say that, sometimes, **it's okay to step back from a friendship that's no longer good for us**. That it's okay to shift a friendship that isn't working anymore. Just like Paul and Barnabas did, we can walk away from a friendship that feels unbalanced or unhealthy. It isn't wrong to take a step back from friendships.

I know this might seem like an unkind thing to do, but trust me, it's not. Or at least it doesn't have to be! In fact, it's actually a really healthy and good thing to learn how to handle changes in your friendships, even in middle school. Because for the rest of your life, you'll be in friendships that will have their ups and downs. Some of them might even come to an end. It may not always be because something bad happened, like someone telling a lie, or hurting your feelings, or making a choice you don't agree with. Sometimes it just happens. Sometimes you just have to step back from a friendship you realize is no longer right for you. When your lives have gone in different directions, when your interests change significantly, when you just need to be around someone who will encourage you toward the best for yourself. Those things aren't big, dramatic reasons for a break, but they're still important reasons to step back from a friendship when it's no longer good for you.

And when a friendship needs to shift, it doesn't mean your attitude toward that person has to shift with it. You don't have to cut them off, or ask your friends to ignore them, or post rude things about them on your Instagram. Instead, it means you can make the choice to let the friendship change while still being kind toward the other person.

Because **friends change, and that's okay!**

APPLICATION

4 MINUTES

I know this may not be easy for some of you. In fact, I think changes in our friendships can be hard for all of us at times. But remember, those changes in your friendships don't have to mean bad things. Sometimes, a change is necessary in order for both you and your friend to live your best lives. Sometimes you need to step back from a friendship that is no longer good for you, to take a step toward what *is* good for you.

That "good for you" part is huge. I'm not telling you to step back from friendships just because you have one fight or rough patch in your friendship. I'm telling you to step back when you *know* the friendship isn't good for you. When you know the relationship is off balance, it's time to make a change. *[Pick up the buckets to demonstrate.]*

So, what do we do with this? How do we handle friendships that need to change? I want you to start by remembering these things:

1. **It's okay to think about which friendships need to change**. You can think about who your real friends are, or who you'd like them to be. Do you have friends in your life who you know aren't helping you make healthy and wise choices? Or maybe you have a friend you might need to take a break from in order to be a better version of yourself. I know this isn't always easy, so think about a trusted adult, like your small group leader or a grown-up you live with, to help you figure it out. Chances are they can be a huge support for you, and their wisdom can help you know what the right next step might be for your friendships.

2. **Remember it's okay to step back.** If you realize you need to make a change in one of your friendships, that's okay. Remember, just because the friendship has to change, doesn't mean it has to end! Maybe the shift in your friendship simply means you spend less time with that person. Sure, they can sit with you at lunch, or come to your birthday party, or hang out in your larger friend group. But maybe having them spend the night at your house, or sharing personal secrets, or asking for their advice isn't a good idea anymore.

Or maybe you're in a situation where a bigger shift needs to happen. Maybe you need to have an honest conversation with a friend about how you feel. The wisdom of that trusted adult in your life can help you navigate a conversation like that. Remember, the shift doesn't mean they're a bad person. It just means something in your friendship has changed, and the friendship isn't the best thing for you right now.

3. **It's okay to be kind!** In fact, it's important to be kind! You may not be best friends anymore, or the friendship might look a little different, but you can still choose to respect the other person. You can still choose to be kind in how you talk to and about that person. Handling a change in a relationship with kindness is a huge sign that you not only care about the other person, but you want what's best for them as much as you want that for yourself. So, as you consider making changes to who your real friends are right now, think about how you can handle those shifts with kindness.

Remember, **friends change, and that's okay.** My hope today is that all of you will have the courage to let your friendships change when they need to. Because when you do, you're making a decision to move toward what's good and healthy for your life right now.

LANDING

1 MINUTE

As we wrap up today, you're going to have an opportunity to spend some time in your small group. Your small group can be a safe place to talk about all this friendship stuff. In fact, your small group has the potential to be a group you can call real friends, too. And that starts with choosing to be real with each other about real-life things like friendships changing. Opening up to your small group is also an opportunity for you to encourage one another to see God in the way you handle these changes to your friendships. I hope you'll do that today! And if you aren't ready to open up to your whole group, I want to encourage you to share with your small group leader. They're here to help you navigate complicated or changing friendships in a way that honors you and the other person.

So, as you get ready to head to small group, I want you to think on this question: **What's one friendship you have that probably needs to change?**



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS