

NCMM Men's Study Bible

“Helping My Friend Grow”

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PRAY: Father, we all need to grow. I need to learn from my friends who know me best and know my blind spots. Please give me the courage to learn.

READ: 8:26-29

Key verse: “Those whom God had already chosen he also set apart to become like his Son...Romans 8:29

We were predestined to become conformed to the image of Christ. What an absolute honor and expression of love—God wants the absolute best for us which is a life of growing spiritually as we better conform to the image of His son. Far too often we make excuses for ourselves or our brothers in Christ such as: "that's the way he is", "he has had a tough life" or "you don't understand him". But near the end of His life Jesus said and did something to help us understand our need to step toward Him rather than making excuses for behavior that is not Christ-like. He told His disciples it was to their benefit (and, subsequently our benefit) that He return to His Father. He would return and then send the Holy Spirit/the Comforter to empower His followers in their journey of becoming conformed to His image.

As He went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray about and prepare for His arrest, beatings, illegal trials and crucifixion He took His three closest friends/disciples with Him. They saw Him struggling. He saw their selfishness when they fell asleep on Him and He rightfully called them on it.

In these last hours of Christ's life we learn the value of being empowered by the Holy Spirit to conform to His image and the importance of not isolating ourselves but having friends/ brothers who love us enough to confront us. Jesus was "full of grace and truth". We must be gracious as our friends tell us the truth about our shortcomings and we must be gracious (taking no joy in the task) as we tell the truth to our friends. If we fail to do so we compromise our pursuit of becoming conformed to the image of Christ.

REFLECT:

Do I have friends who sense in me such a strong desire to become conformed to the image of Christ that they know I welcome their criticisms? Do I share reciprocity so I can also point out my friends' blind spots? Do I seek my friends' guidance to remove the log from my own eye before offering corrective guidance to them?

RESPOND:

Becoming conformed to the image of Christ should be my highest ambition. Is it? If yes, do I

rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom and insights of my friends to help me on that journey?

Father, it is tough to admit my short-comings. But, I do want to be open to what my friends of faith see that needs to be done in my life...and that the Spirit wants to do in my life. Give me the courage and humility to see what they see and the courage to trust you to do the work I need. Amen

Discipleship Study Questions

In Romans 8:29 we are told God was thinking of us before Adam and Eve were on the earth. Let's focus on being conformed to the image of Christ rather than attempt to figure out every nuance of being predestined. Obviously, we all fall short of that image of Christ for which we aspire in both understanding and achievement. What do we look like today in comparison to His image? Are we receptive to guidance from friends of faith? Where does the Spirit need to be at work in our lives?

Jesus expressed genuine friendship and care for His followers by challenging them and pointing out their short comings. With Jesus as our model and example are we caring enough for our friends to tell them the truth relative to where they need to grow?

John writes that Jesus "was full of grace and truth". The Apostle Paul writes that we are to be "speaking the truth in a spirit of love". So, no matter how we think truth is a huge premium to God. He does not play fast and loose with the truth. But, He wants us to present the truth in love and to do it with grace. Thus, helping a friend grow is more than telling him the truth. It is telling the truth in such a way that it will be understood, accepted and edifying and as such, it will not feel judgmental.

One of the beautiful aspects of knowing Christ is that He just does not tell us how to live but He empowers us as well—through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we are not just looking at a list of Christ-like qualities and deciding that is how we should live...but we are to be aware of Who Christ was on earth and what it means to be Christ-like. We are then prepared to allow the Spirit to do His work in our life to that end.