

Discussion Guide

THE DEFINITIONS

1. Which qualities do you most appreciate in a friend? Are these qualities present in your current friendships?
2. How would you define a friend?
3. In what ways do your friendships enrich your life? In what ways do you enrich the lives of your friends?

THE CONNECTION

4. The laotong women of China shared a secret language. Do you and your friends share a language understood by only your close-knit group? In what way does that language bond you with your friends?
5. Do you feel free to be your genuine self with your friends? Or do you feel the need to put on a pretense to be accepted? What makes you feel safe to just be yourself?
6. Sarah states that women's friendships are characterized by conflict, jealousy, competitiveness, betrayal, and disappointment but that they ultimately demonstrate loyalty, availability, kindred spirits,

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forgiveness, and fierce strength. In which ways do these qualities mirror your experience? Does the scale balance between these opposite characteristics?

7. Do you place demands on your friends? What do they demand of you?
8. How do your friendships meet your need for connection? for community? What roles do you play to achieve that sense of connection? Are you the rescuer? the nurturer? the needy one? Or do these roles shift from time to time?

THE CHALLENGES, WOUNDS, AND TRICKINESS

9. Do you ever experience jealousy and competitiveness in your friendships? How do they manifest themselves? How do they get resolved? What toll do they take on the relationships?
10. Have you ever found yourself the target of gossiping friends? How did that make you feel? What did you do about it? How did it impact the future of those friendships?
11. Have you ever felt betrayed by a close friend? How did that impact your relationship? Was reconciliation possible? What was the outcome?
12. Have you ever had to confront a friend with a difficult truth? How did you approach that conversation? What was your friend's reaction?

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13. Has betrayal or misconduct ever fractured one of your friendships? Was it difficult to make the decision to either mend or end the relationship? What was the deciding factor?
14. Loving a friend when all is well is often easier than forgiving her and renewing the covenant of friendship after a betrayal or a confrontation. What's helped you restore a fractured relationship? Did it require a process of time and commitment to forgive? What helped you reach total forgiveness?
15. Where do you draw the line between renewing your commitment to a difficult friendship and deciding it has become destructive and needs to end? If you've chosen to end a friendship, how did you reach your ultimate decision? Do you experience guilt over your decision?
16. Do you have a mental list of disappointments with friends that has left you wondering about their commitment to you? What are three things you expect your friends to do for you? List them, then ask yourself if these are realistic expectations. Are these three things something they are able to give you?

THE SEASONS AND EBB AND FLOW

17. Sarah asks, "Is there an age of friendship? Is there a time when our friendships are richer, deeper, even

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more in number?” How have your friendships changed? Do you still give the same priority to friendships the way you used to? What changed? When did it change, and why?

18. Anamchara, the ministry of soul friendships, represented a vital part of Celtic spirituality. Have you been blessed with a soul friend? In what ways has that friend ministered to you? What makes that friendship special?
19. Do your deepest, most satisfying friendships sometimes need a hiatus, a space, leaving you feeling uncertain about your relationship? When your expectations and needs for connection are not met, how do you respond? How do you gather confidence to accept your friend, even when she seems to withdraw?
20. Most of us experience a friendship that lasts for a season and then is gone. Think about a time when this has happened for you. Was the relationship discontinued for geographical reasons, a major life change, or some other reason? Were you able to grieve it and then let it go, or do you still miss that connection?

THE ESSENCE

21. Has a close friend held up a mirror to you, allowing you to see something about yourself that you had

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- previously not seen? Did this new image of yourself cut like a shard of glass or reveal an unknown aspect of your beauty? Did it cause you to take a deeper look at the reflection of yourself?
22. Is there a particular friend who opens your eyes to the beauties of life, to the wonder of creation, to the goodness of God's presence on the earth? What unique gifts does this friend bring that nurture your soul? What do you learn from her?
 23. Are you involved in a group or community of people that enhances your individual friendships? Did you find this group at church? in your local community? through a particular shared interest or passion? How does this group enrich your individual friendships?
 24. When more than two friends gather together, jealousy, competition, and backbiting seem to flourish. Have you seen this occur within your group of friends? What seems to create this dynamic? How does it play out in your group of friends? Does a sense of loyalty and camaraderie prevail despite the competitiveness?
 25. What is your personal bill of rights for friendship? What do you want and need in a friend? What are your rights and responsibilities? What are her rights and responsibilities?

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26. How do you define a healthy friendship with yourself? What is your bill of rights for a friendship with yourself? Do you give yourself time, acceptance, care, forgiveness, grace, patience, and respect? If so, in what ways do you give these gifts to yourself?