



My Friends

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MY FRIENDS

STUFF YOU CAN TEACH YOUR FRIENDS: LUCILLE BALL, JIM CARREY, JOHNNY DEPP, DREW BARRYMORE, BECK, CUBA GOODING JR., AL PACINO, DEMI MOORE, KEANU REEVES, AND BRUCE WILLIS ALL DROPPED OUT OF SCHOOL EITHER TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES OR BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T FIT IN WITH KIDS THEIR OWN AGE, DESPISED HOMEWORK, OR WERE DESPERATE TO BEGIN THEIR PURSUITS OF STARDOM.

GOD'S DESIGN

Here's a wild thought: God created you to have friends. And friendship itself is something God thought up first.

See, God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all God, right? (We know this can be confusing, but stick with us.) We call that “the Trinity”—the three different “persons of God” who are still one.

Don't sweat it if that doesn't make sense to you. Just get this: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all exist together in community—like an intense, committed friendship. So when God says in the Bible that we're made in his image (Genesis 1:26-27)—which just means we, in the deepest parts of who we are, share some similarities with the God who created us—then we must have that deep-friendship thing built into us.

You could say we're “wired” for friendship or we have the “programming” for friendship. But it's up to us to use it.

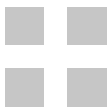
Think about this, too—God created everything that exists. Actually, first God thought of it, and *then* God created it. Laughter? Yup, God thought it up, and then created it. Palm trees? Yup, God thought them up, and then created them. Iguanas? Same thing. Families? Check. Friendship? I bet you can see where this is going.

So, when you read this book about friendship, and when you think about how you can be a better friend, and when you try to be a great friend or to

make new friends, you're moving closer and closer to who God created you to be!

"SCHOOL IS HARD. HOMEWORK IS HARDER.
FINDING GREAT FRIENDS...EVEN HARDER.

—TAYLOR, 8TH GRADE



SHIFTING FRIENDSHIPS

Now that you're moving into your middle school years, you may have noticed your friendships are changing. In fact, we've talked to hundreds of middle schoolers who struggle with this. Sometimes they feel guilty because they don't want to hang out with their childhood friends anymore. And sometimes they're pressured (by their parents, usually) to make different friends than the ones they already have.

Here's the scoop: You're changing. (Duh!) But really, you're changing BIG-time! In fact, except for the years between your birth and your third birthday, you're changing more *right now* than at any other time in your life. You're a change monster!

One thing that's changing the most is your brain (even though you sometimes feel like you've just lost it completely—or at least misplaced it for a little bit). Just like you're growing up physically—your body is changing and stuff like that—your brain is also growing up. One of the cool things about this brain change is that you're becoming unique. When we say *unique* we don't mean “weird” (although that may also be true!). We just mean you're becoming more *different* from other people—one of a kind.

Think of it this way: If you put a bunch of five-year-olds in a room with some toys, they'll pretty much all get along and play together (unless one kid is a total jerk-in-training who wants to make everyone miserable). But if you put a bunch of 13-

year-olds in a room with a CD player and a big stack of CDs, you're likely to hear, "I love this song!" at the same time you hear, "This song totally stinks!"

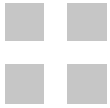
Little kids usually form friendships based on who lives near them or with whom they naturally spend a lot of time. But young teenagers form their friendships based on common interests (and this will remain true for the rest of your life). So lots of middle schoolers shift their reasons for having the friends they have from "because they live by me" to "because we like the same things."

This shift isn't easy. In fact, it's often messy. Feelings will probably get hurt. And misunderstandings are likely.

Here's what we want you to understand: The shifting-friendships thing is normal. It would be great for you to be loving and forgiving and all that stuff—both to new and old friends. But it's normal and okay to go through friendship changes during the middle school years.

"I HATE IT WHEN IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOMEONE IS YOUR BEST FRIEND,
BUT WHEN YOU GET TO MIDDLE SCHOOL THEY SUDDENLY THINK
THEY'RE JUST TOO COOL FOR YOU."

—HALY, 7TH GRADE



CLIQUEES

We wanted to talk about this topic at the beginning of the book because it's such a big deal in middle school. And it's WAY more of an issue than it was in grade school.

Some people call 'em *cliques* (pronounced "clicks"). You probably don't use that word; you probably call them "friendship groups." But there are different kinds of friendship groups, right? Some groups of friends are *open* and welcoming to new friends. Their attitude is, "Hey, if you want to hang with us, come on!" They're like a party in a park—anyone can walk up and join, really, because there are no doors or walls.

But other friendship groups are *closed* and unwelcoming to new people. Their attitude is, "Of course you want to hang with us, but you can't because we don't want you!" They're like a party in a locked room with a security guard at the door and a pit bull tied up out front. These closed friendship groups are what we call "cliques."

Here are a couple of helpful words and ideas: When a group wants to be open to others, they're considered *inclusive* because they "include" people. But when they're not open to others, they're *exclusive* because they "exclude" people. Friendship groups can be either inclusive or exclusive, but cliques are usually exclusive.

STUFF YOU CAN TEACH YOUR FRIENDS: A PIECE OF FRENCH TOAST WITH ONLY ONE BITE OUT OF IT, EATEN BY JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE, SOLD ON EBAY FOR \$3,000. THE PROCEEDS WERE GIVEN TO CHARITY.

Okay. Now that we're clear on what a clique is, let's talk about them for a bit.

First, it's normal to want a group of special friends to hang with. In fact, it's not only normal, but it's also good. Remember, God made us for community. (Check out the very first chapter, "God's Design.")

Second, it's normal and okay to have some friends who are really special to you (like, your "best friends"). Jesus also had these. He had 12 disciples who were like his friendship group, but three of these guys were his closest friends.

Finally, the problem only comes up when a friendship group becomes a clique. Cliques aren't good for *anyone*—not for the people who are in them, nor for the people who *wish* they were in them. That's why God doesn't like cliques—exclusive groups hurt people, even those who are a part of them.

So just remember that your middle school years will be so much better if you try to be part of inclusive and open friendship groups.