

Community Groups are used extensively as the primary vehicle for discipleship at The Gathering and run on a quarter system. There is one in the fall, one in the winter and one in the spring. During the summer weeks we don't meet in Community Groups but we still offer the Growth Guides as a tool to help you grow personally. The Growth Guides are designed to help you dig deeper into the weekly sermon on your own or with your family and are available each week along with the note sheets at church as well as online.

Consider...

Use the summary and discussion below to review and apply this week's message:

Message Summary

It's so easy for things to get complicated, isn't it? Relationships on Facebook, taxes, taking over the world. Many times, our faith feels complicated, too. Worship here, Bible study there, Community Group and outreach programs on top of those. It can all get to be a bit much, and before long, we've taken a simple plan and made it overwhelmingly difficult. This week Phil reminded us that we can't afford to miss a crucial first step: friendship with God personally through a relationship with Jesus. As we learned, our relationships evolve through four stages:

1. **STRANGER:** *This is where all of us started with Jesus – we knew NOTHING about Him. We hear other people make a big deal about Him and it all sounds so very religious. But we were never strangers to Jesus! He has known you and me from the beginning – the good, the bad and the ugly – and gave Himself for us!*
2. **ACQUAINTANCE:** *So you take the next step in the relationship. You start to ask questions about Jesus and learn about Him, but you're still not really following Him. This stage is much more of an information-gathering stage, and there are many people in churches every week who are at this level.*
3. **FRIEND:** *Jesus calls us friends, and when we enter into friendship with Him, we find a real relationship with a real King who knows us and allows us to know Him. In friendship, protocol is replaced with peace, and religion is replaced with rest. There is no striving to do or be anything. There is life-changing acceptance by the greatest Friend we'll ever know.*
4. **COMPANION:** *Companionship is friendship on steroids. This is when you look at your friends and decide you want even more – to the point of giving more to the relationship because you know that's the only way to really get more out of it. At this level of relationship, there is the greatest level of intimacy possible, and it's what Jesus wants us to have with Him.*

Discuss

Use the following questions to review and apply the points learned in the message.

- As you've thought back through this week's message, what one thing – if any – inspired you or maybe even confused you?
- Who was your childhood best friend that Phil asked you to think of? Why were you great friends?
- How do we respond to a friend that invests in us? How do we respond to a friend that does NOT invest in us?
- What level of relationship with Jesus would you say you came Sunday with? Stranger, acquaintance, friend or companion? Why?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus chose you and called you friend?
- Did Sunday change your perspective of your relationship with Jesus?
- Phil called us to "stop trying to please a deity and start resting in a friendship." What were your thoughts about that statement?
- How can we practically pursue Jesus?
- Did you have other thoughts or questions that came to mind Sunday?