

# NOT ALONE



A STUDY ON FRIENDSHIP

LEADER'S GUIDE

# HOW TO USE THE LEADER GUIDE

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We are thrilled you are going to lead others through this study. This Leader's Guide is a brief roadmap for you to use to facilitate group discussion time. However, it's simply a guide. Be flexible. You may get to cover all of the content or you may not. Your group may plant itself on one or two questions for the majority of your time together and that's okay. Have a plan in mind, but let the Spirit lead the conversation. Speak up when needed, but consider your role to be a facilitator of conversation instead of the group speaker.

Create a safe place for people to share and honor their responses. If someone asks a question that you do not know the answer to, it's okay to say, "I don't know." Use that as an opportunity to follow-up and explore the answer together.

With all of that in mind, let's walk through the formats of both your group time and the study.

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## WHAT TO EXPECT WITH EACH STUDY

The studies have two components:

**1. The book** (or web page). Studies are typically about six weeks long, with a devotional written for each weekday.

The daily reading and questions can be found in two formats:

- **The study book.** This is the most effective format for groups. You can purchase a copy [here](#).
- **[ifequip.com](http://ifequip.com).** This is our web-based version of the study. Each devotional is added *daily*. Group members will need to keep journals to write down their answers each day, so they can refer to them during group discussion.

**2. Videos.** The videos will vary for each study in terms of length and format, but they are always intended to be a tool to help highlight the weekly focus of the study.

Before diving in, it can be helpful to plan an "intro" group meeting to give an overview of the study format and schedule, and to allow the group to get to know each other.

## TYPICAL FORMAT:

1. Do the week's reading and questions on your own.
2. Get together and watch the video for that week.
3. Discuss the video and the week's content together.

## HOW TO WATCH THE WEEKLY VIDEOS

1. Log into your RightNow Media account and search "IF:Gathering" to find the *Not Alone* video series.
2. If you do not have a RightNow Media account, click [here](#) to access the videos for free through an exclusive RightNow Media and IF:Gathering resource library. After creating an account, log in and search "Not Alone friendship" to watch the series.
3. Watch on ifequip.com.

# LEADER GUIDE FORMAT

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Each week of the Leader's Guide will include sections designed to help you successfully facilitate group discussion. Here are the sections you can expect every week:

## WATCH

Make sure everyone can see the screen, and set the audio to a comfortable level before beginning the session. You don't want your group to miss anything.

## REVIEW

The review section helps your group briefly summarize what the group has been covering in both the book and in the videos. You'll talk about how you relate to the content and what challenges, confuses, or inspires you from the study.

## DIG IN

This section helps you discuss the biblical passages that are the focus for the week. Allow the women you are leading to open up about what they feel God is teaching them through His Word.

## MAKE IT MATTER

A transformed heart is the goal, so knowing is good, but applying is better. This section helps you talk about how to incorporate what your group has learned and how their hearts were changed into everyday life.

## REFLECT

We'll provide you with a suggestion or two of how to continue to engage throughout the week with the ideas and applications of the Bible you've unearthed throughout the week.

## GO DEEPER

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As a reminder, it's okay if you do not get to every question. Your group may need time to unpack just one or two questions. Use your best discernment to determine how long to let the discussion go before moving on to the next question or topic.

Close your time in prayer. Challenge your group to be praying about something related to the weekly topic. What does your group need accountability in? How is God changing your hearts?

We want to help you and your group to both understand and apply God's Word. Use your reflection time to challenge your group to take what they have just discussed out into the world.



# WEEK ONE

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*This first session holds great opportunities to gauge your group's understanding of the Trinity and the story of creation, as well as their ability to read and interpret Scriptures in the historical, poetic, and gospel genres of the Bible. You can also observe the emotional energy of the group—are there stories of friendship pain or joy? Betrayal or kindness? Observe the silences, body language, and engagement of your group members. Make sure you give everyone time to flip or scroll to the passages you're studying. Make note of prayer requests, and follow up on each one from week to week.*

## WATCH

*What Are Friends For? (13 minutes)*

## REVIEW

Which lesson from this week most challenged or affirmed your idea of friendship?

How does the Trinity help us to better understand the value of friendship?

In the video, Isa mentioned the pain of being known and unloved. Fear of rejection can keep us from forming friendships. What are some other barriers to friendship?

## DIG IN

Jennie mentions in the video that our society has diminished the meaning of the word “friend.” Read John 15:13 . List the characteristics of a friendship that Jesus describes.

Read Proverbs 12:26 and then read Philippians 3:17. These passages focus on

## WEEK ONE CONT.

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the importance of finding and following people who love God. Who in your life would you call a “righteous guide” or someone who is worthy of imitating?

Mark 2:1–5 demonstrates a beautiful story of friends filled with faith. Spend some time retelling this story in your own words. What can you take from this story about being a good friend?

### MAKE IT MATTER

In the video for week one, Alyssa talks about making a “covenant union” as friends. What’s your understanding of a covenant friendship? What does that look like?

In Genesis 2:18, God declares that it’s not good that the man is alone. The Lord creates an *ezer*—a strong and timely help. What can you do to be a strong and timely help to your friends?

### REFLECT

What are your goals for this study? To align your friendships with God’s Word? To make a friend? To forgive? Take time to write them down.

One of the inventory questions of week one day five in the study guide asks you to list the attributes of a person whom you consider a great friend. Consider calling, texting, or mailing a letter of kindness and encouragement to that friend this week.

## WEEK TWO

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*Last week, the study delved into the theology of friendship. We discovered that its roots are as ancient as the Trinity and creation—we were literally made for each other. Community is how we fulfill the charge to love one another, and encourage each other toward the upward call of Christ. Use the opening minutes to reconnect and check on prayer request updates. Hospitality and consistent care set the table for this study.*

### WATCH

*Friendship in the Bible (13 minutes)*

### REVIEW

In the video, Melissa talked about her treasured friendship with a woman who has expanded her view of life. She said, “The friendships that take a little time and intention become the deepest.” In what ways can you relate to what she said? In what ways does this principle also extend to our relationship with God?

Which biblical friendship most resonated with you? Why?

### DIG IN

In Exodus 18, Moses and Jethro have a conversation that could have gone sideways depending on Moses’s response to Jethro’s observation: “What you are doing is not good.” Compare Jethro’s words in Exodus 18:17 with what God says when he sees Adam alone in Eden in Genesis 2:18.

Ruth and Naomi’s friendship starts in the midst of profound bereavement and loss. But out of that loss, they cultivate a loyal love—the term *hesed* that Lauren describes in the video—is cultivated. Describe the love Ruth demonstrates



## WEEK TWO CONT.

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to Naomi in Ruth 1:16–17. Who else in the Bible models a love like that?

In describing the bond between Mary and Elizabeth, Lauren said, “God sends not just an angel, but also a friend.” Read Luke 1:39–56 and talk about the verbal encouragement that Elizabeth gives Mary. How does Mary respond to Elizabeth’s words?

Read Mark 5:37 and 9:2–13. Discuss Jesus’s friendship with James, John, and Peter. Is it surprising to you that Jesus had close friends? What did he do to demonstrate his friendship?

### MAKE IT MATTER

In the video, Amena talked about how it’s difficult to take an “us and them” stance when we have friends who are in different life stages, have different ages, and have different ethnicities. What divides you from potential friends? Take a look at your friend circle. Does it reflect you, the kingdom of God, or something else?

### REFLECT

Create a friend map: list people at your school, job, gym, coffeeshop, neighborhood, or church, who could be potential friends.

What could you do to incorporate *hesed* (lovingkindness) into your friendships this week?





## WEEK THREE

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*This is a great week to celebrate the attributes of friends whom we love. It's also a good week for self-reflection concerning the fruit of the Spirit that we joyfully display—or the fruit that we need to tenderly grow. This is not about condemnation or shame. It's about developing an awareness of where we shine and where we need to grow. This week also provides guidelines on what to look for in a friend.*

### WATCH

*Profile of a Friend (12 minutes)*

### REVIEW

This week, the study talked about the profile of good friends. They are humble, transparent, discerning, empathetic, and intentional. Which attribute stood out to you as you read this week? Why?

### DIG IN

Take time to reflect on the following passages about humility in your group: Matthew 18:4; Luke 14:11; Philippians 2:8; James 4:6. In what ways does humility reflect God's character and affect friendships?

In the video, Amena talked about the fruit of the Spirit being a great marker for the quality of our friendships. Read Galatians 5:22–23 and discuss the characteristics described in the passage. How do these characteristics translate into your everyday friendships?

Read Proverbs 27:17. Discuss the principle behind this proverb and how it applies to friendships.

Isa shared that the hurt associated with being used in past friendship kept her



## WEEK THREE CONT.

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from reaching out again. Friendship requires risk and a willingness to try again with a tender heart. With that in mind, discuss 1 Peter 3:8–9 and Ephesians 4:31–32.

### **MAKE IT MATTER**

Good friendships take work and timing. How can your calendar reflect your intentionality in creating time for friends?

Deep friendships require a reciprocal openness. Take time to evaluate: are you open with your struggles? Why or why not? Do you feel permitted to ask your friends about areas of struggle or growth? Why or why not?

### **REFLECT**

In the video, Isa recalled that she knew she found a friend because “whenever we went to coffee, we were crying.” What does it look like to “go first” and be vulnerable in your friendships?

Amena suggested that we can use Galatians 5:22–23 as a quiz to assess where we are in displaying the fruit of the Spirit. This week, write down the fruit of the Spirit and put them where you’ll see them. Ask God for eyes to help you recognize the fruit you’re lacking and rejoice in the fruit that you display.

## WEEK FOUR

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*This is a hard week, so make space for people to express their grief and share their stories. Actively listen. Don't attempt to fix situations. Don't minimize or deflect from sadness. Emphasize that how we respond to conflict demonstrates the level of health in the relationship.*

### WATCH

*Toxic Friendship (13 minutes)*

### REVIEW

In the video, Amena talked about the time that she couldn't hold space for her friend's vulnerability and instead, she offered a surface-level response. When has this ever happened to you? When have you ever been the person who didn't hold space? How did the situation resolve?

Discuss how to distinguish between temporary moments of jealousy, competition, or neediness, and a consistent pattern of those attitudes. When friendships are toxic, it's okay to create a boundary. What does it look like for you to set a boundary in a friendship?

### DIG IN

How does codependence erase another person? Can the account of blame in Genesis 3 speak to this? (For example, whom did the woman or the man blame for her/his choices? What would it have looked like to take responsibility?)

In the video, Lauren talked about the fact that we are "embodied souls," which means we honor a person's race, ethnicity, age, etc. Discuss where that idea comes from (the creation of humanity, the incarnation of Christ, embodied in a certain place and time to a specific people, the Acts 2 establishment of a multi-



## WEEK FOUR CONT.

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lingual church, Revelation 7:9 are all some examples of where to look).

Ghosting is painful. Read Psalm 46:10, John 14:27, and 1 Peter 5:6-7 from the study's reflection question. Discuss God's assurances.

Lauren also talked about the "rotten fruit" of toxic behavior in Galatians 5:19–21. In what ways are these characteristics different from the fruit of the Spirit?

Jennie mentioned Ephesians 6:12, which talks about the spiritual reality behind our circumstances. The enemy can use conflict to ruin our friendships. What can create division in our friendships? What biblical passage do you meditate on in order to guard against divisive tactics?

### **MAKE IT MATTER**

Discuss the tactics you use in order to discern whether you're experiencing conflict or the dissolution of a friendship.

Have you displayed toxic practices in your friendships? You're not hopeless. This may be a great time to consider counseling, seeking forgiveness, and asking God and other trustworthy people for guidance on the journey to healthy relationships.

The way we respond to conflict affects our relational health. Evaluate yourself: are you conflict-avoidant? Do you feel the burden to reconcile all the time, even without resolving conflict?

### **REFLECT**

Take time to examine yourself. Do you welcome a friend by loving her fully as she is, as Amena mentioned in the video?

If you are struggling with toxicity in your friendships, what could you do to seek help this week?

## WEEK FIVE

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*As Christians, we're called to the ministry of reconciliation. This week is a great opportunity to remind the group of the very tangible hope that we have in Christ, the power of forgiveness, and the joy we find in grace.*

### WATCH

*How to Rebuild Broken Trust (10 minutes)*

### REVIEW

In the video, Melissa mentioned her husband's often-used phrase: "I love you more than I want to be right." Take some time to unpack what that means.

Within your group, discuss the steps needed to rebuild broken trust.

### DIG IN

In Acts 15:39–40, we see that the Apostle Paul disagreed with Barnabas over John Mark. What does this passage show us about our ability as believers to get into conflict? Read 2 Timothy 4:11. What does the fact that John Mark and Paul were reconciled say about our ability to restore our relationships?

Comparison is poison. What lessons did you learn from reading about Saul's obsession with David in day two's reading?

Amena reads Matthew 18:15–16 in the video, and day five of the reading references Matthew 18:21–35. Take time to walk through this passage and take note of the repetitive nature of the process of forgiveness. In your experience, what can get in the way of forgiving again and again?

In the video, Veronica reached out for Millie during a vulnerable time, without a response. Explore the steps that they took toward renewing their friendship. How do their steps reflect biblical reconciliation and forgiveness?

## WEEK FIVE CONT.

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Discuss the story of Jacob and Esau from Genesis 25 and 33 and day four's reading. Did their parents model conflict resolution and communication? What habits did they inherit from their parents? How could their story have been different?

### MAKE IT MATTER

Resolving conflict is impossible without communication. Day three's reading talks specifically about the mechanics of intentional conversation: time, honesty, listening, vulnerability, genuine love, and care. What aspects of intentional conversation do you excel at? Where are you growing?

### REFLECT

What is your communication style? How do you respond to conflict? Ask your friends to answer these two questions. Take time to listen to how your communication style affects them (listen for the positive, not just the negative!)

Amena challenged us to consider if there are conversations that you need to have with certain friends because you feel tender, angry, or hurt? What would it look like to reach out to that person to rebuild broken trust?





## WEEK SIX

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*Friendship is such a blessing. One of the best parts of close friendships is being both known and loved. This week delves into the safe intimacy of friendship and the picture friendship is of the eternity that awaits us in Christ. Friendships provide a safe place for brokenness, confession, faith, healing, and fun. Celebrate it!*

### WATCH

*The Unique Ministry of Friendship (12 minutes)*

### REVIEW

Good friends are so safe. Alyssa said, “It just feels so good to know you belong somewhere.” This week’s reading talked about “imposition” and getting into the business of others. Is it possible to be good friends with someone from whom you hide parts of yourself?

At what point do you consider a friend trustworthy?

### DIG IN

Read James 5:16 and discuss how this practice strengthens both friendships and faith.

Jennie reads Hebrews 3:13–14 and says that friendship helps us to finish well. She said friends provide a firm and steady place in an unsteady world. How do friends help you to follow Jesus well? How does living in community help you persist in following Jesus?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14–18 out loud and walk through examples of how to apply each exhortation in your friendships.



## WEEK SIX CONT.

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Discuss the profile of Jesus imagined in Day four's reading. What impact has God's gift of joy in togetherness had on your life?

Read Revelation 21:3–4 and relish as a group the promises we have to look forward to. In what ways does knowing what's coming affect the quality of your friendships now?

### **MAKE IT MATTER**

Cessilye knew that she was safe when her friend and business partner said, "We are not going to sacrifice our health—our selves—for this organization." Discuss why Cessilye's ability to confess her weakness and Bethany's ability to cover her with care are signs of a solid friendship.

Discuss the reflection question for this week's reading: What unspoken social rules govern your friendships?

How does knowing that God values your relationships with Him and with others impact your values?

### **REFLECT**

Amena mentioned that time is a barrier to cultivating friendship. What can you do to intentionally and regularly speak into your friends' lives?

Share a takeaway from this study that you plan on taking into your friendships.

What can you do to celebrate and cultivate your current friendships?