



deepening **FRIENDSHIPS**

A 7-day Plan



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Do we really NEED friends? YES! We need sisters, deepening friendship of hearts, committed to caring for one another, inviting each other to be curious, and inspiring one another to the full and abundant life God has for us! In this seven-day plan, we will explore what a redemptive community of women looks like and how it might look to move this way with women in your life.

**This reading plan is
based on session six in
The Deepening Journey,
Zoweh's 6-session
video-based resource
for women.**



Day 1: Not Made to Do Life Alone

Scripture:

Genesis 2:18 It is not good for man to be alone. (NLT)

John 15:15b: I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father. (MSG)

Proverbs 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. (NLT)

Devotional:

We are made for fellowship. We are not made to live this life on our own. We are created to bring the image of God to bear to this world we live in. The Trinity is a fellowship, a friendship, in which Father, Son and Spirit live in stunning unity, giving one another glory, creating together, loving, and being loved within the divine Godhead. They are three in one, a mystery. And yet as complete as this union is on its own, our God reached outward and created human beings to enlarge their fellowship, to share their glory and their love, that we would, in turn, return their affection and belonging, to live within this holy fellowship and extend it outward.

Over the next seven days, we will explore this gift of intimate friendship. We begin with two contrasting stories of friendship in Scripture, and how these women experienced sisterhood and belonging, or the lack thereof, and what their stories mean for us.

Mary's and Tamar's stories of friendship and isolation:

Mary: I think of Mary, the mother of Jesus. After she meets the angel Gabriel, who tells her that she, a virgin, is going to become a mother, the mother of the Son of God. Scripture says that Mary arose in haste and immediately went to Elizabeth to tell her this news. As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped, and she was filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth's words to Mary must have been nurturing to Mary's soul: "Blessed are you for believing, for there will be a fulfillment of those things that you heard from the Lord!" This is a beautiful picture of friendship, of one coming alongside another.

Tamar: I also think of another woman, Tamar, one of King David's daughters. She was a beautiful young woman, the daughter of a king, who was raped by her brother. In Tamar's case, she did not find a friend to help her, hold her story, or to speak on her behalf, to come to her aid and rescue. Scripture tells us that in the absence of care after this traumatic experience, Tamar ended up living as a desolate woman, friendless. Alone in a different brother's house, shame kept her from the belonging she was created for.

What a juxtaposition! Mary experienced the love and care we were created for in relationship, and how beautiful this kind of friendship can be for each of us in this fallen world. Perhaps your experience with friendship, or the lack thereof, is more like Tamar, where relationships may have caused so much pain that you are afraid to open yourself to it again for fear that you will just experience more hurt.

Over these seven days we will explore friendship, sisterhood, and belonging. We are created to be part of a redemptive community of sisters, friends, and allies- to be outposts of heaven in this broken world. We were made for this! Although we have been disappointed and betrayed in relationships, our God has come to redeem what has been broken and lost. Our thirst for belonging begins here.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, how do you want to deepen this in me and in my community of friends?

Jesus, who is an "Elizabeth" in my life? Am I an "Elizabeth" in my community?

Spirit, who are the women in my community who need a friend that you would invite me to come alongside? Or maybe I feel like Tamar. I invite you, Spirit, into this space to speak and to move on my behalf.

Day 2: First Taste of Sisterhood

Scripture:

Psalms 139:1-4 You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

Romans 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love.

Devotional:

One of the words for “know” in the Bible is the Hebrew word “yada”. It means to know through experience, to know deeply, intimately. God made us for a yada knowledge of him and of each other. How often do we live from our heads and not from the experiences of our hearts and senses? What would it look like in your life to deeply encounter God and his love of you in your heart and your body and your mind? How would this YADA with God flow into your relationships?

Friendship is not the goal- friendship, sisterhood, and ministry are the fruit of yada-our intimacy with God.

Sherry's Story:

When I think back to my first taste of sisterhood, the three of us were an unlikely group of friends- all firefighter's wives, in a department where it seemed more men had affairs than not. It started when Beth and I were invited by Robin D, (not our Robin at Zoweh)... into a journey together through The Purpose Driven Life. As we met each week starting in May 2005, I had no idea how much my life would depend on these two women. I was just beginning my walk with Jesus. As each of our lives and marriages imploded, we held each other's hearts and stories, and sometimes just held each other as we cried. We prayed fiercely for each other, taking Jesus at His word.

In particular, Robin was incredibly fierce, inviting me to draw my life and breath and way from Jesus, as I moved with God through finding out about my husband's affair, the following months of heartache and healing, and the death of that marriage. Robin both fought for my heart and cared well for my heart, asking disrupting questions, like “what if you DO divorce him?”

I was awakened to my heart's need for friends, for dear sisters, for the importance of fighting for the hearts of others. Robin and Beth knew my story, saw my heart, and as I was fully known and seen, there was no room for shame. In that season, Jesus and Robin taught me to fight for my heart, for her and Beth's hearts, as well as my husband's heart.

I got my first taste of sisterhood as these two women helped me stand up, reminded me who I was, named my True Self, inviting me to live deeply rooted in God; seen, known, and loved by friends, instead of bearing the weight of my life's situations alone while maintaining a facade.

What might it be like for YOU to experientially know and be known by a handful of dear friends?

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, as I sit with you, please reveal to me in what ways MY heart needs to be fought for. Who in my story, what friend of mine, could I offer my strength and courage to right now?

Jesus, how does Sherry's story relate to my own? What do you want me to consider and explore?

Spirit, would you show me what you long for in me knowing you and being known, like the Hebrew word "Yada"?

Day 3: Deepening Sisterhood

Scripture:

Proverbs 13:20 Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Hebrews 13:1 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.

Devotional:

Another story from Sherry:

After returning from my second *Deepening Weekend* in 2012, having heard from women who knew each other's stories... I longed for that, for *my heart*, and for the women around me. I invited several women to join me in this exploration, this way of experiencing life together. I hoped it could be more than the average weekly Bible study that meets to talk *about God*. *What if we became sisters, who know and experience God and life together, friends who are a safe place to be known and seen?*

Our journey together has been hard fought for the four of us, taking steps together through books we read, risking and engaging our hearts over coffees, lunches, dinners, long walks, and camping adventures. It didn't just happen, and it didn't happen overnight.

Our friendship, SISTERHOOD, INTIMACY grew through telling our stories and honoring each other's stories while holding each other's hearts through betrayal, death, deep grief, and longing for more. Intimacy flourishes in our journey together exploring life, hearts, laughing together, and navigating challenging times with dear friends who love, know, and see each other on our best days, and on our worst. There is little space for the false self—we see it coming because we know each other's true self.

Little did I know how much I would need these fierce and tender hearts in my life to navigate all the storms of the past years. *These women around me have played an enormous role in my heart's restoration.*

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, would you bring to mind one woman (or several women) with whom I could pursue friendship like this?

Jesus, how have the women in my life over the years played a role in my restoration, in my becoming who I am today?

Spirit, would you comfort me today in the places that still feel uncomfortable in pursuing friendships with women? Would you nurture in me courage and longing for what you desire for me?

Day 4: Our Longing for Friendship

Scripture:

Psalms 62:8 Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

Psalms 38:9 All my longings lie open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.

Psalms 103:1-5 Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Devotional:

Sherry has recounted two seasons of her own deepening friendships. As I read her stories, it makes me hungry to be similarly intentional with women in my life, both individually and in a group. But like me, you might be wondering, how does one even go about doing this?

Perhaps you have a handful of women in your life who come to mind to invite into a group like this. Or maybe you find yourself in a lonely place without access to women who would be up for going deeper with God and each other like you desire.

Either way, I encourage you to simply pray about this growing longing in your heart. God desires for us to pour out our hearts to him, even our longings for deepening friendships. Let's be alert and watchful today (and in this season) to see who God brings to mind or who we might meet as we put ourselves in the way of women who could become our friends.

We are with and for you, praying for you as you consider all you've read and all you long for in friendship and in belonging. As you read through this prayer and the questions that follow, consider journaling what rises up in your heart.

A Prayer Expressing a Longing for Friendship

Father, Spirit, Jesus, Trinity God, the way you are together as One, is seamless and beautiful and eternal. Alluring. Complete in and of itself, yet you have extended this offer of friendship beyond yourself to us, who you fashioned to be displays of your splendor, to be included in this intimate fellowship and to bring your image to

bear in community and friendship to this thirsty world around us. I long for a friendship that is not fickle and fading, but one that is born of you God, that will stand the test of time. Friendship that is redemptive in nature, nourishing and nurturing, a safe place of mutuality to speak of our struggles and our wounds, and to tend to each other. A sisterhood where iron sharpens iron, where we are present to one another, lift each other up, encourage one another to rise and move in union with you. A place where when we hurt one another, which will happen, we find courage through the power of your coming, Jesus, to be willing to walk with you over the course of time, to hope for and to see repentance, reconciliation, restoration, and resurrection happen in this life. These are the friendships I long for, the kind of redemptive community I desire, the Kingdom fellowship you lived and died for, Jesus.

You know my longings and my desire for this kind of intimacy. You call me your friend and I return to these words, even in the midst of the heartache I have experienced through friends and in community. I proclaim that I am a member of the body of Christ. I confess that there are times that I don't know how to do this, that I have been let down and that I have let my friends down, and this has caused me to retreat into lonely self-protection. But my deepest longing is to be courageous enough to return, again and again, to the fellowship you have made possible, Jesus.

Holy Spirit, speak to me of who I am, how you love me and how you have created me to love others. I want to be like you, Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit, giving and receiving, fierce defenders of one another, of the Gospel, light shiners, loving and true, deeply planted in you and with one another.

I pray for an Elizabeth in my life like Mary had, and to be an Elizabeth to a woman in my life. I trust my heart, mind, soul, desires, and yearning to you, in Jesus' mighty name, AMEN!

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, what do you have to say to me about friendship and community? Where does my heart need healing here so that I can move toward the community you created me to experience?

Jesus, where might I need to offer repair to a friend?

Spirit, as I read this prayer, how are you inviting me to move toward you and others into the friendships and communities that you have for me?

Day 5: What IS a Redemptive Sisterhood?

Scripture:

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Devotional:

Over the last few days, we've explored stories of deepening friendships. Have you found yourself wanting more intentional friendships? (I know I have as I read Sherry's stories!) For the next few days, we will get practical and detailed in how to invite friends into what we call a Redemptive Sisterhood. This is more than just a support group or a Bible study group- it is a small fellowship of hearts where you know another's stories, her journey and glory, where you can know and be known. We have found women richly experience the love, life, and freedom for which God created us in such a circle.

Friendship is not the goal- friendship, sisterhood, and ministry are the fruit of our intimacy with God. Knowing this, we will explore what Redeemed Sisterhood looks like and what it doesn't look like.. Tomorrow we will discuss some important beliefs core to redemptive sisterhood and also what a redemptive sisterhood does.

What does a Redemptive Sisterhood look like?

- It is a place where you bring your true, authentic self and your pursuit of personal intimacy with God.
- It is a safe and trusting place where the deep places of the heart and soul can be pursued, known, and touched.
- It is a place where everyone is free to participate, offer, and contribute. Where no one's glory is muted. Each woman's wounds are honored, and her story is valued.
- It must be small. It must be intimate.
- It will be messy. In the complexity and messiness of relationships, we understand God will provoke and disrupt in order for there to be opportunities for healing and growth, and for the possibilities of moving in new ways of relating. Change and disruption are inevitable and even necessary. In the messiness, we will have

opportunities to repair, to seek reconciliation in our less-than-helpful ways of moving with each other.

What a Redemptive Sisterhood is NOT:

- It cannot be a substitute for God, but rather it is a place God inhabits, and what God designed in order for love and life to be experienced.
- It cannot be contained in a day, a time, or a room.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

*Father, show me which part(s) of Redemptive Sisterhood shimmer off the page?
Why do they catch my attention?*

*Jesus, have I allowed my community to take your place in my life? If so, show me
where and how this is?*

*Spirit, where have I tasted and experienced anything remotely close to this type of
friendship?*

Day 6: Ingredients of a Redemptive Sisterhood

Scripture:

Proverbs 16:24 Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

James 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Luke 8:15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Devotional:

Yesterday we explored what a circle of friends can look like. Today, we will look at some of the ingredients of Redemptive Sisterhood, including what we experience and some crucial beliefs for the group to hold as we move through life together.

What does a Redemptive Sisterhood do?

- It is a place where *a woman's glory is pursued, not her sin*. Different from 'accountability', her true self is sought out, bringing healing to her false ways of hiding, proving, or moving in fear.
- It is a space where we seek to offer good care to each other. Where we hold space for stories, processing, pain, and grief. Where we listen well and respond with kindness and curiosity, without judgment and without trying to fix or give advice. (check out our reading plan "*Loving through Listening*" for more on offering care through listening)
- It is a place where our lives intersect, and how we live in the kingdom together. Where we pray, play, worship, eat, share, and journey together. Ideally, it is intergenerational.
- *It is larger than itself. It must be missional and intentional - for others and on behalf of others*. To be together in this mission of the heart, with purpose and intentionality, deepening friendships, and guiding the group in building the lives of each other and others.

What does a Redemptive Sisterhood believe?

- It is a place where, at its core, the belief that the redeemed heart is good fuels both acceptance and growth. When we come to faith in Christ, our old heart of stone is replaced with a new heart of flesh; the old is gone, the new has come.

- We are new creations in Christ. God redeems our hearts, cleanses them, and renews them with the washing of his blood, with the power of his resurrection, and with the indwelling of his Spirit. When we see each other in this light, it does fuel our ability to accept each other and look with curiosity to where God is cultivating new growth in each of us.
- It is a place where we understand that the Life and Love of God and of each other is fiercely opposed, and we therefore acknowledge that we are in a battle and have an enemy that comes to steal, kill, and destroy. It is important to realize how opposed this way of living is. The enemy is up to something- he is laser-focused on his purpose to steal, kill, and destroy our lives and relationships. Our eyes need to be opened to how Satan “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour,” luring us to misinterpret people and situations in our lives. Imagine how significant it is to have friends to invite us up into the observation deck with Jesus to see what is really going on around us.

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, would you open my eyes and heart to how you have redeemed my own heart? Could you show me the good that you have begun in me and promise to carry on to completion?

Jesus, how have I experienced opposition to friendship? Where have I misinterpreted the people and situations in my life?

Spirit, what are you calling me into in this season of life in terms of friendships and community? How are you longing for me to move in my friendships?

Day 7: What's Next for You?

Scripture:

Proverbs 12:26 The righteous choose their friends carefully...

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Devotional:

What would it look like for you to walk with Jesus as you invite a few women into the exploration of the heart together? To have friends witness and be with you through the adventures of life? What if you could become sisters who know and experience God and life together, friends who are a safe place to be known, seen, and cared for?

Here are some potential ideas for you to consider:

- Pray about which women to invite to join you in creating a Redemptive Sisterhood of deepening friendships.
- Invite these women for a meal together and share your heart and hopes for friendship, for exploring redemptive sisterhood together. (This might be the hardest part, but I imagine women will feel special to have been so intentionally sought out by you.)
- At that first meeting, it might help to go over the Tenants of Redemptive Sisterhood that we have compiled for you on our website:
<https://www.zoweh.org/the-deepening-community#tenets>
- We encourage you to go through this Bible App reading plan together as well as our "*Loving through Listening*" plan so you will be able to practice listening to each other as each woman shares her story.
- Some of your early meetings could consist of enjoying a meal together and taking time for each woman to share her story, perhaps only one woman sharing each meeting. When she finishes, the group could take time asking gentle follow up questions or share what they hear or see in her story, and conclude by praying for her as a group.
- Consider exploring your hearts and stories together through *The Deepening Journey*, our 6-week video-based resource that will have you journeying together in deeper intimacy with God and each other.

- Spend time together doing the things you enjoy or try something new together- cooking classes, art museums, walks in the park, hikes in the woods, coffee dates, karaoke- the list is endless!
- Watch movies together! Movies are like modern day parables, many illustrate the epic stories of our lives as they bring the themes of our lives to life on the big screen, awakening something epic in us.

We need friends, sisters to make it through— we need deepening friendships of hearts committed to caring for one another, loving one another, listening to one another, inviting each other to be curious, and inspiring one another to the full and abundant life God has for us!

As you ponder all this with God today, consider asking Him:

Father, from this whole week of exploration, what do you want to stand out to me the most? What do you want my eyes to see, my heart to feel, and my body to remember from this week focusing on deepening friendship?

Jesus, I have felt a yes in me this week. How do you want me to act on my "yes" to you in the realm of friendship?

Holy Spirit, in my deepest heart, I long for deep friendship; who might I invite into exploring more together?

Want a taste of The Deepening Journey, our 6-week resource for women? Learn more and watch session 1 for free at <https://www.zoweh.org/the-deepening-journey>.

