

## Is a Good Friend Hard to Find? Proxe Station Instructions

<h1>Is a Good Friend</h1>	 <h1>Friend</h1>	 <p>One may have a blazing hearth in one's soul, and yet no one ever comes to sit by it. - Vincent Van Gogh</p> <h1>Hard</h1>	<h1>To Find?</h1>
<p>DO YOU HAVE BETTER FRIENDS HERE OR BACK HOME?</p> <p>Here      Back Home</p> 	<p>WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF FRIENDSHIP?</p> <p>Men and women can be best friends, and stay just friends.</p>  <p>Men benefit more from friendship with women than the women do.</p>	<p>WHAT STRAINS YOUR FRIENDSHIPS THE MOST?</p> <p>Select your top five answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disrespecting my privacy</li> <li>Making a poor racial or cultural remark</li> <li>Being emotionally needy</li> <li>Being jealous of me</li> <li>Not coming to me with things that bother you</li> <li>Your anger</li> <li>Hooking up with my ex or current</li> <li>You wanting to hook up with me</li> <li>Coasting about me</li> <li>Treating other people badly</li> <li>Having different breaks of sharing</li> <li>Taking care of you while you're drunk</li> <li>Being excluded by your other friends</li> <li>Interrupting me when I'm speaking</li> <li>Copying me/my work</li> <li>Being long-winded</li> <li>Having different priorities and values</li> <li>Other</li> </ul>	<p>WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN BEING A GOOD FRIEND?</p> <p>Select your top answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I'm too busy</li> <li>I can't choose between people</li> <li>I keep making mistakes in friendship</li> <li>I have trouble forgiving others</li> <li>I have trouble being vulnerable/asking for help</li> <li>I don't know who I am</li> <li>I take a long time to get to know</li> <li>I lose interest in other people</li> <li>I get disappointed easily</li> <li>I have trouble with conflict</li> <li>I wonder about the objective value of people</li> <li>Other</li> </ul>
<p>HOW IMPORTANT IS FRIENDSHIP?</p> <p>"What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured." - Kurt Vonnegut</p> <p>How many "true friends" do you have?</p>	<p>WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF FRIENDSHIP?</p> <p>Students of color are more likely to make friends across race than white students.</p>  <p>To really be my friend, you have to understand my cultural background.</p>	<p>FRIENDSHIP AND CHARACTER</p> <p>"Genuine friendship must be based on goodness." - Aristotle</p> <p>"Be good and you will be lonely." - Mark Twain</p> 	<p>CAN GOD (IF GOD EXISTS) BE YOUR FRIEND?</p> <p>"God" is personal, relational, and knowable.</p> <p>"God" is trustworthy.</p> <p>Your relationship with "God" shapes your friendships.</p> 

### Purpose

The goal behind this proxe station is to engage people on a personal, heart level. Three main conversations can happen here, all related to friendship. First, we can go the intellectual route about the question of objective good and evil versus merely personal preference. Second, we can be personal about our character and our own flaws in friendship, and how Jesus addresses the deep human nature problem of selfishness that affects our friendships. Third, we can be personal about the character of God revealed in Jesus as relational and desiring to relate, knowable and desiring to be known, personable and desiring to be personal, and how Jesus can affect our friendship patterns.

As participants move along the proxe station from left to right, each panel is intended to uncover connection points for communicating something about Jesus during the follow-up interview.

### 'Is a Good Friend Hard to Find?' Proxe Station Introduction

1. Invite people to participate: 'Hi, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. We're asking people how we experience friendships and what we think about them.'
2. Give them a set of 'dots' and a quick overview: 'Answer the questions with the dots. Go top to bottom, and left to right.'

3. Tell them that you'll 'When you're done, if you have time, I'd like to ask a few follow-up questions.'
4. Give them time to engage with the material.

### **Important Questions to Ask Anytime:**

- Do you think that a self-centered person can truly be happy? I mean, if I'm self-centered, then no one else in the whole wide world is as committed to me as I am. So I'll always be disappointed, even with my future spouse, and all my best friends. That's why I think there must be some bigger truth out there to commit our lives to. Aristotle is right: 'Genuine friendship must be based on goodness.' Otherwise, two people are just mutually using each other, or one is taking advantage of the other. That's why the question of who is God can become very important. We need something or someone larger than us to draw us out of ourselves. What do you think about that?
- Friendship can be powerful, like Kurt Vonnegut says in that quote. I think about how some suicides might not have happened if there were decent friendships in place. Or think about James Egan Holmes, the Aurora, CO theater shooter who dressed like the Joker at the Batman movie, or the high schooler who ran a \$3 million drug ring (<http://theweek.com/article/index/230796/the-high-schooler-who-allegedly-ran-a-3-million-drug-ring>). People might have stepped in earlier, don't you think?
- If you'd like to talk about how Jesus can be an actual friend, and also impact our friendships, I think that's really important to talk about. Our experiences of being loved and being befriended really do impact how we love and befriend others. Why not start with an ideal? Especially if there's some reality to Jesus?
  - Here's a good quote: "To love at all is to be vulnerable... If you want to make sure of keeping [your heart] intact, you must give your heart to no one... Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable." — C.S. Lewis
- For Christians: Life with Jesus is more like playing football than playing violin. You can play violin by yourself, or with people. But there is no such thing as playing football by yourself. Love and reconciliation and partnership are all things Jesus calls us to do, and that all involves other people. So there is no way to be a Christian by yourself.

### **The Big Picture Conversations: The conversations I'm hoping to have can move from:**

1. *The Good and Evil Question*: Is there such a thing as good and evil? Who defines that?
  - a. When people hurt or betray us, we tend not to just say, 'You didn't give me what I want.' Instead, we say things like this: 'You broke a standard of friendship.' We refer to an ideal picture of friendship to which both you and the other person are subject. Is friendship bigger than us, in a sense? Aren't there standards of friendship that we're acknowledging?
  - b. In Harry Potter, book 1, Professor Quirrell says, 'There is no good and evil, only power, and those too weak to seek it.' (Quirrell was speaking about what Lord Voldemort taught him. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, p.291). Do you agree?
    - i. If there is no good and evil, then what's wrong with men taking advantage of women?
    - ii. If there is no good and evil, then what's wrong with making friends in a way that just perpetuates racism?
    - iii. If there is no good and evil, then what's wrong with just dropping a friend and making people interchangeable parts in your life?
  - c. We can usually recognize when two people are just 'mutually using each other.' Why is that different from friendship based on goodness, or the pursuit of goodness, as Aristotle said?
  - d. If you think there is good and evil, objectively, where does that come from?
    - i. I think it comes from us being made in the image of a loving God...
    - ii. Be prepared to summarize religions by the way they think about good and evil

1. Good and evil are equal: Buddhism, Hinduism, or Jainism (one karmic god who is both good and evil); or Zoroastrianism (two gods equal in power)
    - Not really provable because it's just a philosophy
  2. A good god will triumph over evil: Judaism, Christianity, Islam
    - Provable through historical events that demonstrate a character of goodness
2. *The Character/Human Nature Question*: Do we have a character deficiency? Is there a spiritual redemption for us?
- a. On the slide 'What strains your friendships the most?' there are a bunch of not so nice things we do in friendship. Why do we do them?
    - i. This slide makes me think about myself, too. What have I done to others that put a strain on them?
    - ii. Do you think that our friendship energy runs out after a while?
  - b. I think, many times, it's easy to love humanity at large, but have lots of problems with loving particular people, like a roommate. Why do you think that is?
    - i. Do you think that points to a spiritual need in us? That our friendship energy runs out?
  - c. Of course, we know that bad families or bad laws or bad circumstances contribute to how we might treat other people badly. But fundamentally, I don't think we can just blame external factors all the time. I think the problem is internal to us. I think human nature itself is corrupted.
  - d. Be prepared to illustrate this personally. Tell your story if it seems appropriate.
    - i. Jesus fundamentally changes our identity, and helps us engage with an inner civil war against our own evil and self-centeredness. So it's not that we suddenly become perfect people. And Jesus always has us return to the areas of life in which we failed, and he retells our story, to redeem it.
  - e. Many people will say that human beings are only good, and that evil is external to us. It's rooted in the bad families, laws, or circumstances.
    - i. So then are we individually responsible for our actions? Or did our environment make us do it? I totally believe that if we work on families, laws, and circumstances, it would be important. But I think we also have an internal problem, a leaning towards self-centeredness. It's not just external forces.
    - ii. I'm not saying that we are totally and only evil. But I am saying that I think the line between good and evil cuts right down the center of who we are.
    - iii. Don't you think we tend to shift the blame from ourselves? A lot of studies report that we (this generation of young people) have high self-esteem and mediocre competence. We have been affirmed, affirmed, and affirmed, until we actually try to do something challenging. Then we fail, or are mediocre, but expect to be affirmed. Do you think that's influencing our view of ourselves nowadays?
  - f. Other sources outside the Bible that point out human evil:
    - i. Literature: 'Because it seemed clear that wars were not made by generations and their special stupidities, but wars were made instead by something ignorant in the human heart' (John Knowles, *A Separate Peace*, p.193 paperback edition).
    - ii. Pop culture: Woody Allen ran off with his wife's adopted daughter. Even the liberal New York Times reporter asked him, 'Come on – this is a little far. Even if she's not your biological daughter, she's still your wife's adopted daughter, and your daughter.' His response was, 'The heart wants what it wants.'
    - iii. Literature: "There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast...Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!" said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. 'You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go. Why things are what they are?'" (William Golding, *The Lord of the Flies*, p.130 – 131)
    - iv. Economics: Blamed by some for not doing more to prevent the crisis, Mr. Greenspan denied any responsibility for the problems

gripping the global economy. 'It's *human nature*, unless somebody can find a way to change human nature, we will have more crises and none of them will look like this because no two crises have anything in common, except *human nature*.'

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8244600.stm>, *Market crisis 'will happen again'*, September 2009)

- v. Psychology: 'We need more understanding of human nature, because the only real danger that exists is man himself... We know nothing of man, far too little. His psyche should be studied because we are the origin of all coming evil.' (Carl Jung, BBC interview, 1959)
  - vi. Psychology: Reviews of Cordelia Fine's book *A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives*, From Publishers Weekly. 'Vain, immoral, bigoted: this is your brain in action, according to Fine, a research associate at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at Australian National University. Fine documents a wealth of surprising information about the brain in this readable account that adopts a good-humored tone about the brain's failings without underestimating the damage they do. The brain, she shows, distorts reality in order to save us from the ego-destroying effects of failure and pessimism. For example, an optimist who fails at something edits the truth by blaming others for the failure and then takes complete credit for any successes. The brain also routinely disapproves of other people's behavior (how could he do that?), while at the same time interpreting one's own actions in the best possible light (I would never do that!). The brain also projects stereotypes onto others that reflect prejudicial beliefs rather than objective reality. Despite the firm hold these distortions have on our brains, Fine is not a pessimist. The path to overcoming stereotypes and other distortions of the brain, she says, may be gained through self-awareness and knowledge provided by experimental psychology, a field that explores and exposes unconscious mental influences. (July)'
3. *The God Question*: There are many religions in which the 'god' isn't really relational, so the 'god' doesn't have a direct impact on relationships. But the God that Jesus reveals loves people and is very relational. For example, here are some characteristics of Jesus:
- a. Knowable, Interested in Friendship and Communion:
    - i. Vertical relationship with God: If the 'god' is not interested in being known, and befriending us, then what hope do we have for relationship with him? You might as well try to be friends with a rock.
    - ii. Horizontal relationships with people: If the 'god' is not interested in being known, and befriending us, then what interest could he rightly have in our friendships? He couldn't! So the Deist god who sits out there somewhere and does nothing relational can't possibly have anything to say about our friendships.
  - b. Self-restraint:
    - i. Vertical relationship with God: You might think of raw omnipotence as a quality that some 'god' supposedly has. But Jesus has self-restraint, which is actually more important, and essential for relationship! He didn't call down curses, fire, or angels. But more importantly, he constrained himself to a human body and loved people as a human being. He didn't control them. He even became vulnerable to them killing him.
    - ii. Horizontal relationships with people: Self-restraint, or self-control, is one of the biggest ingredients of healthy relationships. Look how many problems in friendships spill over from self-indulgence. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo asked Aragorn, 'Can you protect me from yourself?' That's a great question, one of THE most important questions. Since Jesus has self-restraint, he helps us with it.
  - c. Empowers love:
    - i. Vertical relationship with God: Would a passive or unloving god be able to help us love and befriend him?
    - ii. Horizontal relationships with people: Would a passive or unloving god be able to help us love and befriend others?
      - 1. Illustration: Tell a personal story about being empowered by Jesus to love others
  - d. Forgiving and Reconciling:
    - i. Vertical relationship with God: If the 'god' is not forgiving, then what hope do we have for relationship with him?

- ii. Horizontal relationships with people: If the 'god' is not forgiving, then forgiveness is unjust and immoral because it is a failure to rightly punish a wrongdoer. Here are examples of how Jesus really does help us forgive:
1. Yale University Center for Christianity
    - Miroslav Volf, a Croatian Christian theologian who started doing reconciliation work in Bosnia-Herzegovina
  2. Duke University Center for Reconciliation
    - Ugandan Catholic scholar Emmanuel Katongole who does reconciliation work in post civil war Uganda and Rwanda
    - American white evangelical Chris Rice who helped start a Christian community with African-American evangelical Spencer Perkins focusing on black-white reconciliation in the deep South
    - American white evangelical Charles Marsh who has written about the Civil Rights Movement and other faith-led social justice and reconciliation movements
  3. Other notable examples:
    - Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa
    - Corrie Ten Boom after the Holocaust

## Appendix A: Culture, Ethnicity, Race, and Friendship

Hurtado, Dey, and Treviño (1994) focused specifically on the issue of self-segregation on campus. They conducted a longitudinal study of the college behaviors most strongly associated with interracial interaction in college. On a descriptive level, Hurtado and her colleagues found that students of color (who are numerical minorities on most campuses) were more likely than white students to interact across race. Furthermore, they found that not only were various activities predictive of interracial interaction, they determined that the nature of those activities varied by race. For example, more frequent interracial interaction was related to involvement in: academic activities for whites and Chicanos; social activities for whites and African Americans; intercollegiate sports for whites and Asian Americans; residence hall advising and participation in Greek organizations for Chicanos; and participation in racial or ethnic student organizations for whites. In essence, their study showed how student involvement in college -- a widely recognized correlate to retention, satisfaction, and cognitive and affective development (Astin, 1993a, 1984) -- goes hand-in-hand with interracial interaction among students.

The most recent study addressing interracial interaction concentrated on the degree of racial diversity of a campus population and its effect on student outcomes. Chang's (1996) study indicated that in general, greater racial diversity in the undergraduate student population positively affects the frequency of socialization across race. In addition, he found that socialization across race was associated with discussing racial issues in college, taking ethnic studies courses, attending racial/cultural awareness workshops, and promoting racial understanding.

One limitation of each of these longitudinal studies is that the context of the interactions across race or the type of relationship involved in the interaction is rarely specified. Allport (1954) distinguished the effects of at least two different types of interracial contact. Negative results such as the reinforcement of racial stereotypes are likely to occur if the contact is casual. These contacts may be less frequent and less meaningful for the participants. Acquaintance contacts, on the other hand, may be more frequent and characterized by more established relationships between participants. These contacts are more likely to be beneficial in reducing prejudice and increasing cross-cultural understanding. In the Chang and Astin studies, interracial interaction was measured simply as the frequency in which a student "socialized with someone of a different race/ethnicity" while in college. Clearly, we cannot determine whether interracial interactions were "casual" or of an "acquaintance" nature. Furthermore, we do not know whether the benefits of socializing across race in college are limited to acquaintance contacts or are reaped through casual contacts as well. The Hurtado et. al. study utilized an improved measure. Interracial interaction was operationalized as the frequency in which a student had studied, dined, or roomed with someone of a different race/ethnicity. Depending on the specific persons with whom a student engages in these activities (close friends, new acquaintances, assigned roommates, etc.), it is somewhat arbitrary to interpret these interactions as either casual or acquaintance contacts. Our interpretive lenses, then, remain cloudy with respect to findings on interracial interaction.

A second limitation of these relatively few studies concerns the status of our understanding of the linkages between interracial interaction and two of the presumed outcomes of a diverse campus reported above, the development of cultural awareness and preparation for leadership in a diverse society. Astin's work (1993a, 1993b) identified interracial interaction as a contributor to cultural awareness, but from the standpoint of practice, we do not know whether such interactions need only be casual for students to benefit. The relationship with leadership ability or activities has yet to be examined but is recognized as an important outcome of having a diverse student body. As Bok and Bowen (1998) have noted, the active recruitment of minority students was motivated not only by convictions to enhance the educational process through the creation of a diverse study body, but also by a recognized need for producing diverse leaders as well. Evidence as to the extent to which diversity does or does not contribute to leadership is currently lacking. (Anthony Lising Antonio, *Student Interactions Across Race and Outcomes on Campus*, 1998, p. 5 – 7)

**Illus: A quote from Henri Nouwen: Friends and Their Unique Gifts:** 'No two friends are the same. Each has his or her own gift for us. When we expect one friend to have all we need, we will always be hypercritical, never completely happy with what he or she does have. One friend may offer us affection, another

may stimulate our minds, another may strengthen our souls. The more able we are to receive the different gifts our friends have to give us, the more able we will be to offer our own unique but limited gifts. Thus, friendships create a beautiful tapestry of love.'

**Illus: An article in the NY Times on the challenge of making friends as an adult:**

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/fashion/the-challenge-of-making-friends-as-an-adult.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/15/fashion/the-challenge-of-making-friends-as-an-adult.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all)

**Illus: the movie I Love You Man, about the challenges of male friendship**