



THE  
**FRIENDSHIP**  
CHALLENGE

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*A Six-Week Guide  
to True Reconciliation—  
One Friendship at a Time*

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TIM SCOTT & TREY GOWDY

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*The Friendship Challenge: A Six-Week Guide to True Reconciliation—One Friendship at a Time*

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# Introduction

**OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS**, the very foundation of our melting-pot society in America has been shaken—ironically, by our differences. For generations, people have come to “the land of opportunity” to forge a new way of life. They have embraced the American ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and have blended their distinct cultural strengths and values into the larger free society. It has never been perfect, and there have certainly been some rocky points along the way, but generally it has worked out for the common good, and our nation has been strengthened by our united pursuit of harmony within diversity. But lately it seems as if an increasing number of people are choosing to distinguish themselves based on *identity* or *ideology*. We’ve always been a nation of different people living alongside one another, but now it seems as if we’ve become more interested in dividing over our differences than in learning how to get along.

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**TREY**

One thing I have learned from my time in Washington, DC, is that conflict is a business model. It *sells*. But it doesn't solve anything. If we want to move from our current conflict-driven environment to one that is based more on *contrast*—that is, an appropriate and necessary recognition of our differences, but without the anger, frustration, and intentional divisiveness that come with conflict—we must first recognize that most people have most things in common. It doesn't make sense that we tend to run toward the things that divide us, while skipping over all the things we agree on.

People often look to government to solve problems in our society. But even though we can pass laws to compel people to change their conduct, no piece of legislation can change someone's heart. There's no law that can make people care about each other. That has to come from someplace other than government. To me, that someplace else is friendship.

I believe that friendship has the best chance of transforming our world. If we will just take the time to hear other people out, seek first to understand, and work together toward mutually agreeable solutions, we have a chance to make a positive difference in each other's lives and in the world around us. We may still disagree strongly about some issues, but if we will commit ourselves to being friends at the beginning of the conversation and friends at the end of the conversation, no matter what, we can work through our differences.

The great things we all want for our future won't happen in Washington, DC. But they can happen in small groups and in local settings where relationships are built. That's the genius of who we are as human beings. That's the genius of how our Creator wired us. We are hardwired for relationships, and as we connect with each other, we find the miracle of problem-solving and reconciliation in the midst of those connections.

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."<sup>1</sup> That's a powerful formula.

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## TIM

I am very hopeful about our future as a nation, but real and lasting change can begin only through committed friendships that reach across lines of division. I agree with Trey that politics is not how we're going to change the world. We can change the world only by changing people's hearts—through the transforming power of love. The Bible is very clear that love is not just an emotion; it is a *commandment* and a *commitment*. Friendship is born out of the principles of unconditional love and acceptance. Love and acceptance are not situational. They are consistent.

We open the door to reconciliation when we become willing to step outside our comfort zones and try some things that may seem awkward at first—such as initiating a conversation

with someone who is different from us. Most of the exciting adventures I've had didn't start off being fun—they were hard. But what's hard becomes easier, so let's be willing to do the hard things so we can enjoy the benefits, rather than doing only the easy things and paying the price.

In the coming days, I hope our nation will continue to be a beacon of hope and opportunity for the world to see. And I hope the church will be at the forefront, finding ways to come together and reveal the true meaning of the body of Christ. Different parts, different likes, different passions, different perspectives, without question; but all woven together by the thread of love and unconditional acceptance of one another. Love and acceptance are also what enable us to share the gospel in fresh, new ways—with words, without words—everywhere we go, and with everyone we meet.

With our book, *Unified: How Our Unlikely Friendship Gives Us Hope for a Divided Country*, and with this discussion guide, Trey and I encourage you to take the first step. Our hope is that you will not only change your own life, but also open the door for other people to change theirs.

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**TIM & TREY**

In this six-week study, we will encourage you—from our own experience—to form intentional relationships with people who are different from you. In the process, you will discover the power of unlikely friendships—friendships that can

transform your life, your community, and maybe even the world. Whether the lines of division in your life are racial, religious, ideological, or even something as simple as a difference in age or experience, we will show you how to pursue reconciliation by learning how to listen to, understand, and build rapport with people who at first may seem to have little in common with you.

This workbook is designed for both personal and group study. To get the most out of your small group meetings, we suggest that all members work through the chapters on their own each week before coming together for discussion with the group. We have intentionally packed a lot into each session, to encourage your engagement with and reflection on the topics of friendship and reconciliation. Group leaders and members can decide which questions (and how many) to discuss in each session, depending on the length of your meeting and the composition of your group.

We encourage you to identify someone—whether it is a person or a group—with whom you'd like to develop an intentional friendship across a line of division in your life. Invite that person or group to join you in this study and learn how to leverage the power of unlikely friendships to create a better community, a better nation, and a better world. By taking the important first step—initiating a dialogue—you can be part of the solution to the all-too-common problems of separation and division.



## SESSION 1

# Why Reconciliation?

The Power of Unlikely Friendships

### **WATCH**

To watch the introductory video (3–5 minutes) for session 1, go to the Why Reconciliation? link at [www.thefriendshipchallenge.com](http://www.thefriendshipchallenge.com).

### **CONSIDER**

Many Americans say they feel disconnected from one another. Why? We are really good at rattling off our differences: liberal or conservative; millennial or baby boomer; black, white, or brown; Catholic or Protestant; Muslim or Christian; one-percenter, middle-class, or poor; Northern or Southern; and the list goes on. In many ways, we are polarized and divided

as a nation. But what about our similarities? Can we list those as quickly and easily? How about some of these:

We all want what's best for our children.

We all want to live in a safe and peaceful community.

We all want opportunities for meaningful work that allows us to provide for our families.

We all want to enjoy a nice meal with good company.

We all want a secure future for ourselves, our children, and our parents.

If we think about it, don't we have a lot more in common with other people than we may have realized? Aren't there more things—and more important things—that unite us than separate us? And how many of the things that separate us are the result of different perspectives about how to reach the same goals?

What if, instead of focusing on our differences, we focused on everything we have in common with other people? What if we pursued intentional relationships across lines of division with the goal of reconciliation? What if we formed genuine friendships based on mutual understanding and respect? The point is not to erase our differences—in a pluralistic society, our diversity makes us who we are—but to make an intentional decision to listen, learn, seek understanding, find points of agreement, and disagree with civility and grace. The road to reconciliation begins with a simple choice to invite someone with whom we differ to have a conversation.

**REFLECT**

1. When have you witnessed the power of a friendship or a relationship to change things for the better—in your family, neighborhood, or community?
  
2. Think of someone who, at least on the surface, seems totally opposite from you. It may be someone who has opposing views or a different life experience. What makes you different from each other?

Now describe some of the similarities you have with this same person.

How does identifying your similarities affect your perspective on your differences?

**DIG DEEPER**

- I. As you read the following passage, look for differences between Jesus and the woman at the well.

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noontime. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you

get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for



2. Read the next part of the passage:

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, “What do you want with her?” or “Why are you talking to her?” The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, “Rabbi, eat something.”

But Jesus replied, “I have a kind of food you know nothing about.”

“Did someone bring him food while we were gone?” the disciples asked each other.

Then Jesus explained: “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, ‘Four months between planting and harvest.’ But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, ‘One plants and another harvests.’ And it’s true. I sent you to harvest where you didn’t plant; others had







**RESPOND**

- I. As Christians, we believe that Jesus reconciles sinners to a sinless God. Moreover, in order to reconcile us to God, Jesus crossed many lines of division. Though he was the Son of God, he was born into this world to an unwed mother, grew up in meager economic circumstances, and had no settled home as an adult. Though he invested his life in helping other people—teaching them the truth about God and about salvation, healing the sick, casting out demons, and restoring people’s lives—he was arrested on phony charges, tried before a biased tribunal, and put to death for crimes he did not commit. Even as he was being executed on a cross between two thieves, he cried out to God to forgive the very people who were killing him. His willingness to forgive even the worst of sinners is the foundation for our willingness to be reconciled to one another—even to those who are very different from us, and to those who may even be opposed to us. Jesus’ example of sacrificial love is what enables us to offer grace, extend forgiveness, seek understanding, and pursue reconciliation.
  - a. How does this perspective affect your decision to initiate a relationship with someone who is different from you?

- b. Are there any people in your life who are off-limits? Explain.
2. One of the keys to overcoming problems in our society is finding common ground. We don't have to agree on *everything*, but wherever we *do* agree . . . let's start there. I (Tim) have found commonality to be a powerful tool. Trey understands the concept of mutually beneficial opportunities as well as anyone I have ever met, especially in leadership. His lifestyle reflects what we're talking about. One of the reasons Trey and I have been able to have some frank discussions about problems, challenges, and obstacles—and overcome them very quickly—is that we have intentionally sought to find common ground. No matter what differences we may have with another person—social, racial, political, spiritual, ideological—if we will look for *something* we have in common, or something we can admire or emulate in the other person, we can always build on that.<sup>2</sup>
- a. Do you agree or disagree that there is always something we have in common with other people that we can build on? Explain.

- b. Why do you think it is sometimes easier to focus on our differences than on what we have in common?
  - c. Think specifically about the person or group with whom you most need to reconcile. How can starting with common ground open a pathway for frank discussions about problems, challenges, and obstacles?
3. In *Unified*, we discuss our different perspectives on the shootings at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. Do you recall your first thoughts when you heard about the tragedy? Did you talk about it with anyone? Did the shootings affect you in any way? Why or why not?
4. In Washington, on the day after the shootings, there was a massive prayer vigil on the Capitol grounds. People of every background and political persuasion gathered to pray. It was beautiful and compelling to

see the emotional boundaries lifted, to see people come together to comfort one another. It reminded me (Trey) of all that is *good* about America. But why does it take a tragedy for us to come together so beautifully? Why must we face a calamity before we will join hands, pray, and seek healing?<sup>3</sup>

Discuss your responses to these two questions.

5. I (Tim) have always been impressed by what I call the “aftermath mentality.” As Americans, we are so good at treating each other as individuals and family *after* a crisis. Think about 9/11. Think about hurricanes and other natural disasters. It is amazing to see how people will pull together to help, across all barriers and boundaries, when something bad happens. But I would like to see us develop an aftermath mentality *without* the crisis. Maybe we can avoid a future tragedy if we will act like the American family we are without waiting for an *event* to ignite that response.<sup>4</sup>

What steps can we take to develop an “aftermath mentality” *before* there is another crisis?

6. How do suffering and tragedy affect our willingness and ability to pursue reconciliation? Do they help or hurt? Explain.
  
7. How does the kind of forgiveness modeled by the families of the victims of the Charleston shootings factor into reconciliation? What or who needs to be forgiven, corporately or individually, as part of your effort to pursue reconciliation with someone with whom you have differences? In other words, is anything blocking you from pursuing a relationship with someone in the “other camp”?

### **RECONCILIATION IN ACTION**

1. What are some of your own prejudices or fears that you may need to confront and overcome in order to pursue a relationship with someone who is different from you?

2. What steps can you take to start a relationship across a line of separation in your life—an intentional relationship trending toward reconciliation? What are some of the challenges you may face? Who can help you overcome these challenges?
  
3. Set a date to attend an event that will help you connect and explore reconciliation with someone who is different from you. This is only a first step. You simply want to get out and see how it feels to be with someone from your “other” group as you work to develop further steps to build bridges and find common ground. How could attending a church service or a social function with someone across a line of division help you both begin to reconcile your differences?
  
4. After the event, write down how you felt. Were you surprised by the meeting? Did you feel awkward, or were you comfortable? How did the person or group receive you? What things did you discover you had in common?