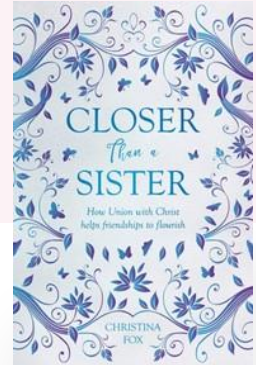




# LEADER'S GUIDE

## CLOSER THAN A SISTER BY CHRISTINA FOX



*"We are one of those countless stars in the sky, a grain of sand on the seashore that together make up the people of God."*

**CHRISTINA FOX**

### THEMES

Community

Friendship

Mentoring

Life-giving relationships

Theology

### HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Conservative approach to women's roles within the Church

### BOOK SUMMARY

Christina encourages us to embark on the journey of developing Christ-honouring friendships. Through intentional spiritual guidance and practical troubleshooting, the book is divided into three parts. We join Christina on a step-by-step process of implementing life-giving, Christ-centred, sister-friendships within our spheres of influence.

#### **Part 1. A Community of Faith**

Establishing the very foundations of community, we are reminded that 'We love because He first loved us' 1 John 4:19. Christina delves into the theology of the Trinity while drawing out the importance of relationships within the community of believers. She plants hopeful seeds of heavenly relationships and encourages us to bravely seek unity with fellow Christians. Wrapping up, Christina describes what the true Sisterhood of Faith ought to look like in a world where friendship can be difficult to define.

#### **Part 2. Living with Sisters in Community**

Transferring the head knowledge of a 'sister-friend' relationship into heart knowledge through faith in action is the focus of this next part. Christina shares touching stories about her first encounters with true sister-friends and the life-giving relationships which blossom through love in action. We are given practical advice on mourning and rejoicing together, exhorting one another, as well as learning and growing together.

### Part 3. Challenges in Sisterhood

Christina is not naive to the reality that we live in a broken and hurting world, and this final section offers an honest (and sometimes gut-wrenching!) look at the challenges we may face while trying to cultivate and maintain life-giving sister-friendships. Nevertheless, the heartbreaking reality that there is no 'perfect friend' within our sisterhood communities is replaced with hope in Jesus - the perfect friend.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. In the foreword, Jen Wilkin shares "Like all good gifts, Christian friendship is to be sought and stewarded with wisdom and grace." (p14). What are your thoughts about this statement?

### TALKING POINTS

- Sought; The seeking of life-giving, sister-friendships is a very intentional activity.
- Stewarded; As good stewards of our gifts, we lavishly pour into our sister-friend's lives, seeking to be more others-focused and entering relationships wanting to bless others. Ultimately thinking more about our sister and less about what we can get out of the friendship.
- Wisdom; God generously pours wisdom into our lives when we ask for it. We need His wisdom to enter into the right relationships and maintain those relationships as we grow and learn together.
- Grace; As imperfect women, we require grace to cover one another's faults, forgive one another, and flourish together (p14).

2

Q. 'Made for Community' paints a picture of what it means to be *Closer Than a Sister*. How did this chapter change your perspective of God's purpose for community within the body of Christ and the Trinity?

### TALKING POINTS

- The Trinity (Father, Son and Spirit) is the perfect representation of a life-giving relationship and a community in total harmony.
- No man is an Island (John Donne).
- We are image-bearers of God and reflect His image by being in community
- Community was broken once sin entered the world.
- God created a new community through the blood of His son Jesus Christ
- As Christians, we are bound together by Christ.

3

Q. Christina states, "Like different colored threads, we are woven together to create a beautiful tapestry. My strand crosses with a sister in my church and our strands connect to your strand across the miles. We are knit together and part of the same whole." (p 45). How does this very visual description help you to ponder the importance of unity within the faith community?

## TALKING POINTS

- Our lives, relationships, and community ought to be 'visually' appealing to those around us; they should be a beautiful picture and representation of Christ to the unsaved.
- Union with one another is the inevitable result of being in union with Christ.
- Because Christ loves us, we can love one another.

4

Q. Chapter 3 appeals to our very real need for Christian fellowship. When you ponder your own life and friendships, would you say that you have deep friendships with Christ at the centre? Or are your friendships lacking Christ and, therefore, like any other 'worldly' friendship? Why is it essential to seek Godly friendships?

## TALKING POINTS

- Biblical friendships are about doing life together, not merely being 'facebook friends'.
- Biblical friendships have a purpose of bringing about God's kingdom and purposes.
- Biblical friendships help one another through trials, encourage one another, prayerfully support one another and implore one another in the faith.
- Biblical friendships reflect Christ in a broken world.

5

Q. "That day I encountered true Christian community; true gospel friendship and it changed me" (p 66). Can you pinpoint a time in your life when an act of kindness opened your eyes to what true Christian community is all about? Or maybe you can recall your very first Christ-centred friendship and the profound impact it had on you?

## TALKING POINTS

- Helping our sisters in need is not just a good deed but a natural overflow that originates with our union with Christ.
- Christ came not to be served but to serve.
- Helping others is a sacrifice of time, energy and goods. In a busy world, this kind of sacrifice often makes us feel loved and cared for.
- Sometimes we may be fearful of reaching out for fear of judgement.
- Do you have friends that you pray with? Read the Bible with? Share what God is teaching you?

6

Q. What does it mean to you to "Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn?" Has your perspective changed since reading this book?

## TALKING POINTS

Mourning

- We can expect hardship, suffering and sorrows, but we are also called to journey together through these trials.
- Seeing someone weep can be uncomfortable, but we are not representing Christ if we ignore their pain.
- We cannot fix anyone's problems, and we cannot be Christ to anyone.
- What a hurting person needs most is the presence of someone who loves and cares for them.
- Listening can be more productive than talking.

- Speaking gospel truth is crucial (page 86).
- Prayer is powerful and effective.
- We can share our lessons learnt during trials where appropriate.

#### Rejoicing

- Our sister's joy should become our joy.
- Begrudging a sister in the Lord is a sin, and says, "What God has given me is not enough" (p97).
- Love does not envy.
- God has given us a new heart to love.

## 7

Q. How does authentic and non-judgemental fellowship push us towards transformation and holiness?

### TALKING POINTS

Authentic relationships outside of Christ do not exist. Without His grace, love, and forgiveness, there will be judgement and/or condemnation, unforgiveness and selfishness.

- We often fear judgement from our sister-friends, and it may seem easier to hide our sin.
- Social media gives us the misconception that everyone has it together except us.
- Authenticity in relationships allows us to reveal our 'real selves' and share our brokenness, heart struggles and past.
- Faithful are the wounds of friends (Proverbs 27:6)
- Sin is deceitful and blinds us to the truth.
- A good sister-friend who sees our sin urges us to return to the Lord.
- A relationship that holds us accountable helps us grow and thrive in Christ.
- Trust is an integral aspect of a successful sister-friend relationship and develops over time.
- Transformation should occur for both friends within a healthy Christ-honouring friendship.

## 8

Q. Christina teaches from Titus 2 about the very real command (not a suggestion!) for women to learn from other women, both as a spiritual mentor and being mentored themselves. Have you experienced being mentored or mentoring another? Why are mentoring relationships so valuable?

### TALKING POINTS

- Women role model Godly behaviour to one another, specifically spiritually mature women to those who are young or new to the faith.
- Spiritual mentors are conduits of God's grace (p214).
- Mentoring is discipleship.
- Mentoring involves equipping, encouraging, and developing life-giving relationships.
- Mentoring is about pointing others to the wisdom in God's word and helping others understand their identity in Christ (p129).
- Encouragement is wonderful, but spiritual encouragement is life-giving (p129).

## 9

Q. "God creates community but we have to cultivate and nurture it" (p146). How has this statement been true in your life? How do you best maintain and nurture your community and friendships?

## TALKING POINTS

- Community within the church is hard because we are sinful and broken.
- Despite the difficulty, it is worth it.
- Just because the church meets together on a Sunday does not mean members automatically live out community.
- Real-life friendships take work and effort and open us up to vulnerability and hurt.
- If you're struggling to find a friend or place within your community, pray for wisdom and the provision of a life-giving friendship.
- Practical tips; invite someone over, be hospitable, be a good friend to others (be the friend you desire to have).
- Try and enter deeper levels of conversation to maintain growth.

# 10

Q. Chapters 11 & 12 touch on the many challenges which we may face in a community such as; rejection, gossip, loneliness, conflict, disunity, idolatry in friendship, unhealthy boundaries, toxic relationships and envy.

Yet despite all of this, Christina appeals to us to always remember, "When you feel unloved, disconnected, lonely and friendless, remember Jesus" (p188). How does this fill you with hope?

## TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and include;

- Jesus is the perfect friend who never fails us.
- Jesus intercedes for us.
- Jesus died to restore all that is broken.
- Jesus will use your pain for your good and His glory.
- Despite the knowledge that Jesus is the perfect friend, women may still feel alone, sad, or desperate for community. Pray that God will provide the friends and community they need.

You may like to provide space for anyone who needs healing and prayer for hurts, offences and unforgiveness. To keep the conversation for this question life-giving, avoid using names when describing scenarios of past hurts, offences etc. and be cautious about gossip. If needed, divert the conversation or gently remind the women that situations may be shared, but names, locations or anything which may give away a particular individual is not necessary.



## ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

The author provides very thorough and well thought out questions at the end of each chapter for personal reflection. You may like to encourage your Book club sisters to keep a journal while reading the text and answer these questions, and as the month progresses, discuss these through your group's online platform (a Facebook group/messenger or whatsapp chat group etc.) to keep connected and engaged throughout the month.

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