

UNIFIED

How Our Unlikely Friendship
Gives Us Hope for a Divided Country

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Notes

1. Jennifer Steinhauer, "Hoping for a Senate Seat, the Friendliest of Rivals," *New York Times*, December 13, 2012, www.nytimes.com/2012/12/14/us/politics/trey-gowdy-and-tim-scott-senate-aspirants-and-friendliest-of-rivals.html.
2. Luke 10:30-35
3. Jeff Hartsell, "'A Lot of God, a Little Bit of Me,' Says Chris Singleton, Son of Emanuel AME Victim, on Being Drafted by the Chicago Cubs," Charleston (SC) *Post and Courier*, June 14, 2017, www.postandcourier.com/sports/a-lot-of-god-a-little-bit-of-me-says/article_62970240-512a-11e7-85ee-43768f82249c.html. We encourage you to take a few minutes to watch the video embedded in this story of Chris Singleton, son of Charleston shooting victim Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, speaking to the media on the day after his mother's death. As tragic as the circumstances were for this young man, his responses to the reporters' questions are inspiring.
4. Emily Badger, "Political Migration: A New Business of Moving Out to Fit In," *New York Times*, August 16, 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/upshot/political-migration-a-new-business-of-moving-out-to-fit-in.html.
5. Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Fireside, 1990), 235–260.
6. "Direction of Country," RealClear Politics, www.realclearpolitics.com/polls/other/direction_of_country-902.html, accessed September 11, 2017; "The Disunited States of America," interview with Scott Keeter, director of survey research at the Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, *Reflections*, Fall 2012, <http://reflections.yale.edu/article/who-are-we-american-values-revisited/disunited-states-america>.

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.

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

THE FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE

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.

THE FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE

DIG DEEPER

1. 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

1. 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?

THE FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE

- b. Are there any people in your life who are off-limits? Explain.
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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.²
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- a. Do you agree or disagree that there is always something we have in common with other people that we can build on? Explain.

WHY RECONCILIATION?

- 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?
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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

THE FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE

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?³

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.⁴

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

THE FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE

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?