Lesson 1: Jesus wants us to be His friends

Focus Point: Jesus wants us to be His friends.

Goal: Students will learn Jesus wants to call us friends, but if we are His friends, we give Him our lives.

Verse of the Day: John 15:13 (NIV) *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

Supplies Needed:

- Follow Me: God's Social Network Media Resources
- Strips of paper with each memory verse word on them
- Girl puppet (optional)
- Geeky Gus costume (optional)
- 4 sheets of paper that say A, B, C, D
- Tape
- Individually wrapped pieces of candy
- Long drywall nail or stake
- Hammer
- Strings
- Beads in yellow, black, red, white, and green

Opening: Use *Follow Me: God's Social Network* Slide or Countdown (Available free with registration of this curriculum.)

Welcome: Welcome the children and tell them how excited you are to see them. Talk to them about friendship. A good friend listens, cares for others, puts others' needs before their own, etc. Tell them that you want to be a good friend to them, but there is someone who will be the best friend they will ever have if they accept His friend request. That friend is Jesus.

(Show Lesson 1, slide a)

Our focus point for today is Jesus wants us to be His friends.

Prayer App: Ask a child to pray over the service.

Group Rules: (use rules slide available in *Follow Me: God's Social Network* Media Resources)

Go over the 5 Ups Rules:

- Sit up straight.
- Listen up.
- Hush up.

- Don't get up and run around.
- Worship Up!

Theme or Activity Songs: Choose one or two fast-moving activity or theme songs, preferably something about friendship with God or God's love.

Gameville: Friend Groups (Use Follow Me: God's Social Network Gameville Slide)

Supplies needed: 4 sheets of paper that say A, B, C, D. Tape

Preparation: Use tape to attach one sheet of paper to each of the four corners in the room.

Have the students stand in the middle of the room. Tell them to decide which corner to stand in according to the answer to the questions you call out. Then comment on which corner has more students. Remind the students to wait until you've listed all 4 options. Here's a sample of questions you could ask.

Those who like baseball better, go to corner A. Those who like football better, go to corner B. Those who like soccer better, go to corner C. Those who like basketball best, go to corner D.

Those who like science better, go to the corner A. Those who like social studies better go to corner B. Those who like reading best go to corner C. Those who love gym, go to corner D.

Those who like the color red best, go to corner A. Those who like the color blue best, go to corner B. Those who like green, go to corner C. Those who like yellow, go to corner D.

Create as many questions with four choices as time allows.

Sometimes we make friends based on those who like what we like. But sometimes we make friends because of who wants to be friends with us. Jesus chooses all of us to be His friends. Some will choose to accept His friendship, and some will choose not to be His friend. The Bible says Jesus will separate those who want to be His friends and place them on His right. The ones who don't want to be His friends will go on His left. Those on His right hand will live with Him in Heaven forever after they die.

One more question, but this time you can answer without showing anyone what you've decided. If you could choose right now whether or not to be Jesus' friend, would you go to the corner on the right or the corner on the left?

Offering: Giving Back to God (Use *Follow Me* lesson 1, slide b)

Psalm 116:12: *What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me?*

Good friends are generous with each other. They like to give each other gifts. There is nobody who has been more generous with us than God. God has given us so much. Now it's time to give back to Him.

Verse Status of the Day: John 15:13 (NIV) *Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

Memory Verse Talk: (Use *Follow Me* Lesson 1 Memory Verse Status Slide)

Have you ever heard someone in a movie say, "I'd take a bullet for that person"? That is a way of saying that if somebody was shooting that person, I'd jump in front of him so that I'd get shot instead. Most people have somebody they would take a bullet for. Parents would take a bullet for their children. Best friends would normally take a bullet for each other. But very few people would take a bullet for somebody they don't like. When you're willing to die for somebody, you're showing great love for that person. Jesus showed love like that for us when He was willing to die on the cross for our sins. Jesus took a bullet for us. That's what today's verse is all about.

John 15:13 (NIV) says, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Memory Verse Skit:

Supplies needed: *Follow Me* Lesson 1 Memory Verse Status Slide and girl puppet or *Follow Me* Lesson 1 Memory Verse Skit

Girl Puppet: Hi boys and girls. I'm Olivia. I help students know how to love God and love others. Jesus wants us to follow Him and be His friends. He showed this by being a friend to us first. We've all sinned and done things wrong. Because of this, we can't be close to God. We deserve the punishment of God. But Jesus took our punishment by dying on the cross so we could be friends with God. John 15:13 says, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" Jesus showed us that kind of love. The question is not if He is our friend. The question is do we want to accept His friend request and become His friend.

Memory Verse Activity: Word Scramble:

Supplies needed: 2 sets of strips of paper or index cards

Preparation: Place each word of the verse on a separate piece of paper. Make 2 sets.

Divide the children into two teams and give them each one set of words. Whoever arranges the set into the memory verse first wins.

GusTube Skit: Facebook Friend or Real Friend (Use Follow Me Lesson 1 GusTube Video)

Supplies needed (Optional for live skit): Geeky Gus costume

Geeky Gus: (walks into the room checking his cell phone) Woo Hoo. I'm so excited.

Teacher: Excuse me. We're in the middle of a church service here.

Geeky Gus: I'm sorry. My name's Gus – Geeky Gus. I didn't mean to interrupt.

Teacher: That's all right. Maybe you'd like to stay and listen. We're talking about Jesus and how He wants to be our friend.

Geeky Gus: That's amazing. I can't believe it. That's what I was so excited about.

Teacher: I don't understand. Do you mean you're excited about Jesus being your friend.

Geeky Gus: Well yeah. I want Jesus to be my friend. Not only Jesus, but I want all of you to be my friends. My goal is to have more friends than anyone else in the world, even more friends than Jesus.

Teacher: Gus, it's good to have close friends, but Jesus is the only one who can be friends with everyone because He's God.

Geeky Gus: I can't find Him.

Teacher: What do you mean you can't find Him? He's everywhere.

Geeky Gus: He's not online. I can't find Him on any of the platforms I use, and I'm on them all. I'm even on the video game platforms. I can't find Him anywhere.

Teacher: Do you mean like social media friends?

Geeky Gus: That's right. If I get more social media friends than anyone else in the world, then I won't be lonely anymore. I'll always have my friends by my side.

Teacher: How many online friends do you have now?

Geeky Gus: Seven, but I plan to get a lot more. I'm asking everyone online to be my friend.

Teacher: How's that working?

Geeky Gus: Not too good. Some of them have blocked me, but most of them just ignore my friendship request. Do you think that's what happened with Jesus? Do you think He blocked me?

Teacher: No, Geeky Gus, Jesus certainly didn't block you. He chooses everyone to be His friend, but He's not on social media.

Geeky Gus: How does He get friends is He's not online?

Teacher: Gus, you do realize that social media friends aren't real friends?

Geeky Gus: Yeah, but they're the only friends I have. I don't have any real friends. They say I'm too much of a geek.

Teacher: I'm sorry to hear that. Sometimes kids can be unkind, but that's not your fault. Jesus wants us to be kind to everyone. And if you accept Jesus' friendship request, He'll be a real friend to you, a friend who will never leave you nor forsake you.

Geeky Gus: How do I do that when I can't even find Him online?

Teacher: Why don't you stay and find out?

Geeky Gus: Maybe later. Right now I need to go check my Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X accounts to see if I have any more friends. I can always accept Jesus' friend request later. (Geeky Gus leaves while texting on his cell phone.)

Praise and Worship: Choose a couple of fast songs and a slow song to lead children into praise and worship. You can have a children's praise team, but until they understand leading praise and worship, have an adult leader or you be the worship leader.

Object Lessons:

1. Jesus Chose Us

Supplies needed: individually wrapped candy

Preparation: Choose two students to make team captains. Have each student choose four other students. Encourage them to choose their closest friends first. Give team captains and everyone who was chosen a piece of candy.

Ask those who were chosen, "*How did it make you feel to be chosen? Did you like getting candy?*" Ask someone who wasn't chosen, "*How did it make you feel not to be chosen?*" Talk about when you were a kid and were usually not chosen for a team because you weren't good at sports. Talk about how when your best friend was team captain, you knew you would be chosen no matter how bad you were.

That's the way it is with Jesus. He chooses us even though we do things wrong. Even though we can't live without sin, He wants to be our friend. That's why He died for us.

When Jesus was on Earth, He didn't choose the best people. He didn't choose the religious leaders or the rich people. He chose those who wanted to be His friends.

Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors aren't very well liked, but in Bible times, it was worse. Tax collectors would make money by telling people they owed more taxes than they really did. Then the tax collector would keep the extra money. That's what Matthew did before Jesus chose Matthew to be His disciple.

Matthew was so happy he was chosen by Jesus to be His friend that he gave back the money he stole plus extra and left his job to follow Jesus. Matthew knew when he accepted Jesus' friendship, he had to make Jesus Lord of his life. He had to give up the bad things he was doing.

Jesus chooses all of us to be His friends. The question is if we choose Him to be our friend.

And now, I'm choosing every one of you who wasn't chosen to receive candy.

Make sure each child gets a piece of candy.

2. **Jesus Died for Us** (Use *Follow Me* Lesson 1 slide c)

In Australia in 2011, there was a flood called the Queensland Flood that killed 25 people. One boy, a 13-year-old named Jordan Rice became a hero that day. He showed what a good friend he was to his 10-year-old brother, Blake. Jordan and his brother were in the family car when they were trapped by the flood. The rescuers tried to save Jordan, but he told them to get his brother to safety first even though Jordan didn't know how to swim. By the time they returned to the submerged car, it was too late to save Jordan.

Jesus is that kind of friend to us. He died on the cross for our sins when He didn't have to. He died so we could become friends of God, but we have to make the choice to accept His friendship in order to be saved.

Bible Story App: Jesus Gave His Life to Be Our Friend

(Luke 23:39-46)

Supplies needed: A hammer and a long carpenter's nail

Preparation: Play a slow song without background vocals at low volume while you're telling this story for a stronger effect.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins even though He never did anything wrong. When they nailed Him to the cross, they hammered a nail like this into His wrists and His feet. (show objects) Then they lifted the cross and waited for Him to die a very painful death.

Jesus was crucified between two thieves. They deserved to die. They were being punished for the crimes they had committed. One thief made fun of Jesus and insulted Him, saying, "Aren't You the Christ? Then save Yourself! And save us too!"

But the other criminal didn't do that. He said to the first criminal, "You should fear God! You are getting the same punishment as He is. We are punished justly; we should die. But this man has done nothing wrong!"

Then he turned to Jesus and asked Jesus to remember him. He knew Jesus was dying on the cross for his sin, and he wanted to accept Jesus' sacrifice so he would be forgiven of his sin. Jesus told him that he would be in Heaven with Him that very day.

Jesus wants us to come to Him just like the thief on the cross did. He did His part. He wants to be your friend. All we have to do is give our lives to Him and accept Him as our savior, our Lord, and our friend.

Message: Accept Jesus' Friend Request

Imagine if the most popular kid in school came up to you and told you he wants to be your friend. Would you accept his friend request? What if he wasn't just popular, but he was the best at everything he did and he had a lot of money he wanted to spend blessing you. Would you be his friend then?

Allow students to answer.

Someone much greater than a rich, talented, popular kid wants to be your friend. Jesus is the Son of God, the one who created the universe, and He is giving you a friend request. He wants to be your friend, not just a friend, but your best friend.

He did everything He could to make it so He could be that kind of friend. He died a horrible death so we wouldn't have to be punished for our sins or be separated from God forever. Because He gave His life for us, He is the best friend we could ever have. But we have to do our part. We need to accept His friendship. That means we accept that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. We turn from our sins, invite Him into our lives, and give our lives for Him.

But there's more. When we have a friend in school or church, or in our neighborhood, do we ignore that friend when we see him?

Allow students to answer?

How do we treat our friends when we see them? Do we spend time with them and play with them? Or get to know them better?

Allow students to answer?

Sometimes, people accept Jesus' friend request, but they don't really become His friend. Then they ignore Him as if He isn't their friend at all. How would you feel about someone who says he's your friend but treats you like that? Allow the students to answer.

No matter what your friend says, he isn't a true friend. And we aren't really friends with Jesus if we don't ever spend time with Him. The great thing is we can spend time with Him.

We can spend time with Jesus by talking to Him. That's called prayer. We can also learn more about Him. We do that by reading the Bible or having it read to us and learning about the Bible in church. Also, we can take time to worship Jesus, and we can do what we know pleases Jesus.

Jesus wants us to spend time with Him. He looks forward to those times.

Invite children to accept Jesus into their lives and to allow Him to become their friend. Remind them if they really want Jesus to be their friend, they give their lives to Him and make Him their Lord.

Response Time:

Invite students to the front who want to accept Jesus as their Savior, Lord, and friend. Then, also invite students who want to spend more time with Jesus.

Small Group Chat:

Ask these questions as discussion starters.

Do you have any friends?

Who are they?

What are they like?

What do you do with your friends?

What makes someone a true friend?

Talk to the children about how Jesus is the best friend we could ever have. Ask your students if they've ever introduced their friends to Jesus. Talk to them about how they could do that.

Craft: Jesus Friendship Bracelet

Supplies needed: strings, beads in yellow, black, red, white, and green

Have students make bracelets with the strings and beads. Explain what each color represents.

Yellow: God in Heaven wants you to be with Him.

Black: But we can't be with God because we've all sinned.

Red: Jesus loves us so much that He shed His blood for our sin.

White: He made us white as snow. Now we can be His friends forever and live with Him in Heaven someday.

Green: The closer we get to Jesus, the more we'll grow as His friends.