

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the Week of January 14th-20th

In 1960, just three years before his death, C.S. Lewis penned one of his most remarkable books. Titled The Four Loves, it is a practical reflection on four Greek words used in the ancient world to describe love. In the space of less than 200 pages, Lewis walks the reader from affection to friendship to eros and finally to charity. Observations about human nature, relationships, and salvation itself abound. For the purposes of this study guide, we are going to focus our discussion on the second of these four loves - friendship. Below are a series of excerpts from both Lewis and one of his modern-day champions - Joe Rigney - followed up with questions for reflection and conversation. Enjoy this in your own personal study, with your family, or in your community group.

“Turning now to friendship, we discover how different it is from affection [family love]. Friendship is ‘the least natural of loves; the least instinctive, organic, biological, gregarious, and necessary... Without Eros [romantic love] none of us would have been begotten and without Affection none of us would have been reared; but we can live without Friendship.’ Being unnecessary does not make it unimportant. Quite the contrary: ‘Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself (for God did not need to create). It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival.’¹

Fascinating, isn't it? Have you ever thought about the relative 'necessity' of friendship (as compared with those two other loves)? What does Lewis mean by "survival value"? Why and how do Lewis and Rigney advocate for friendship nonetheless?

“Friendship differs from Eros [in this way]: ‘Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; Friends hardly ever talk about their Friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest.’ In this way, friendship is always ‘about something’ - some shared activity or common interest. Friendship arises when two people suddenly discover that they love the same thing in the same way. ‘What? You too? I thought I was the only one’ is the typical expression of a new friendship... This ‘You too?’ is the hallmark of Lewis’s view of friendship. In

¹ Joe Rigney (quoting and interacting with C.S. Lewis) in *Lewis on the Christian Life: Becoming Truly Human in the Presence of God*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, IL. 2018. p.213.

friendship, ‘Do you love me?’ means ‘Do you see the same truth?’ - or at least ‘Do you care about the same truth?’.”²

What do you make of Lewis’s point about lovers face to face and friends side by side? Do you believe that friends can become lovers, even spouses, without destroying their friendship? What has friendship looked like for you over the years? Take some time to share with the group about your friendships (as a child and as an adult). Do you have a “What? You too?” moment that you’d like to share? Do you maintain any friendships to this day that began for you as a child? If so, perhaps you could talk about those.

“[Rigney continues] And the glory of this experience is that it is not limited, like Eros, to two people. Adding a third person to a romantic relationship produces jealousy; Eros will not stand for triangles for long. Friendship loves triangles and squares, even pentagons and hexagons.”

What do you think of Rigney’s point about the geometry of lovers and friends? Has that been your experience throughout your life? Explain.

“Now that we know what friendship is, we must attend to the ways in which it can go wrong. One danger is the one identified by Paul: ‘Bad company ruins good morals’ (1 Cor. 15:33). Because friendship is always *about* something, it matters what that something is. Friendship ‘makes good men better and bad men worse.’ Thieves and murderers can have the ‘You too?’ moment about their thievery and murder.”³

Makes sense, right? Have you experienced this over the course of your life? How have certain friendships made you better or worse? Prior to your conversion to Christ, were you ever the person who made “bad men worse”? Explain.

“But there are more subtle dangers that Lewis identifies...pride can easily turn a friendship into an Inner Ring. By Inner Ring, Lewis means a friendship that is ‘about almost nothing except the fact that it excludes.’ This sort of ‘friendship’ feeds on exclusivity. Though from the outside, all friendships look like Inner Rings, in a healthy friendship, the exclusivity is accidental. It’s a by-product of ‘You too?’ moments. But those in the grip of the Inner Ring move ‘from the innocent and necessary act of excluding to the spirit of exclusiveness...to the degrading pleasure of exclusiveness’...The...system is invisible and fluid; you

² Rigney (quoting and interacting with Lewis), pp.213, 214. By the way, this last sentence is critical: “...or at least ‘Do you care about the same truth?’” This means that you can actually be genuine friends with a person who takes a very different view of the world than you do on many, many issues. Do you have friends like this? If so, please share that with the group as well.

³ Rigney (quoting and interacting with Lewis), p.215.

don't always know who's in and who's out. 'There are no formal admissions or expulsions.' It is marked by informal slang, an allusive manner of conversation that acts as passwords for the insiders..The word *clique* approximates the meaning. If the idea is still opaque, just recall the social system at [a]...junior high or middle school, and it ought to become clear."⁴

If you've never read Lewis's masterful essay on "The Inner Ring", please see this [link](#). If you'd like to take a step further still, read Lewis's novel That Hideous Strength (1945) which follows the story of Mark Studdock (one of the protagonists) whose life is about the quest for the Inner Ring. Share about your experience with Inner Rings. Can you think of a time in your life when you were clearly on the inside of one? How about the outside? In each case, how did it feel? Why are inner rings sinful? What sorts of vices drive them? What's the best way to keep our friendships from becoming Inner Rings?

This is the stirring conclusion to Lewis's essay "The Inner Ring". While the wisdom here applies at every point of life, it's important to know that this was initially an address given to college graduates at a commencement ceremony.

"The quest of the Inner Ring will break your hearts unless you break it. But if you break it, a surprising result will follow. If in your working hours you make the work your end, you will presently find yourself all unawares inside the only circle in your profession that really matters. You will be one of the sound craftsmen, and other sound craftsmen will know it. This group of craftsmen will by no means coincide with the Inner Ring or the Important People or the People in the Know. It will not shape that professional policy or work up that professional influence which fights for the profession as a whole against the public: nor will it lead to those periodic scandals and crises which the Inner Ring produces. But it will do those things which that profession exists to do and will in the long run be responsible for all the respect which that profession in fact enjoys and which the speeches and advertisements cannot maintain.

And if in your spare time you consort simply with the people you like, you will again find that you have come unawares to a real inside: that you are indeed snug and safe at the centre of something which, seen from without, would look exactly like an Inner Ring. But the difference is that the secrecy is accidental, and its exclusiveness a by-product, and no one was led thither by the lure of the esoteric: for it is only four or five people who like one another meeting to do things that they like. This is friendship. Aristotle placed it among the virtues. It causes perhaps half of all the happiness in the world, and no Inner Ring can ever have it."⁵

⁴ Ibid, p.216.

⁵ <https://www.lewissociety.org/innerring/> . Accessed 1/13/24 @ 12pm.