

First Sunday after Epiphany

I will be with you.—Isaiah 43:2 NRSV

Explore

plaster-casting materials, equipment items for a journey, picture of Jesus Christ, scriptures

Isaiah 43:1–7

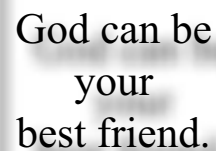
Planning for the Journey

Before class, make a plaster-casting of a large pair of footprints. Include in a worship setting the footprints and items that people would use to make a long journey: suitcases, sleeping bags, camping equipment, hiking boots, maps, canteen. Add a picture of Jesus Christ and the scriptures to the setting.

Ask students to describe what is involved in making a trip. Encourage them to look at all stages of the preparation process: planning, packing, getting the house ready, saving money, making reservations, housing pets, taking the trip, picking up the pets, paying bills, doing laundry. Make a list of categories and tasks on a flip chart. Ask: “Does it make a difference how long you will be gone? What would you need for a life-long journey?” Discuss.

Ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 43:1–7. This scripture assures us that God is our constant companion. No matter how rough it gets, God will be there with us.

- What is the meaning of: “I have called you by name, thou art mine”?
- Why did the writer use east, west, north, and south?
- What does verse seven suggest?
- How do each of you interpret this scripture passage?
Allow think time and the opportunity to share.
- Does this mean that you will never know trouble or pain?
- Have you ever heard a testimony from someone about God helping them through a difficult journey? Tell about it.
- Has anyone felt God’s presence when they were having a difficult time?



God can be
your
best friend.

*Way to Live:
Christian Practices
for Teens*

Facilitator: Have several testimonies on hand to share if the students can't think of stories to contribute. A good resource is Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens, edited by Dorothy C. Bass and Don C. Richter, Upper Room Books, 2002. Stories could be printed on cards and read by different students.

Extract

Choosing Companions

On a flip chart, write the following questions:

Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, a concordance, flip chart, marker

- What are characteristics of a good companion or friend?
- What should you expect from a good companion?
- What happens if a companion or friend is counting on you and you “drop the ball” or don’t hold up your side of the friendship? What if they do that to you?
- Would you choose God to be one of your companions?

Discuss these questions based on the students’ prior knowledge. Then do a scripture search to see how these biblical scriptures describe companionship. If there is time, you may want to use a concordance and search the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, as well. Divide these scriptures among groups; research and report on findings. If your group is small, preselect only a few scriptures.

1 Corinthians 13:4–8	Acts 20:35	Proverbs 3:27, 28
1 Corinthians 9:19–23	Mark 8:36–40	Proverbs 11:12
Philippians 2:1–5	Luke 16:9	Proverbs 15:13
Philippians 2:20–22	John 15:13–15	Proverbs 21:10
Philippians 4:8	James 4:4	Proverbs 25:8, 9
2 Timothy 1:13–14	Hebrews 10:24	Proverbs 25:21
Romans 12:9–21	Peter 3:8	Proverbs 27:17
Romans 15:1, 2	Amos 3:3	

Experience

Hearing and Seeing God

How do we know that God is there? Chances are you will not hear God speak to you in an audible voice or be able to look God in the face. History tells us that God generally doesn't work that way. The Bible tells us that God sends the Holy Spirit to be with us (read Acts 8:14–17) and guides us in our decisions. But we must be open to that guidance. How do we know what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell us? There are many people that ask the same question. Sometimes the best way to hear something is to stop and quietly listen. For just one minute have everyone in the room sit perfectly still and not say a word. Have them close their eyes and listen to the sounds they hear. Ask each person to tell one thing that they heard: breathing, giggles, footsteps, a bird.

Our lives are so busy, and we have so many things that we want to do. We all miss many things that happen around us every day, because we are so busy doing our own thing. Some of the best moments feeling the Spirit of God are when we pray. Prayer is a way of personally talking to God, just as we talk to our other friends and companions. Talk to God as you would a friend. Tell God how you feel. Take time to quietly sit and feel God's presence. Pass the plaster footprints around the room. Ask students to examine and touch them. Ask: "What does it mean to have God as a companion?" If there's time, let each student make a plaster casting of their own feet. Make a permanent display of the feet in your classroom.

Bible, plaster footprints, plaster-making materials

It is a wonderful experience to be friends with God. Ask those who are willing to share about places where they converse with God. How does it feel to have such a close relationship? Invite one or two members of the class or the congregation (in advance) to share a testimony of their friendship with God.

Expand

God, Our Companion

The God of the New Testament is a loving, caring God who wants to establish a friendship, a relationship, a companionship with humans everywhere. God sent Jesus (Luke 3:15–17, 21–22/3:22–24, 28–29 IV) to be an earthly companion. God desires to help us, to be there for us no matter what the problem is. God is the best friend we will ever have. As God provides this example for us, ask: "Whose companion are you? Who are your fellow travelers?" Have students respond on the paper provided. Close with prayer.

Bible, paper, pens,
Luke 3:15–17,
21–22/3:22–24,
28–29 IV

Lectionary scriptures—Isaiah 43:1–7 IV; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14–17; Luke 3:15–17, 21–22/3:22–24, 28–29 IV