

# As Yourself

## Week 5 • The Spiral of Grace & The Gift of Friends

Sep 16, 2026 • Philippians 3:12–16 • Luke 24:13–35 • Dr. Geoffrey D. Lentz

Print reading: Chapters Seven and Eight, *The Spiral of Grace and The Gift of Friends*, pp. 117–155

Tonight's rhythm: Opening prayer & Scripture 5 min • Teaching 30 min • Table time 20 min • Practice & closing 5 min

### Teaching Block 1 • Around Again, but Not the Same (10 min)

The Pensacola Lighthouse staircase keeps bringing you past familiar walls and views, yet each turn carries you higher. Christian growth often feels like that. We return to the same fear, Scripture, relationship, wound, or temptation. Repetition alone is not growth, but recurrence is not proof of failure. The better question is: Am I meeting this old place with more honesty, responsibility, freedom, or love? (pp. 117–119, 132–134)

Pseudo-Dionysius gives three movements of the soul: the circle—grace gathers the scattered self; the spiral—grace heals and transforms us through the mixed and changing activities of life; and the line—grace directs us outward toward God and neighbor. “The spiral returns, but grace makes the return different.” (pp. 120–124)

John Wesley's Christian perfection is not flawless performance. Perfect love means that love of God and neighbor increasingly becomes the governing direction of the heart. Gregory of Nyssa names *epektasis*: continual stretching forward into the infinite life of God. We do not grow to become worthy of love. We grow because we are already loved. (pp. 124–129)

### Table Time 1 • 6 min

*Choose one question. Make room for each voice; anyone may pass.*

**Where are you tempted to say, “I thought I had already dealt with this”? What suggests you may be meeting it differently now?**

**What might the next faithful turn require—asking for help, making an apology, practicing a new habit, setting a boundary, or acting with courage?**

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### Teaching Block 2 • Friends Call the Self Forth (10 min)

The Emmaus story begins with two disappointed disciples walking away from Jerusalem. They do not yet know that Easter has happened, but they have each other. Christ comes near in their conversation, walks at their pace, opens Scripture, and is finally recognized in the breaking of bread. Grace often comes to us through companionship before we recognize Christ's presence. (pp. 137–141, 151–153)

St. Aelred of Rievaulx gives Christian friendship its beautiful center: “Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.” Friends are not Christ, and no human relationship should bear that weight. But friendship can become a means of grace—a place where Christ tells the truth, carries hope, and helps us see what we cannot see alone. “Friends do not manufacture the self. They call the self forth.” (pp. 141–143)

It is possible to be surrounded by people and still lose touch with our own voice. We can become so practiced at adapting, agreeing, or keeping the peace that we stop asking what we actually think, want, or sense God calling us to do. Good friendship makes room for honest difference. A true friend can ask the questions that help us become more truthful and more fully ourselves without pulling us out of communion with others. (pp. 142–144)

## Table Time 2 • 6 min

*Choose one question. Listen for experience as well as ideas.*

**Who has helped you become more fully yourself? What did that person see, ask, or say that you could not have discovered alone?**

**What is something friendship can reveal about us that solitary self-examination usually cannot?**

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## Teaching Block 3 • Communion Without Collapse (10 min)

The Trinity gives Christian friendship its deepest grammar: communion does not erase distinction. Individualism says, “I can only be myself apart from you.” Enmeshment says, “I can only remain with you by becoming less myself.” Christian communion offers another way. A good friend does not need us to become an echo; holy friendship helps each person become more truthful, free, and distinctly themselves. (pp. 145–147)

René Girard helps explain why difference can become rivalry. We often learn what to desire from one another, then begin to experience another person’s success as our loss. Grace makes another possibility possible: I can rejoice in your gift without treating it as a verdict on mine. Friendship teaches us to receive difference as gift rather than threat. (pp. 146–149)

Friends can also carry faith when ours is thin. The friends who lower the paralyzed man through the roof become an image of hope borrowed from others. Healthy friendship still requires truth, freedom, trust, and boundaries; communion is not possession. The chapter ends with the larger claim: “The self is not discovered alone.” The self received in communion is prepared to become a gift—which is where we will go next week. (pp. 148–155)

## Table Time 3 • 8 min

*Begin with the first question, then move to the second if time allows.*

**Where does comparison or rivalry tempt you to experience another person’s gift as a threat? What would it mean to rejoice in that person’s good?**

**What kind of friend are you being called to become right now—a listener, truth-teller, encourager, faith-carrier, or companion who simply stays?**

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## Practice & Closing • The Higher Turn and the Emmaus Companion

1. Name one place where you are still growing. Ask: Am I merely circling, or am I meeting this place differently?
2. Name one friend or companion through whom God has helped you grow.
3. Before the week ends, thank that person. You might say: “One way you have helped me become more myself is...”
4. Choose one next faithful step. Grace does not shame us for where we are; grace meets us there and calls us onward.

**Closing prayer** God of grace, gather what fear has scattered in us. Turn our old circles into higher turns of honesty, freedom, and love. Thank you for the companions through whom Christ comes near. Free our friendships from rivalry, possession, and fear. Teach us to tell the truth, carry one another’s hope, honor healthy boundaries, and rejoice in one another’s gifts. Keep drawing us further up and further in, until our lives are gathered around love. Amen.