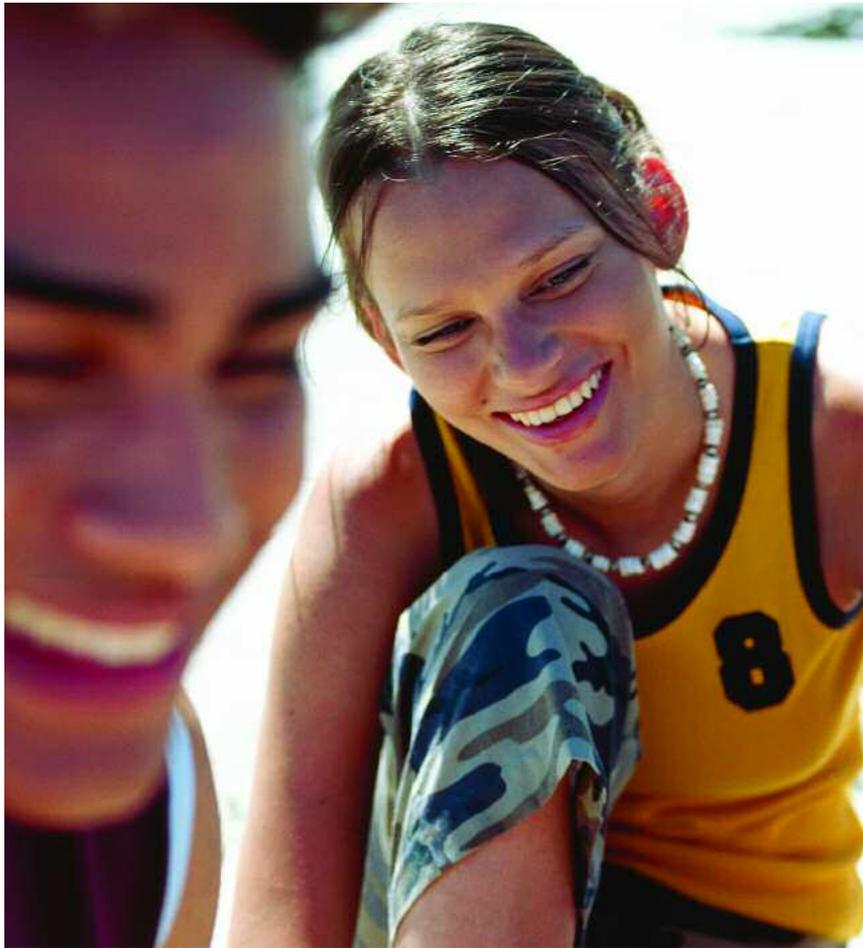


Reclaim

your friends for God

Produced by the Youth Ministries Committee Southern Region
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RECLAIM YOUR FRIENDS FOR GOD

Something made me think of you today. It was only something little, almost insignificant, but it brought you into my mind... again. So I thought I would just let you know that your friendship is still important to me. Perhaps friendships are the most important thing we have been given to care for in this world, and yours is one I don't want to lose. I'll keep you in my heart and in my prayers - and if you have some time it would be great to catch up and do something together. Thanks for being my friend.

Smthng m8d me think of u 2day. ur stl imp2t 2me. frndshps r th mst imprtnt thng we hv n i dont wnt 2 lse urs. Ur in my prays n if u hv sum tme wld b gr8 2 ctch up. Thnks 4 bng my frnd.

Is this true? Do you really want to re-establish a connection with a friend who has left your circle of spiritual friends? If it is, then you are probably the way that God will use to bring them back to Himself again. Friendships are a great blessing and an awesome responsibility.

Jesus taught that the way we treat others is so important that our salvation hinges on it. (Matthew 25:31-46). The followers of God have been given a mandate to bring others to know Him (Matthew 28:19-20) and Jesus told one of the first leaders of His church that the way he could love to his Saviour was to 'feed my sheep' (John 21:16,17).



"Spend some time considering the kind of friend you need to be to the ones you know who have drifted away from your church family. Use these words to motivate you to connect with them again and reclaim them as your friends."

QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ANSWER:

1. What are the factors that have kept you in the Church? Remembering the reasons you are in the Church will help you share the positives of the church with your friends.

- ✦ Ask yourself why you want to get your friends back to church. It is important to understand your own motives so that you don't inadvertently manipulate your friends for a purpose not entirely focussed on them.
- ✦ Spend some time asking yourself: Why are you at church? What is it about your church that keeps you involved? Who in your church supports you, needs you, encourages you or challenges you? What is that you love about your home church? What (if any) are some of the problems with your home church? Why haven't they driven you away?
- ✦ Be sure that you understand why you are at church. When you invite someone else to join you at church, it is because you want them to benefit from this community.
- ✦ Be careful about asking a friend to come to church because numbers are needed for a special program or because the youth group needs a lift, etc... When you understand what you appreciate about your church, it will be easy to invite someone else to appreciate the same things.



2. Who are your friends? What are their interests, what do they need?

Who is this person you are asking to come back to church? Do you know them? Are you aware of their circumstances? Do you know why they haven't been around? Have you been in touch with them? Should you have been?

These are hard questions that focus on one main point: **Reclaiming a friend for God is first about having a relationship with your friend.**

Credibility in an invitation comes from the genuine integrity of the invitation. Will they feel that they are somehow on a 'list' of people to ask? Is that your motivation? Are they a best friend? If so, how much time have you spent with them recently? Are they just a friend or an acquaintance?

Spend time knowing the person you want to ask. Your genuine interest in them is worth more than the fact that you are inviting them to church.





QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ANSWER:

3. How will you invite them back to church? How will you make contact in the first place?

How will you invite your friend to something special or interesting at church? If you just send them a flyer in the mail, don't expect too much of a response. People aren't stupid. They know how much effort you are putting into something. They will also know how well you know them and how interested you are in them as individuals by the way that you invite them.

Your invitation must be personal. How could you invite the person? What is unique about them? How will they respond? How can you make them feel special?

A formal written invitation could be something that would be very much appreciated for some. For other closer friends, a small gift or something thoughtful that is 'extra' might convey how important the invitation is to you. If it is a guy, then it might just be the tone of voice in the phone call. For many, a personal visit may be the way to emphasize that this occasion is important to you and that you will value their company.

The main point here is this: **Regardless of how you plan an invitation, you must first make contact as a friend.**



Before you invite them to church, start by renewing your friendship. This could be with a text message, a phone call or a visit that says: I saw something or heard something that made me think of you.

Be open about what you're doing. Your friend will wonder, 'Why are you getting in touch with me after all this time?' Be honest. Tell them the truth and re-build your relationship from there.

Be careful that it isn't just a big event that you are inviting your friend to - just in case your friend ends up being neglected. It is good to have some special reason for the invitation - something that you think they would genuinely enjoy. Remember, it doesn't have to be much. Don't wait for next year's 'big deal' in order to invite a friend along to church. See if there is a theme you know they would be interested in, or a speaker you think they will appreciate. Allow the 'what' you invite your friends to, show them that you both know and value their interests.

QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO ANSWER:

4. What made your friend leave? How will you deal with the emotions that caused?

It can be very difficult for people to make contact with church life after they have left. It is often very threatening to walk back into that environment. Sometimes there are difficult emotions, including guilt associated with not coming to church. Questions could haunt them like, "Who will know about me? What will people think of me? How will I be treated?"

- ✦ Spend the time that it takes with your friend to understand what they are feeling about church. Be brave enough to ask honestly and show that you are interested in that aspect of their life. If there are wounds left from the past, listen to them and be interested in helping your friend work through them. A church family is never perfect, and sometimes people get terribly hurt.
- ✦ Don't pretend that it didn't happen, and don't guarantee that hurt won't happen again. Just be sure that your friend knows that your church can be a safe and supportive place for them.



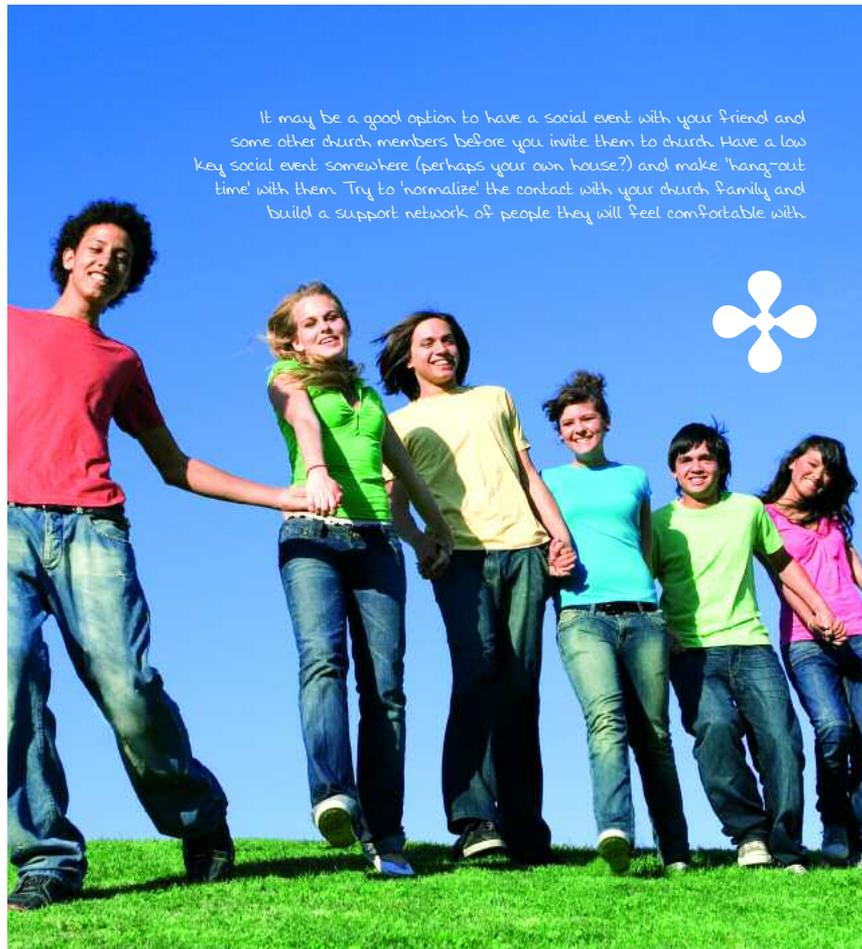
5. How will your church be ready when they do come back?

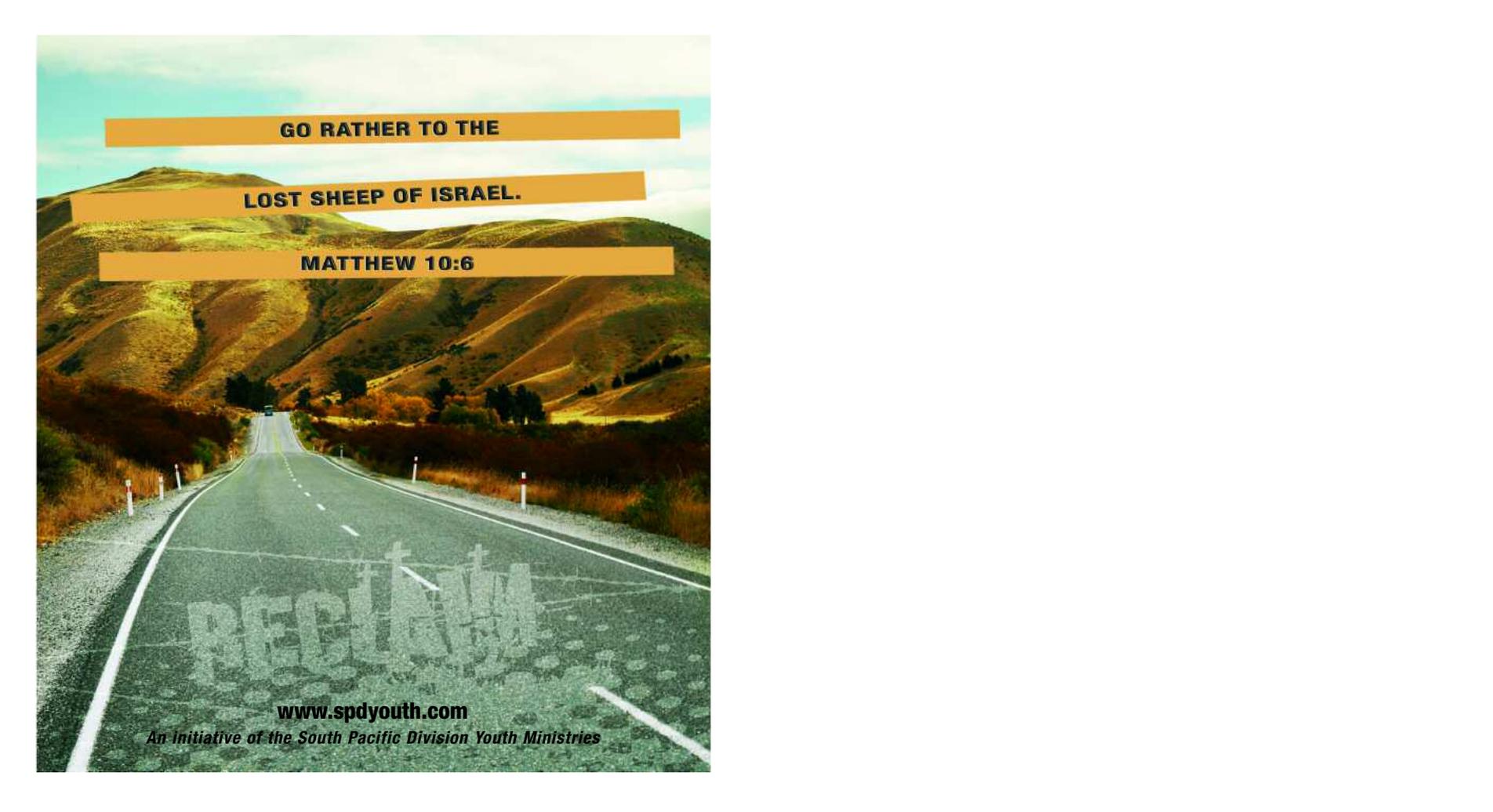
Assuming you have spent time re-establishing your own connection with your friend, take some time to prepare a group of people who will also look forward to your friend's return.

If you are inviting them to a church program, have a social event planned for afterwards that includes a group of other friends. Decide what social activity you can do so that they don't get the impression that you 'got them there' and then you all head off in different directions. Church is a social place. It is an extended family and people need to socialise together to feel a part of the family.

- ✦ Remember that most people in an unfamiliar environment are concerned that they're not going to fit in. Consider how you can address that. Give them plenty of information about the type of program, what they can expect and how they should dress. When they do walk in, make sure that there are others available who will be looking out for them and ensure that they feel welcome.

It may be a good option to have a social event with your friend and some other church members before you invite them to church. Have a low key social event somewhere (perhaps your own house?) and make 'hang-out time' with them. Try to 'normalize' the contact with your church family and build a support network of people they will feel comfortable with.





GO RATHER TO THE

LOST SHEEP OF ISRAEL.

MATTHEW 10:6

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An initiative of the South Pacific Division Youth Ministries