

# SUMMER FRIENDSHIP GATHERINGS

## 2024 SUMMER FRIENDSHIP GATHERING

### DISCUSSION GROUPS

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- Summer Friendship Gathering events lasts three evenings and each evening is divided into three parts: fellowship meal, worship time with a large group lesson, and small group discussion. On the last evening there is a closing worship service, which replaces the Large Group Bible Lesson and Small Group Discussion time.
- The Discussion Group is a vital element in the Gathering. It is an opportunity to talk about the Large Group Lesson. It is also a special time for small group prayer, acts of service, and craft projects. A good number of people who will never say anything in a large setting may participate in a small group. It is a place where intimate Christian community can be formed. Our theme for this summer is **“He is Worthy.”**
- We will be discussing with our friends, because God is holy, powerful, and loving He is worthy of all praise and worship.
- Some of our friends with disabilities do not use words and we may wonder if the discussion or prayer time is well spent. It is through these small Christian communities that the Holy Spirit can move hearts. We were not meant to live our lives alone but share the love of Jesus, and our gifts as well as connect with others around us.



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## DISCUSSION GROUPS CONTINUED

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- Make sure to leave plenty of room in your group for the prayer time.
- **Romans 8:26-27** states, “...*the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.*”
- The discussion and prayer time should not be rushed. There may be something the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish through this time together as a small group.
- The Discussion Groups will meet following the Large Group Lesson on Days 1 and 2. There is no Discussion Group on Day 3. The Discussion Group room assignments will be communicated in an announcement at the end of the Large Group Lesson.
- Each group will be designated by a colored sticker placed on each person’s nametag. As each color is announced, volunteers with that color will lead their group to the correct room.
- We ask that each Gathering group organize their Discussion Groups. Friendship leaders will provide Connection Ministries with their Discussion Group assignments three weeks before the event. This will allow us time to prepare the nametags and small group rosters.
- Please have 1-2 volunteers available at your Gathering event to put stickers on the nametags when Connection Ministries staff arrive the first evening of your Gathering, to go along with the Discussion Group assignments.

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# 2024 SUMMER FRIENDSHIP GATHERING

## DISCUSSION GROUPS CONTINUED

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- When creating your Discussion Groups, be sure to balance each group with friends who have a variety of intellectual levels, and ability to use words. Also include families and caregivers in the group assignments.
- The person leading the Discussion Group is the Discussion Leader. They should already be a volunteer companion who has established relationships in the Friendship group. The remaining Friendship companions should be encouraged to participate in the event and be assigned to a Discussion Group to assist the Discussion Leaders.
- Each event will need 4-6 Discussion Groups and volunteers to lead, depending on the number of friends with disabilities, families, caregivers and volunteers that register.
- It would be helpful for the Discussion Group Leaders and Friendship companions to review the Large Group Lesson videos for Days 1 and 2.
- Connection Ministries has also prepared a Discussion Group Leader's Guide that you can download and print either at home or through your church. If requested, we will mail you a copy. This guide along with the videos will prepare you to either lead or participate in the discussion time.
- We have also prepared a Discussion Booklet as a take-home piece for all participants. It has a summarized story for each day, illustrations, and the same questions you will find in the Discussion Group Leader's Guide.
- For every Gathering, Connection Ministries will bring enough Discussion Booklets for everyone. Be sure everyone writes their name on the front cover of the booklet.

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# 2024 SUMMER FRIENDSHIP GATHERING

## DISCUSSION GROUPS CONTINUED

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- It is important to note the Discussion Group Leader is a facilitator, not a lecturer. The facilitator's goal is to encourage participation from everyone in the group.
- Encourage members of your group to read portions of the story out loud. Be sure to engage the families and direct support staff in the conversations.
- When you ask a question, be patient and wait for a response. If discussions start slowly, use simple yes or no questions with simple follow-up questions to get the conversation going.
- Companions need to be ready to assist the Discussion Group Leader with additional questions to help keep the discussion going. It is important to be prepared. Be sure to review the questions and answers that will be asked. They are available in the Discussion Group Leader's Guide.
- Help your friends with disabilities. After you give them time to answer, its ok to whisper the answer in their ear. Include families and caregivers and make sure everyone feels welcome participating and answering questions.
- The discussion and prayer time will be just as important for the families, caregivers, and volunteers as for our friends with disabilities.
- For Day 1 we will do an activity called "Heart for Worship". On Day 2 we will do a craft called "Praise Tambourine". You will find the description for this activity on the Connection Ministries website.
- Connection Ministries will provide the supplies needed for these projects.

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# 2024 SUMMER FRIENDSHIP GATHERING

## DISCUSSION GROUPS CONTINUED

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- If an additional craft, activity, or service project is planned, leave adequate time. However, make sure the project is started after the discussion and prayers. There needs to be at least one volunteer at each table to lead the project and assist.
- Time is limited, so it will be difficult to include additional Bible reading beyond what is offered in the curriculum.
- The take-home Discussion Booklets will be collected and placed in the Discussion table bin after Day 1. The booklets will be used again on Day 2. Following the Discussion Group on Day 2, everyone can take their Discussion Booklet home.
- Following the Discussion Group on Days 1 and 2, nametags will be collected and placed in the Discussion table bin. They will be available at the registration table the next day.
- At the end of the Day 3 Worship Service, an announcement will be made that anyone who wants to keep their name tag can take their name card out of the holder and return the plastic holder and lanyard. If someone wants to keep the holder and lanyard, that is fine.
- You are encouraged to view the video for this presentation along with the Discussion Group Leader's Guide. The links to these resources can be found on the Connection Ministries website next to the training video. If you print the guide or the notes for your Discussion Group, please bring your copy with you to your Gathering.