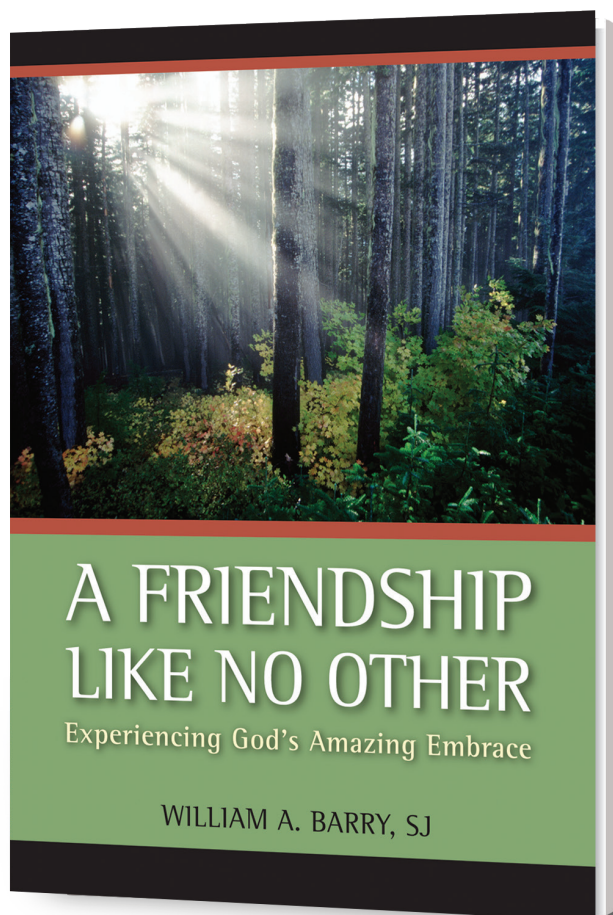




# ONE BOOK ONE PARISH

---

## A Five-Week Discussion Guide



# WEEK ONE: Chapters 1–3

---

1. “What does God want in creating us? What God wants is friendship.” What are the first thoughts that come to your mind when you hear that God wants your friendship? How comfortable are you with the idea? What difference would it make in your life to realize that God wanted you as a friend?
2. The author writes “we exist as persons only in relationship.” How does this challenge the notion that only self-made and independent individuals can be persons? If your image is that of a self-made individual, how can you relate to God as one of his creatures?
3. Adam and Eve lost trust in one another once they had disobeyed God. How much energy does it take to hold up a “leaf” before God and others? How much easier would it be to be open and transparent?
4. God and Abraham developed an open and candid relationship with one another. What subject would you like to talk about with God candidly? How would you challenge God to be God?
5. Ignatius of Loyola taught that all people have experiences of God’s creative and sustaining love. Reflect on an experience that gave you an enormous sense of well-being. Did you understand this as an experience of God? Did this experience in some way help form the direction of your life?
6. God is willing to be hurt again and again and to forgive again and again. How does this image of God’s forgiveness compare with what you have learned in the past? Why do you think God is willing to take such a risk?
7. Fr. Barry gives an exercise for helping us discern the needs of the world. In the midst of the troubles our world faces, what are some signs of God’s continuing presence and love?

## WEEK TWO: Chapters 4–5

---

1. Ignatius of Loyola teaches us to use our imagination in a contemplative way in order to know Jesus better. What would you like to say to Jesus in an imaginary conversation?
2. The only way forward in this friendship is to tell Jesus what you really feel and think, and then wait for his response. How does it feel to know that there are “no holds barred” in your conversations with Jesus?
3. Consider Jesus’ Passion and Death, when he was abandoned and betrayed by his friends and had to face the road to Calvary alone. Reflect on a time in your life when you felt you had no one left to trust but God. How can you relate this to Jesus’ experience of abandonment?
4. Enter imaginatively into one of the stories of the Resurrection. We have done our worst, and God has raised Jesus bodily from the dead. With the women, you are meeting Jesus on the road. What do you want to say to him? What do you want to hear from him?
5. After his Resurrection, Jesus enters the upper room. He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Imagine you are there among Jesus’ disciples. In what area of your life is it most important that you receive the peace offered by Jesus?
6. The Holy Spirit works to bring about what God wants—a world where human beings are friends of God, friends of one another, and friends of the universe that sustains us. How can you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to welcome all to be friends of God, friends with one another, and friends with the universe that sustains us?
7. Ignatius uses the analogy of human friendship to speak of the relationship with God. It is extraordinary, when you think about it, that God wants our gifts just as much as we want God’s gifts. God has created us for such mutuality. “Each shares with the other,” Ignatius writes. Reflect on the personal gifts you can share with God. What does it mean to you that God wants your gifts as much as you want God’s?

## WEEK THREE: Chapters 6–8

---

1. The biggest obstacle to a relationship with God is our belief that the relationship depends on us. What do we gain if we judge for ourselves what God wants? What do we lose?
2. “You do God no favor by thinking stingily or meanly about the person who is the apple of God’s eye—you.” What first steps can you take to accept yourself as “the apple of God’s eye”?
3. As adults, God leads us to greater collaboration with our family business. God’s family business is discipleship. In what way are you called to be a collaborator in God’s family business?
4. How would you compare your willingness to be open with a friend to your willingness to be open with God?
5. Friendship with God is not only a path to personal salvation; it is also a means to the salvation of the world. We can choose to be who God wants us to be and be part of God’s solution or be part of the problem. In what way do you see yourself as part of the problem? . . . as part of the solution?
6. We are God’s friends in the world to the degree we show compassion as God shows compassion. God’s compassion is not limited. Have you ever experienced a feeling of compassion for someone that rather astonished you? Reflect on how God has been compassionate toward you. How can you prepare yourself to act toward all people with the same compassion that God shows toward you?
7. Mary was probably about fifteen when the angel came to her with God’s request that she become the mother of Jesus. At this young age, she was able to make this life-giving decision. How do you think Mary can help you become a better friend of God? What can you ask Mary to do to help people become vulnerable to God?

## WEEK FOUR: Chapters 9–12

---

1. St. Teresa of Ávila wrote, “It is the most dreadful thing in the world that God our Creator should suffer so many misdeeds to be committed by His creatures within Himself.” What does it mean to recognize the presence of God not only in the victims of suffering but also in the people who are harming them?
2. St. Teresa of Ávila was thrown from her carriage into some mud. She said to God, “If this is the way you treat your friends, it’s no wonder you have so few.” In times of frustration, are you able to express yourself as honestly as St. Teresa of Ávila did?
3. The Book of Job was written to address the question of why bad things happen to good people. God often acts—or doesn’t act—for reasons that only God understands. Does the Book of Job’s answer satisfy you? What else would you say to God?
4. When we think of God as the ultimate fixer, we get into trouble explaining natural disasters and human evil. How much easier do you think life would be if God were a “Mr. Fixit”? Do you think it would be a blessing or an intrusion?
5. Jesus, our friend, wants to share everything with us, even those things that make us angry and resentful of God. When in your life have you been angry or resentful of God? If you have not, what keeps you from being so?
6. Imagine the Trinity looking at our world and deciding to send the Son. In this decision, was God looking at the world in anger or in compassion? What does this say about how God wants us to look at the world?
7. The Spirit is the least mentioned Person of God. How does God as a silent partner speak to God’s willingness to trust you to be a sign of his compassionate presence in the world?

## WEEK FIVE: Chapters 13–14

---

1. “Thin places” are where the border between heaven and earth seems especially porous and God is believed to leak through more easily. What would you say are the “thin places” in your life?
2. The Eucharist is the gathering that most often is experienced as “holy ground.” Even everyday Eucharistic liturgies can give a sense of peace and communion. Think of a time when a Eucharistic celebration touched your life in a special way. How did this influence the way you saw your relationship with God and others?
3. Fr. Barry’s sister Mary, a sister of Mercy, told of a time when she contemplated seaweed. She began to see lovely colors in the ugly mess. She was reminded of how often she found grace and loveliness in the troubled boys with whom she worked. Reflect on the “thin places” you have experienced that were occasions of sorrow and loss. How have these experiences deepened your sense of the presence of God in your life?
4. God’s Spirit and the evil spirit operate differently with those who have turned away from God. For those who act contrary to what is right, the evil spirit tries to douse the conscience pangs that come from God’s Spirit raising questions about our behavior. Fr. Barry experienced this when dealing with his alcohol consumption. What do you think of his example? What does it tell us about how the Spirit works in our lives?
5. For those who live honest and upright lives, the bad spirit raises doubts that cause inner turmoil; the good spirit encourages us and increases our peace, joy, faith, hope, and love. How can you recognize and follow where God’s Spirit is leading you?
6. Consolation refers to “every increase in hope, faith, and charity, and every interior joy which calls and attracts one toward heavenly things and to the salvation of one’s soul, by bringing it tranquility and peace in its Creator and Lord” (*Spiritual Exercises*, n. 316). When have you had experiences of God’s “consolation”? What have they meant to you?
7. Provided that we are trying to live as friends of God, experiences of feeling out of sorts, ill at ease, anxious, unhappy, listless, etc., are experiences of desolation. They do not come from God. Ignatius also advised never to make a decision when in “desolation.” Why do you think that this is an important teaching?