

# “ON FRIENDSHIP”

## BY MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

### Background on the Selection

This *Reading* is a slightly abridged edition of *De Amicitia*, a small book by the Roman lawyer, orator, and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.). Sometimes called the *Laelius*, after its protagonist, *On Friendship* is one of the most influential books ever written on the subject. Doug Holladay introduces the text with a Foreword that sets the Stoic philosophy of Cicero in a contemporary context and draws lessons from his own Christ-driven friendships that may help us in our pursuit of true friendship.

### Group Discussion Questions

- 1 How do you respond to the implicit request here to talk *about* friendship? Do you read Cicero as cold and calculating or warm and loving? What is he trying to say by basing his approach on the friendship of Laelius and Scipio?
- 2 Consider the reasons given in the foreword and the text for Cicero’s writing a book on friendship. What, in his view, distinguishes true friendship from mere companionship? Have you experienced friendships that approach Cicero’s ideal? If not, is the fault in Cicero’s definition or somewhere else?
- 3 Laelius’s first principle is that “friendship can exist only between good men.” Why does he begin here? Does your experience bear him out? Are you accustomed to think about your relationships as related to character or virtue?
- 4 Laelius ranks friendship higher than health, wealth, and position. Do you agree? Why? What examples support or challenge your view? Now consider the way you live. Have your daily actions toward your friends been in line with your stated priorities? If not, what do you need to do to bring them together?
- 5 Consider section seven where Cicero’s Laelius ties friendship to the survival of family and society. Is he correct? Compare this vision with Holladay’s

discussion of the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath. What sort of conclusions do you reach? What sort of actions are you inspired to take?

**6** How do you respond to the discussion of challenges and limits to friendship in sections ten and following? Is Cicero consistent with his earlier premises? How easy or difficult would it be to follow his counsel in these sections?

**7** What does Cicero say about the challenges to friendship for successful people (§15–17, 19)? Do you agree? How does he suggest we act toward our friends? How do you choose your friends? Have you left friends behind when you achieved success or promotion?

**8** Do you appreciate or resist Cicero's approach to dissolving friendships? What about his discussion in §22 about putting friends to the test before befriending them? Compare these with Holladay's discussion of unconditional acceptance in the Foreword. How do the ideas of Cicero and Holladay compare with the teachings of Jesus?

**9** Read Cicero on truth and flattery (§24–26). How do you and your friends encourage truthfulness and avoid flattery with each other?

**10** Consider the friendships in your life. Which do you celebrate? Which promote virtue? Which would you like to go deeper? What steps are you going to take with these friends now that you have done this reading?

## Further Reading

See also the *Trinity Forum* reading list on friendship at our Findings online journal.

- John Pollock, "William Wilberforce: A Man Who Changed His Times," *The Trinity Forum Reading* (1996)
- Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1974).
- Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (books 8 & 9). A classic treatment of friendship.
- Richard Lamb, *The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends* (InterVarsity Press, 2003).
- C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Harvest Books, 1960, 1971).