

# Connections

January 2024

## *Closer Than a Sister* by Abigail Dodds, Desiring God

Friendship, C.S. Lewis concludes, is "unnecessary." He says, "I have no duty to be anyone's Friend, and no man in the world has a duty to be mine. No claims, no shadow of necessity. Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art" (The Four Loves, 103).

Friendship is a little bit like the offer of dessert after a wonderful meal. No one must eat it any more than the host must provide it — the unnecessary best part. So too with one's friends. Friendship runs on the fuel of shared enjoyment, not by way of contract or debt or familial duty. Yet in friendless seasons, we feel at a loss — of companionship, comfort, sharpening, and edification.

The Scriptures show us just how strong the bonds of friendship can be, as with Jonathan and David: "He loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:3). We also see the pain of a friend not living up to the name, as with Job's friends: "My friends scorn me; my eye pours out tears to God" (Job 16:20). We know "a friend loves at all times" and that the love of a friend even includes his willingness to injure us, for "faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Proverbs 17:17; 27:6).

Considering such a potent blessing, how can young women pursue godly friendships?

### **Pathways into Female Friendship**

At times of transition in life, we can find ourselves friendless, or at least in short supply of any tried-and-true friends nearby. One thing I know is that you don't make new friends by sitting around wishing for them. The best way I've found to make friends is to get busy doing whatever God has given me to do that day and then to see whom God puts in my path.

Now, it should go without saying that our closest friends are Christian friends, not just anybody in proximity to us. We need to be around people at church, in our family, and in our friendships that honor Christ and his ways. When we walk with the wise, we become like them — when we hang out with fools, we will suffer for it (Proverbs 13:20). Friendship is a fellowship, and "what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

I often observe that women admire someone from a distance and then invite her to grab coffee. Trying to spark a friendship isn't wrong, but it may result in disappointment when the woman doesn't live up to your ideal. In my experience, the best way to get to know someone is to do something alongside her rather than starting off primarily one-on-one and face-to-face. Serving shoulder-to-shoulder with women from church is a great way to

have unpressured conversations. Inviting a family over for dinner is another helpful way to get to know a potential friend, as you will see a fuller picture of what she's like when surrounded by her husband and children.

I'm occasionally surprised when a woman whom I seemed to get along with well in a private conversation isn't as compatible when with our families or a larger group of friends. But I'm also surprised when someone with whom I didn't sense any great kinship at the start eventually becomes a dear friend in the context of our families and shared work. In other words, get to know potential friends in real life, not just by sitting with coffee away from the bustle of children or classes or home life or service or work. Female friendships shouldn't mainly be siloed away from husbands, children, parents, or hands-on work. Rather, our real-life context is fertile soil for healthy friendships.

The most rewarding friendships God has given me are secure enough to take our eyes off the friendship, lock arms, and take a hill together. Maybe the hill is a feat of hospitality that's too big for just one person. Maybe it's trying to solve some tough problem and praying together. Maybe the hill is finding the best way to educate our children in the Lord. Maybe it's working on a writing project with a friend, providing critical feedback or receiving it. In these cases, friendship has moved beyond itself to productive fruitfulness that spills over to others.

### **Enemies of Female Friendships**

Certain weeds regularly find their way into the garden of friendship among women and can keep a friendship from becoming fruitful in the Lord. Female friendship grows in a particular kind of soil prone to particular weeds — envy, flattery, rivalry, pretense, deceit, complaining, and gossip, to name a few.

My first memory of an envious thought takes me back to twelve years old with a friend I loved (and love!) dearly. I envied her appearance and form. That envy sat in the background of my heart for several years, an unwelcome but persistent guest, before I realized I could do something about it. Likewise, I can recall rivalry — a competitive urge to be or do better than my friends — from an even earlier age.

What's more, even as a grown woman over forty, I am still putting to death the occasional urge to gossip or complain or exaggerate when with friends. I thank God that he has given me a new heart that desires to put to death those sins and also desires to love my friends in truth. But the battle isn't over yet. So, for the sake of our own souls and the good of our friends, we must relentlessly pull the harmful weeds out of our friendships.

We can start by developing the habit of dealing with those sinful tendencies lightning fast. If an envious thought springs up, kill it immediately by confessing it to God. Ask him to resurrect gratitude instead of envy, and then give thanks to him for the very quality you were about to envy in your friend. Thank him for her beautiful hair, or her good humor, or her lovely home. Then cheerfully move on — give it no more attention.

If you catch yourself shaping stories either by exaggeration or by withholding information to somehow protect your reputation or make others think better of you, then quickly, before another false word can come out of your mouth, walk it back. Tell your friend, "I'm sorry, that's not right. Here's what really happened."

If you find yourself starting to gossip with a friend, do not succumb to the second temptation that would try to get out of it by acting like it never happened. Quickly deal with it on the spot. Say to your friend, "I'm sorry I was just gossiping. Would you forgive me?" Even if your friend also participated, take responsibility for your part, repent, and receive God's forgiveness. Gossip and complaining provide cheap ways to intimacy. They

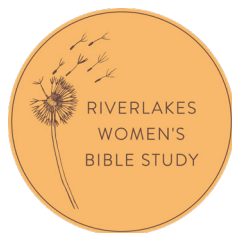
make friends feel close and bonded. But in the end, they remain crumbling foundations for friendship.

### Love Through Thick and Thin

While Lewis is right that friendship is not a duty that can be demanded from one to another, we do have the opportunity to give our friends a precious, Christlike gift: our constant love. This love is not something we give on the basis of how much fun they are to be around on any given day, but on the basis of our Savior, Christ, who calls us his friends and loves us to the end (John 15:15).

Our friends will face deep valleys and high peaks over the course of their lives. If we are to love them in the valleys, we must not be selfish; if we are to love them on the peaks, we must not be envious. God can grant us real enjoyment in our friends in every season because he has done a wonderful thing in uniquely making them, calling them, gifting them, and letting us partake in their lives. It's a privilege to call someone friend — and still more to be called it in return.

## Women's Bible Study



Draw close to the Lord and other women, find support and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ in a small group environment. You may choose Thursday mornings or Tuesday evenings for fellowship, discussion, prayer, and encouragement. Join us as we walk through the book of Prov-

erbs. A children's program is available for both morning and evening groups. Register at the Next Steps area on Sundays or online at [www.riverlakeschurch.org](http://www.riverlakeschurch.org).

### RiverLakes Women – Thursday Morning

Community Center

Thursdays @ 9:30am -11:30am

Contact: Women's Office 589-9733

Registration Fee: \$25

Childcare provided

### RiverLakes Women – Tuesday Evening

Education Bldg. – Room 210/212

Tuesdays @ 6:00 - 8:00pm

Contact: Women's Office 589-9733

Registration Fee: \$25

Childcare provided

## Prayer Seekers



Prayer Seekers is a group of women who gather Tuesdays at 1:30pm to pray for our church body. Prayers are kept confidential. Any women who call RiverLakes their home church are invited to join the ladies during their weekly prayer time. You may submit your prayer requests to the church

by emailing [prayerseekers@riverlakeschurch.org](mailto:prayerseekers@riverlakeschurch.org).

## Counseling Available

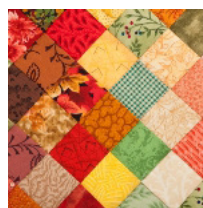


People Encouraging People (PEP) is a ministry of trained Biblical Lay Pastoral Counselors to hurting people. PEP counselors draw upon the comfort

they have received from God to help others move closer to Jesus in the midst of their problems. When life challenges get tough, are you strong enough to ask for help?

Referrals to Christian professional counselors are available as well. Don't let your spiritual and emotional health be threatened. Call (661) 589-9733 x222 for assistance, appointments or referrals.

## Prayer Quilt Ministry



*Can you touch a prayer? Can you pull it close and feel its comfort?  
You can if it's part of a Prayer Quilt.*

Prayer quilts are sewn by a team of women committed to sharing the burden of others through prayer and the giving of quilts. The quilts are completed with knots tied by our praying congregation and given as tangible expressions of God's love to people with prayer needs. Anyone who is facing a special need for prayer such as surgery, treatment or a crisis illness may receive a quilt when they are sponsored by someone attending RiverLakes Community Church. The Prayer Quilt ministry is located in the Community Center at the North Entrance. Please stop by our location, tie a quilt knot and pray for those in need. To sponsor a quilt, contact Jeanne at (661) 979-1965.