

# Today's Christian Woman

Series

LEADER'S GUIDE

## Cultivating Friendships

*What does biblical friendship look like?*

Developing and sustaining friendships takes effort and commitment, especially when you're new to the area. In her article on cultivating friendships after a move, author Cindy Crosby provides practical suggestions for starting up new friendships and keeping in touch with old friends, no matter the distance. She suggests, both directly and indirectly, that the time and effort necessary to establish and maintain friendships is worth the investment.

This study asks: What is the value of friendship? What can be learned from biblical examples of friendship? What is the cost of isolating yourself from others? What do we learn about God through friendship? What does the world see in our friendships?

**Scripture:**

Ruth 1; 1 Samuel 18:1–4, 1 Samuel 20; John 13:1–17, 17:20–26; 1 John 3:11–24, 4:7–21

**Based on:**

"New Girl in Town," by Cindy Crosby, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, January/February 2002, Vol. 24, No. 1, Page 38



INTERNATIONAL

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## PART 1

**Identify the Current Issue**

*Note to leader: Distribute copies of the article "The New Girl in Town" from TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN to each participant prior to the study.*

When you've just arrived in a new place, it can be tempting to remain anonymous, engaging others only when the mood strikes. There's an illusion of freedom that says, "If you're not known, you can do whatever you want without consequences. You don't really need others to be spiritually okay." Not only is this kind of thinking putting you in a dangerous place spiritually, ultimately these lies will leave you feeling unsatisfied and lonely.



The triune God created us in his image to be in relationship; as believers we are called to know others and be known by them, speaking the truth in love. Jesus said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. While *neighbor* is a broad category, it certainly includes all whom we call friends.

Even when you have resolved to make new friends (and keep the old), it can still be a challenge to succeed in doing so. Coordinating busy schedules, finding people with similar interests, connecting with others during the short time at church on Sunday morning, the perception of having too much to do—all of these factors and more can contribute to the difficulty of starting and sustaining friendships.

Yet God desires us to be in relationship with him and with one another. In the school of friendship, we can experience love, grace, and healing. We can learn the power of forgiveness as we forgive others and they forgive us. We can encourage each other, hold each other accountable, and share each other's burdens. As our friendships develop, we will grow in the knowledge of ourselves, others, and God himself.

**Discussion starters:**

- [Q] What factors have you personally encountered that make starting up a new friendship difficult? How does your personality affect your desire to initiate friendships?
- [Q] What fears might prevent you from taking the first step? Have you been burned by friends in the past?
- [Q] How might pride influence your behavior toward others? Does it anger you when people don't seem to make the effort to reach out to you?
- [Q] What are the challenges in maintaining long-distance friendships? What are reasonable expectations for keeping in touch?
- [Q] Have you ever decided to try going it alone? If yes, for how long? What did you feel like during that time? How was your relationship with God affected?



- [Q]** Where have you found your current friends? Do you tend to have lots of friendships, or just a few? What are the characteristics of a good friend?

**PART 2****Discover the Eternal Principles****Teaching point one: Christ models friendship for us in his relationship with his disciples.**

At the start of his ministry, Christ called 12 men into a close relationship with himself. He did not judge by outward appearance, as we are tempted to do—notably, none of the disciples were highly educated, perceived as religious, or men of high status. The only prerequisite for friendship was to come and follow him.

Christ lived his life before his disciples with integrity, pointing them towards God and revealing himself as their Savior. Christ and his disciples shared joys and sorrows, traveled and ate together, and spent time in conversation and prayer. Sharing the wisdom God gave him, Christ taught his disciples and was patient with their lack of understanding. He also asked for their trust, even in challenging circumstances, like during a stormy night upon the sea (Matthew 8:23–27). To show his trustworthiness, Christ gave his disciples opportunities to serve others while relying on his help, as in the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:30–44).

Christ encouraged, comforted, and challenged his disciples, seeking their growth and spiritual development. He knew the needs and desires of each of those close to him, and he made his own needs open to them. Christ was willing to lay down his life for his disciples, for their sins and the sins of the world, in the ultimate act of sacrifice and forgiveness.

Read John 13:1–17. On the same night that he knew he was going to be betrayed and finally deserted by all of the friends he treasured so dearly, Christ washed the disciples' feet to reveal to them "the full extent of his love" (John 13:1).

- [Q]** Take a few moments to reflect on Christ's life and interaction with his disciples. How did Christ demonstrate love for his friends? How did he point them to God? How can we do the same with our friends?
- [Q]** Too often we seek to be served by those close to us, wanting our own needs to be met instead of looking to the needs of others. What attitudes prevent us from serving?
- [Q]** What does Christ's act of foot washing suggest about the connection between love and service? Is service optional? What does Christ promise to those who carry out his words? In what ways can you "wash the feet" of others?
- [Q]** What was Peter's initial response when Christ came to wash his feet? Why is it sometimes difficult to let others serve us? In what ways can you let others "wash your feet"?
- [Q]** What enabled Christ to serve? On what did he base his identity and security? How does basing our identity on God's love for us give us the freedom to love and serve?



## Teaching point two: How we treat our friends is both a barometer of our spiritual development and a place where God can reveal his glory.

Too often in evangelical circles there is such an emphasis on individual salvation that the communal nature of faith is overlooked. Yet loving God and loving our neighbor go hand in hand. Loving our friends gives us the opportunity to demonstrate and grow in our faith, learn who God is, and become more like Christ.

Read 1 John 3:11–24 and 4:7–21. Bear in mind that this letter is written by John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (see John 21:7, 24). Who better to provide counsel for the early believers than one who was in an intimate relationship with Christ himself?

- [Q] What is the relationship between life, death, and loving our brothers? What definitions of love are given in these passages? Who are our “brothers”?
- [Q] In 1 John 3:18, John says, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” What actions have you undertaken on behalf of your friends? Is there an action that you feel God has been prompting you to take lately?
- [Q] What does it mean to love your friends in truth? How are we tempted to deceive each other? How can we be more honest?
- [Q] How can we communicate the truth with love? In what ways can we hold each other accountable?
- [Q] How should our love for God affect our behavior toward others?
- [Q] What did God do to demonstrate his love for us? Because you have received grace from God, do you show your friends grace? How?
- [Q] 1 John 4:16 states that “God is love.” We have the ability to see God in each other as we love. How has the love you have received from a friend taught you about God?
- [Q] Why does John say, “There is no fear in love” (4:18)? How has fear damaged your friendships? What does it mean to be “made perfect in love”?
- [Q] How is it possible for us to love others as God commands us to do in these passages? How has God been glorified in your difficult relationships? How has God sustained your friendships over the years?

## Teaching point three: Self-denial, loyalty, and unity of spirit are three qualities of true biblical friendship.

Among the classical philosophers, Cicero was among the first to pen an essay on friendship. He notes, “In the face of a true friend a man sees as it were a second self.”

Following Cicero’s lead, St. Aelred, a Cistercian monk who lived in the 12th century, defined friendship as “oneness of Heart, Mind, and Spirit, in things human and divine, with mutual esteem and kindly feelings of approval and support.”



True friends encourage us to be who we really are, who God intended us to be. They allow us to drop our pretenses, free us from the pressure of always having to defend our thoughts and actions, and enable us to use the gifts that God has given us.

Examining the friendships of David and Jonathan and Naomi and Ruth reveals that the path of biblical friendship involves a commitment to the good of others, even at your own perceived or actual expense. Since we live in a culture that values self-fulfillment over long-term investment in people, we would do well to meditate on these biblical friendships. By putting the needs of others above our own needs and agenda, we can begin to learn how to live as Christ calls us to live.

Read 1 Samuel 18:1–4 and 1 Samuel 20, then Ruth 1.

- [Q] What factors about Jonathan and David make their friendship remarkable? What barriers did they overcome? What did Jonathan risk by befriending and assisting David?
- [Q] Give an example of when you have felt one in spirit with a friend. What did you have in common? How did this friend make you feel?
- [Q] A covenant is an agreement established between two parties. What do you think was agreed upon in the original covenant between Jonathan and David in 1 Samuel 18:3–4? What did Jonathan do to emphasize his commitment to the covenant? What covenant does Jonathan make in chapter 20?
- [Q] In 1 Samuel 20, what actions does Jonathan take to fulfill his words to David, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you”? Do your actions back up your words with your friends?
- [Q] At the parting of Jonathan and David, both wept, but why would David have reason to weep “the most”? How does Jonathan comfort him?
- [Q] How does Ruth show compassion for Naomi? What does Ruth the Moabite stand to lose by following Naomi to Bethlehem? How is Ruth’s love sacrificial?
- [Q] Would you be willing to follow a friend as completely as Ruth followed Naomi? Why or why not? Are you willing to make sacrifices for the sake of your friends? How?

#### **Teaching point four: God intends for our friendships to be a witness to unbelievers, demonstrating the character and love of God.**

Within the Trinity, each person of the Godhead plays a unique role and possesses distinctive characteristics, yet the three are united in fellowship, love, and purpose. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit present unity in the midst of diversity, and suggest to believers how God desires his people to live. Living in harmony with fellow believers speaks volumes to a world committed to self-preservation and narrowly defined self-interest.

Read John 17:20–26.



- [Q] What is Christ's desire for believers? Do you believe that such unity is possible? What are the conditions necessary for unity? What conditions lead toward division?
- [Q] What is Christ's desire for the world (v.21)?
- [Q] Do you consider your friendships part of your witness? Has an unbeliever ever commented on how you treat your friends?
- [Q] Do our friendships among believers look different from friendships among unbelievers? What should be distinctive about Christian friendship? What elements are counter-cultural?
- [Q] How has the church historically lived out its mission to reveal God to the world? Where has it succeeded, and where has it failed? How can we in the church today be an effective witness to the world?

**PART 3****Apply Your Findings**

Aristotle wisely notes in *Nicomachean Ethics* that “without friendships no one would choose to live, even if they had all other good things in life.”

Take some time to prayerfully consider all the friends that God has given you, thanking him for the role each friend has played in your life. Pray too about the friendships that have slipped away and those that are yet to develop, asking God to guide you toward those he wants you to spend time with.

- [Q] What have you learned about yourself and God through each of your friends?
- [Q] Make a list of Christ's interactions with people, both his close friends and the strangers he encountered, taking note of how he treated each person. How can you model his behavior in all your relationships?
- [Q] In what ways can we serve our friends to demonstrate our love for them? How can you tangibly show your friends this week that you care about them?
- [Q] What are good boundaries in friendships? How can you tell a healthy friendship from an unhealthy one? Are there any issues you need to address within your friendships?
- [Q] How committed are you to your friends? How willing are you to sacrifice your time or goals for the sake of a relationship? Ask God to reveal to you how you can be made more perfect in love, and write down the steps you would like to take in the coming months.

—Study prepared by Adrianna Wright, publicist and freelance writer



## Additional Resources



[ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)  
-Developing True Accountability  
-Friendships That Benefit Parenting  
-Authentic Fellowship



*Six Keys to Lasting Friendships*, Carol Kent (NavPress, 2000; ISBN 1576831329)



*Rediscovering Friendship: Awakening to the Power and Promise of Women's Friendships*, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (Augsburg Fortress, 2001; ISBN 0800634454)



*Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction*, [David G. Benner](#) (IVP, 2004; ISBN 083083270X)



*Safe People*, Dr. Henry Cloud and John Townsend (Zondervan, 1996; ISBN 0310210844)



*Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Harper and Row, 1978; ISBN 0060608528)



*Spiritual Friendship*, [Aelred of Rievaulx](#) (Cistercian Publications, re-issue 1989; ISBN 0879077050)



*Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle, Translated by W. D. Ross (Oxford University Press, 1998; ISBN 019283407X). See especially books VIII and IX.



*Cicero: On Friendship, or Laelius* (<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/cicero-friendship.html>)



ARTICLE

## New Girl in Town

*How to cultivate friendships after a move.*

By Cindy Crosby, for the study “Cultivating Friendships”

I stood hesitantly by the industrial-strength coffeepot, nervously juggling a Styrofoam cup of bland hot brew with my Bible and trying to make eye contact with potential female friends in the adult Sunday school class. Inside, I felt that intense aloneness that can grip you most in a big crowd. Most of the 50 or so class members huddled in their little groups, secure in their shared activities. However, I must have looked pathetic enough for one woman to break away and throw a morsel of conversation in my direction. “Is this your first Sunday here?” she politely inquired.



I’d been in the class for a year.

After a move to a different state, and a year in our new church, I hadn’t connected with anyone. Worse yet, I wasn’t even a familiar face, although I’d attended the class faithfully every Sunday. Somehow, I hadn’t figured out how to build relationships in a new place—and I was losing touch with my friends back home.

Between 1999–2000 the United States Census Bureau estimates more than 43 million people—16 percent of the population—moved. Of these, almost 19 percent moved to a different state. In our mobile society, chances are good you’ll move at least once.

If you move a lot, you may instinctively shy away from making new friends because you’re tired of investing in relationships, then packing your bags again. And you may find old friendships falling apart in the absence of day-to-day attention. So is friendship really worth the effort?

Yes! Carol Kent, author of *Six Keys to Lasting Friendships* (NavPress), says it well: “How much we owe to friends! They bring out the best in us, and challenge the worst in a loving way. They get us through tough times and help us make difficult decisions. They help us relax and laugh, cry and heal, hope and dream.”

When a job change moved us again a year later, I was determined to make some changes. I echoed Scarlett O’Hara in *Gone with the Wind*, “As God is my witness, I’ll never be lonely again!” Okay, maybe that wasn’t exactly what she said. But here are a few friendship lessons I’ve learned along the way:

### Don’t Judge a Potential Friend by Her Manicure

She was so together—blond hair cut to perfection, nails immaculately manicured, makeup artfully applied. I run toward no makeup, Birkenstocks, blue jeans, and ragged nails I can’t stop biting. When our husbands began meeting for breakfast



regularly, I told mine flatly to enjoy his friendship with Jack, but I was sure Jan and I'd never be friends.

I was wrong.

When we cautiously explored a relationship by spending two nights at a women's retreat together, we stayed up till 3 A.M. laughing so hard our sides hurt the next morning. Her children are a bit older than mine, so I've gained wisdom from her about parenting. And I'm a good listening ear for her challenges with her extended family.

Moral of the story: Opposites can attract. Don't necessarily rule someone out because she's different than you!

### **Consider May-December Friendships**

When I attended a special-arts elective at our church, the speaker for the morning was a lovely, white-haired woman in her seventies who made a presentation on the value of good books. Being a book junkie myself, I raced up to her after the class and blurted, "Could we please have coffee sometime and talk?" Somewhat taken aback, she graciously agreed and gave me her phone number. The next week we met, and the age barriers fell away as we discussed everything from mysteries to fiction to a surprising shared love of ecology. By the time we parted, I knew I'd met a soul sister. Although there's a 30-year difference in our ages, Florence has become a dear friend.

Never rule out a potential friend because of an age difference. You might miss a blessing!

### **Know When to Hold 'Em, Know When to Fold 'Em**

I thought Melinda would be the perfect friend. We both loved the outdoors, we were in several church groups together, and we shared many mutual interests. Yet, although she was always kind, she was also always too busy to go out for lunch or too tied up to get together on the weekend. After the fourth re-buff, it hit me she wasn't in the market for friendship—at least not mine. I felt completely rejected.

That is, until I realized Melinda was in the middle of a marriage difficulty and only had the energy for people who knew her and her situation well. She had nothing left over for a brand-new relationship. Did it still hurt? Yup. But I moved on.

### **Make New Friends ...**

I work in a home office, where it's easy to be minimally involved in outside activities. If you hibernate, as I did after my first move, you'll likely find yourself battling loneliness. Try these tips instead:



**Ask someone for advice.** By putting the other person in the position of “expert,” you set her at ease and make her less intimidated by the idea of getting to know you. Good questions include, “Where’s a good place to go walking?” or “Who makes a dynamite cappuccino?” Before you know it, your potential friend might be offering to meet you at the little café that serves “the best coffee in town.”

**Get involved in a church.** If you’re a life-long Christian, this may seem like a no-brainer. Yet, if you do what we did—attend church services and Sunday school without getting involved—you’ll likely find yourself as I did: a stranger to everyone.

**Join a group.** A great place to make friends is in a club or group of people interested in the same things you are. If you love to plant flowers, try a Master Gardener program. In my neighborhood, I’ve found new friendships within book groups.

**Try something new.** The great thing about a move is being able to shake off everyone’s expectations of who you are, and start afresh. Always wanted to ski? Take some lessons. Thought about volunteering for Habitat for Humanity? Now’s your opportunity. And chances are, you’ll meet some potential friends along the way.

**Make a memory.** A new friend and I made it a tradition to walk together for an hour once a week and to have breakfast once a month. This gives us a comfortable framework to explore a deeper relationship.

### ... But Keep the Old

One of the most difficult things about moving is leaving behind close friends. Accept that some relationships you leave behind won’t endure without the day-to-day touch points you had before, and grieve those losses. (Of course, the flip side of this is you get to lose those difficult relationships you couldn’t quite figure out how to get out of!)

Here are some maintenance tips that can help keep the long-distance friendship fires burning:

**Express your love, grieve your loss.** Our tendency is to wall ourselves off from the pain of leaving. Before you leave, don’t be afraid to cry and tell your friends how much you’ll miss them.

**Stay connected electronically.** My former college roommates and I rarely see each other. Yet, we stay connected by e-mailing each other about the big events in our lives.

**Drop in.** When we travel, my husband and I try to connect with friends at different places across the country where we’ve lived. It may be as simple as stopping by to say hello, or as extended as a weekend spent at an old friend’s home.



**Realign old friendships.** One of my friends was the music minister at my previous church. She couldn't share many of her personal struggles with me because my husband was one of the elders. Now that we've moved, she has the built-in listening ear of someone who knows her situation but isn't actively involved in it.

### Now What?

So, you may not have the kind of friendships portrayed in *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*—fostered by childhood, forged through the college years, nurtured by living down the street from each other, lasting into old age. Get over it! Whether you move once or often, you can find deep, long-lasting relationships. Go on. Pick up the phone. Now's the time to give new friendships a chance.

—Cindy Crosby, a TCW regular contributor and author of *Waiting for Morning (Baker)*, lives with her husband and two children in Illinois.

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TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, January/February 2002, Vol. 24, No. 1, Page 38.

