

Praying for Your Friends

Seventeen Prayers to Strengthen Your Relationships

By Judith Couchman

A friend loves at all times.—Proverbs 17:17

The Bible begins with a story of friendship. During the day's coolness, the Creator strolled through the garden, calling for his friends Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, the first couple spoiled their relationship with God, but he remained steadfast in his compassion for them, their offspring, and all humanity.

Scripture depicts other friends who stayed lovingly committed to each other. When Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth faced separation, Ruth refused to leave her in-law and friend. She pledged, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:6). It's intriguing that this poignant verse, frequently repeated in marriage vows, originally sprang from a friendship.

Perhaps David heard about his great-grandmother's loyalty, and her story influenced his friendship with Jonathan. Although Jonathan's father, Saul, wanted to kill David, these young men vowed to remain friends for life, and for the lifetimes of their descendents (1 Sam. 20:42). One of those later descendents, Jesus, traveled with a group of friends: the twelve disciples and a few women. He assured them, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called

you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). These words marked a striking transition for the Son of God, who shared his Father’s trait of self-sufficiency. When most of Christ’s close friends fled during his trial and crucifixion, he still forgave them and continued their relationship. It’s heartening that even Jesus recognized the importance of lasting friendship.

Friendship in Our World

These biblical friendships stir something hidden within us. God created us for abiding companionship, not just hit-and-run interaction. Still, we live in a frenzied, post-modern world. Our culture depends on what’s disposable, bends to crowded schedules, and conforms to media expectations. With marriage, children, work, church, extra-curricula activities, travel, exercise, appointments, continuing studies, extended family, and more, it’s hard to squeeze in time for friends. Yet when we do, these relationships can satisfy the soul like no other. Aside from the pleasure of spirit-to-spirit connection, “Two are better than one . . . if one falls down, his friend can help him up” (Ecc. 4:9-10).

So how do we cultivate friendships? It begins with prayer. Whether we already have faithful friends, or need some trustworthy companions, we can present our friendship joys and challenges to God. The following prayers can help you celebrate and strengthen bonds with friends, as you learn to walk in God’s light together. For “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1 Jn. 1:17).

Prayers for Friendship Joys

There's nothing like a great friendship. But even the best of friends need to nurture, protect, and reaffirm their relationship. These prayers can help you strengthen the bonds between you and your friends.

1 • The Courage to Commit

Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD.

—1 Samuel 20:42

Lord, I live in an era of commitment phobia. People fear committing to marriage, jobs, churches, and even friendships. In fact, friends can be discarded like yesterday's newspaper, or at least demoted to last on a list. Yet Scripture models a different way: a covenant friendship with you and one another. Jesus laid down his life for his friends (Jn. 15:13). Jonathan vowed a lifelong friendship with David (1 Sam. 20:42). I know that not all my friends can offer me commitment, so today I ask for some who will. Please lead me to one or two friends who'll stick closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). In turn, help me to extend the same loyalty to them. Amen.

2 • Love Without Limits

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.—1 John 4:7

Lord, I know that you originated all things, including love. I long for your Spirit to flow through me, washing my friends in the security of unconditional acceptance. Teach me to love without limits, give without expectation, and listen without interruption. Help me to discern between surface sentiment and deep compassion; to distinguish between devotion and dependency; to separate intimacy from neediness. I want my friends to know that my love for them “always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (2 Cor. 13:7). Keep us “increasing and abounding in love toward one another” (1 Thess. 3:12). Amen.

3 • Soul Service

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.—Galatians 5:13

Lord, the apostle Paul said to serve one another in love. But how can I find time to serve my friends? My life is so busy, I'm not sure how to schedule in one more task. Still, the Bible advises Christians to serve wholeheartedly, as if we were serving you (Eph. 6:7). Show me how to focus less on me, and more on serving my friends. Open up sacred spaces of time for meeting their needs. Nudge me when one of them could use a helping hand. Develop my spontaneity, insightfulness, and generosity. Inspire me to be creative and practical. Infuse my soul with the joy of service, making it a natural response instead of a guilty obligation. Thank you for the privilege of serving the people I love. Amen.

4 • In Appreciation

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

—Ephesians 1:16

Lord, thank you for the gift of friendship. You knew that “two are better than one” (Ecc.4:9) and created humans for companionship. Even the godhead dwells as three-in-one, and we pattern after you. Thank you for my friends. As I look back, I can trace your loving hand moving them into my path, prompting us to forge relationships. I am grateful for what these friends add to my life: love, laughter, support, and motivation. I thank you for our similarities and differences; for their insights and thoughtfulness; for their steadfastness over the years. Remind me to express appreciation to my friends openly, tenderly, and frequently. I don’t want to take them for granted. Keep me in an attitude of gratitude. Amen.

5 • The Pleasure of Unity

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

—Ephesians 4:3

Lord, it brings you joy when friends are “like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (Phil. 2:2). Like you, I’m happy when I’m “in unity” with my circle of friends. Thank you for times that we work, play, share, and minister together with a spirit of cooperation and understanding. I love how this fills my soul, satisfying my desires for meaningful relationships. At the same time, I want to learn

that disagreements don't mean the breakup of friendships. When we don't understand one another's opinions, help us to agree to disagree and not carry grudges. Holy Spirit, flood our hearts so we can live in peace. "May the Lord of peace give [us] peace at all times and in every way" (2 Thess. 3:16). Amen.

6 • When Friends Pray

Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.—Matthew 18:19-20

Lord, teach me to pray with my friends. Impress on our hearts the need to "agree together" and bring our requests to you. Not just as individuals, but as a group. Thank you that when two or three of us intercede together, you join us. Lead us past our shyness, inexperience, and busyness into your presence. Help us to utter bold but simple prayers that pierce God's heart. As you taught the disciples, encourage us to pray for your kingdom and your will; for our daily bread and forgiveness of debts; for deliverance from temptation and evil (Mt. 6:9-13). Keep us consistent. Above all, stir us to praise you and offer thanks for our blessings. Amen.

7 • Cause to Celebrate

Rejoice with those who rejoice.—Romans 12:15

Lord, you told a parable about the woman who lost a coin. She swept the floors and corners, searching her house for the small treasure. When the woman found the money, she summoned her friends. “Rejoice with me, I have found my lost coin,” she exclaimed. Together, they celebrated. (Lk. 15:19.) I want to be that kind of friend, eager to rejoice with those who rejoice. It’s hard, though, when friends receive answers to prayer or unexpected rewards when I’m in the spiritual dumps. Inwardly I complain, “Lord, why not me?” I want to fling off self-pity and join the party. I want to sincerely rejoice. Besides, my friends are cause to celebrate whether or not favor shines on them. I want to applaud their innate, God-endowed splendor. Who they are is more than enough, in my estimation and yours. Amen.

8 • The Blessing of Humility

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.—Philippians 2:3

Lord, it seems like ambition rules the world. Get ahead. Trample the competition. Look out for yourself. We’re encouraged to be proud. Arrogance seeps into relationships. But Lord, you were humble. You entered the world as a helpless baby. You despised the cross, but humbled yourself to the point of death. You reign as the servant King. Following your example, help me to be a humble friend, considering others before myself. Don’t let me flaunt my talents or possessions or accomplishments in front of my friends. Humility allows us to just be ourselves, divested of outward trappings and enjoying one another from the inside out. Thank

you for the blessing of humility. Thank you for humble friendship. Amen.

9 • Daily Encouragement

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.—1 Thessalonians 5:11

Lord, your Word says to encourage one another daily (Heb. 3:13). What friend needs cheer today? How can I lift this dear person's spirits? What words can I say? What note can I write? What token could I give? Sometimes I think up acts of encouragement, but then forget—or don't find the time—to do them. Remind me to follow through and be a faithful encourager. You told us to treat others like we want to be treated (Mt. 7:12). Empower me to encourage friends like I want to be encouraged: with sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and no pat answers. May my heartening words and actions point them to you, and the encouragement of your Spirit. Amen.

10 • Simple Hospitality

Offer hospitality to one another.—1 Peter 4:9

Lord, too often I've defined the word "hospitality" from the pages of books and magazines. This makes me think of preparation, perfection, and pressure. However, the gospels describe your simple hospitality: sitting on the floor in modest homes, serving a bread-and-fish meal, or cooking on an open fire by the sea. You cared more about relationship than presentation. In my friendships, I want to give and receive

simple hospitality, too. Instill in me an open-home spirit. When friends stop by unexpectedly or we get together at the last minute, a cup of coffee given in your name can mean more than a planned menu. Amen.

Prayers for Friendship Challenges

No matter how wonderful the relationships, friends still conflict once in awhile. We're human and flawed. These prayers can turn your friendship challenges into opportunities for growth and understanding. Even better, praying and working through difficulties can draw you closer to one another.

11 • Keeping Confidences

A trustworthy man keeps a secret.—Proverbs 11:13

Lord, my friend betrayed my confidence. I'm angry and hurt, and don't know what to do. When I say information is confidential, why does the listener think telling "just one other person" is alright? I need wisdom to confront this friend about honoring my request for privacy. I want to speak calmly, listen carefully, and forgive this slip of the tongue. Looking back, I can think of times I haven't kept a confidence. Somehow I excused myself, thinking it wasn't important. Or that I told another person "out of concern." I didn't confess to my friend and ask for forgiveness, either. From now on, help me to be sensitive and trustworthy, keeping my friends' confidences. Amen.

12 • Speaking the Truth

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.—Ephesians 4:24

Lord, it's clear in the Ten Commandments that lying is sin (Ex. 20:16). Still, telling the truth is much harder than it sounds. I'm not referring to bold-faced lies, but the untruths that avoid conflict or hurting feelings. People ask me questions that I'm uncomfortable answering, so sometimes I dodge the truth. Like congratulating a friend on his engagement when I really think it's a mistake. Or telling a colleague her presentation is great when it clearly needs more work. Or insisting that I'm not upset with somebody when I really am. Forgive me for shading, stuffing, or omitting the truth. For you, there are no "big" or "little" lies, no playing with the truth. Teach me to "speak the truth in love" to my friends (Eph. 4:15). Amen.

13 • Healing One Another

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.—Matthew 5:16

Lord, help me and my friends to confess our sins to one another so we can be healed. Grant us the courage to admit our struggles, addictions, and temptations. Help us create a cocoon of acceptance so we can repeat together the ancient prayer

of Augustine: “Help us to turn and seek you; for you have not forsaken your creatures as we have forsaken you, our Creator. Let us turn and seek you, for we know you are here in our hearts, when we confess to you, when we cast ourselves upon you, and weep in your bosom, after all our rugged ways; and you gently wipe away our tears, and we weep the more for joy; because of you, Lord, who made us, do remake and comfort us.”¹ Amen.

14 • The Envious Heart

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.—Proverbs 14:30

Lord, I don't mean to, but sometimes I envy certain friends. Their lives seem easier than mine, with an abundance that I'll probably never know. Secretly, I get frustrated when they don't appreciate their jobs, possessions, relationships, or opportunities. To be honest, I don't understand why they deserve some things more than I do. Still, I adore these friends. I don't want to hurt them. Why am I both envious and caring? Shine your light on the brokenness in me. Forgive me, heal me, and change my divided heart. Wrap my soul in your peace and restore me to a pure and grateful love for these friends. Amen.

15 • Offending and Forgiving

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.—Colossians 3:13

¹ Vinita Hampton Wright, ed., *Prayers Across the Centuries* (Wheaton, IL: Shaw Publishers, 1993), 59-60.

Lord, create in me a forgiving heart. Spare me and my friends from the hypersensitivity that's easily offended. Ancient wisdom says, "He who covers over an offense promotes love" (Prov. 17:9). Teach us to overlook small irritants that don't matter, but to discuss and pardon grievances that could erode our relationships. Safeguard us from using our past sins against each other, digging up offenses we've already forgiven. Stop us from judging, criticizing, or gossiping about one another. Shape us with kindness, patience, and gentleness. Help us to honestly admit our own mistakes and ask for forgiveness. Bless us with unending fresh starts. Amen.

16 • A Friend Caught in Sin

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.—Galatians 6:1

Lord, when a friend gets caught in sin, fortify me with compassion and perseverance to journey with him through it. According to your Word, I want to restore my friend gently with truthful insights and effective support. I'll walk with this struggler as you lead him toward repentance and change, realizing it's usually a process instead of an instant transformation. Enable me to provide a way of escape for my friend when temptation strikes again, comforting and encouraging him with Scripture, prayer, and the promise of your grace. Protect me from falling into the same sin myself. Amen.

17 • Starting Over

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.—Matthew 5:24

Lord, I need to reconcile with my friend. Even if we can't be close anymore, bring us to peace with one another. Help us to pray these wise words: "O God, you know our desperate need for your gift of understanding and forgiveness to live in harmony with our [friends and] neighbors. . . . We confess that we have nourished grievances and irritations which we ought to forgive; we have sinfully thought our differences too great for reconciliation; [we are] wounded by our selfishness, prejudice, and pride. . . . Grant us the courage to forgive as we hope to be forgiven; and in your mercy heal our divisions and make us whole, together, in the love which we have from you" (from a prayer by William Booth).² Amen.

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² *Prayers Across the Centuries*, 124.