



Make new friends

& keep **the old**

We never outgrow our need for friends.

BY KATHRYN HAUZEISEN

MANY YEARS AGO, AS A GIRL SCOUT, I remember singing a friendship song. You might recognize it: “Make new friends, but keep the old. One is silver, and the other gold.”

My first friend was Susan, my next-door neighbor. We walked to and from grade school for six years and spent hours at each other’s

homes. When my family moved to a suburb a few miles away, it might as well have been to another country for all the times Susan and I got to see each other after that. Our parents didn’t see the necessity of chauffeuring pre-teen girls to visit each other.

Joyce, the first girl to extend a welcome mat for me when I was

the new student in our seventh-grade class, is still one of my friends today. Joyce and I spent nearly every Friday night together at her home or mine until we went to different colleges. We now live in different states and have only seen one another in person a few times since our early married years. However, as she noted in a

follow-up email after a long chat the other day, “We pick right up where we left off.” That we do.

Picking up where we left off is the foundation of any great friendship. The years apart provide endless possibilities for stories to share, whether by letter, phone or visit. Such friendships are rare—like gold. I once read that friendships fall into three concentric circles. We may have a few friends in the innermost circle, as Jesus did with his closest disciples. I consider these my 2 a.m. friends. If a serious situation arose in the middle of the night, I could call such a friend, and she’d help me.

The next ring out are early morning friends like Jesus’ disciples who stayed close to him. These are people I wait to call until after the first cup of morning coffee. But I call, whether my news is wonderfully exciting or life-threatening tragic. When I have personal news, I’m as likely to call them as I would my own family. Indeed, they are like adopted family. These friends are silver.

One day I got a call from a woman I’ve never met. She was the granddaughter of one of my silver friends. She called to inform me that Eleanor had just died. I was on her list of people to notify. Eleanor and I often spent time together when we lived in the same community. She died a thousand miles away from where I was living at the time. It was bittersweet to have such a dear friend die when geography and

finances prohibited me from going to pay my respects in person. Sadly, the people around me now never got to know her and the significant part she played in an earlier chapter of my life.

Then there are casual friends, acquaintances, like the many people Jesus befriended wherever he went. These are people I meet in a new career position or a new community. They may someday become close friends, or they may remain pleasant people I know, but not well. Some friends move in and out of these circles. Only a few remain in the innermost circle for life.

I’ve moved many times. With each move, I’ve made a few friends I dreaded leaving. Some I thought I’d stay in touch with turned out to be “location friends.” We were close when we could spend time together in person, but when that was no longer feasible, the friendship faded over time.

When I moved a couple of years ago, I actively sought out new friends. The first new friendship I forged was with Lisa. Lisa and her nearly 90-year-old mother moved into an independent senior living apartment complex at the same time I did. I invited Lisa to my apartment for a glass of wine. After exchanging short versions of our long lives, we soon became fast friends. Our Sunday morning routine was to meet for coffee in the community library before I’d head off to the new church I’d begun attending. When her

mother needed the help of an assisted living place, Lisa moved away, but near enough that we often meet up for a meal or to attend an activity. I miss our Sunday morning coffee chats, but I’m grateful we can still see one another.

It is challenging to make new friends in a congregation where people have known one another for decades. There is simply no way to catch up with their years of shared experience. Yet if we are willing to venture into a room or sanctuary of strangers, gradually some strangers become acquaintances. Over time, some of those acquaintances may become dear friends.

One of my new friends, Biruta, knows all about making friends in a new place. She immigrated to this country as a child, not speaking English. I attribute her excellent friend-making skills in part to her childhood experience of being surrounded by other students with whom she could not communicate at first.

On my first Sunday at the congregation where I am now a member, I asked Biruta if I might sit next to her. She scooted over and went above and beyond what typically happens when two strangers share a pew. She instantly made me feel welcome and invited me to come back the following week. When I returned, she told me how glad she was to see me again. On my third visit, someone else was sitting next to her, so I took a seat further

back. When Biruta spotted me during the exchange of peace, her face literally lit up. This woman could teach a course on the art of making friends.

Many friends have disappeared from my life, yet I cherish their friendship no less. These friends were there at critical moments. Chris was with me the morning my son-in-law called to

let me know daughter Carol had safely delivered our first grandson into the world. Helen befriended me when my mother was fading away in her final years. As a retired nurse, Helen supported me through tough decisions about how to best respond to my mother's changing needs. Chris and I have both moved and lost contact. Helen has joined my

mother in the next life. I thank God they crossed my path when they did.

What new friendships may yet develop in these later years of life? I'm curious to find out. We never outgrow our need for friends. Friends help us maintain overall physical, mental and spiritual health. Learning how to make friends is an essential life skill. 🌿



How to **befriend someone**

Friends don't just magically appear. We make friends from among the strangers all around us. Since no two people are alike, no two people approach making friends the same way. Here are seven suggestions:

- 1. Accept variations.** Even Jesus, who we sing about in the hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus," experienced varying levels of friendships in his earthly life. We cannot be equally close to every friend. It's normal for friendships to ebb and flow over the course of our lives.
- 2. Take the initiative.** Jesus often approached people. Bravely striking up a conversation with strangers may lead to an eventual friendship or it might fizzle from lack of verbal fuel, but we won't know until we try.
- 3. Be responsive.** Jesus listened to people to learn more about their situations and needs. Listening is a vital part of any healthy relationship. Asking people to talk about themselves helps people feel seen and heard.
- 4. Need something?** Even Jesus occasionally needed someone to do something for him. Prepare a place for supper. Borrow a donkey. Keep him company. Asking someone for reasonable help (directions, recommendations, a cup of sugar) lets them know they are important.
- 5. Say "thank you" often.** Send a physical thank you note through the mail or a "thinking of you" note via text or email.
- 6. Offer something.** Offer to watch a child or give a ride somewhere. Offer to do some small tasks to free up a friend's time. Offer a new recipe you tried out or share an interesting article about something you've discussed.
- 7. Pray for the people you care about.** Prayer is a powerful, effective way to stay connected when you can't be together any other way. You can also pray that God will send the friend you need, at a time when you most need them.