

A Praying Friend

God is my witness . . . how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times. (Romans 1:9–10)

Scripture: Romans 1:8–12

Song: “I Love Your Church, O Lord”

I love to camp, and a campfire is one of my favorite parts of the experience. It is almost impossible for me to sit beside the fire and not poke and prod it frequently to turn the logs or watch the sparks fly upward. Occasionally the errant log rolls away from the fire, and if I am not quick to notice, it will lie against the circled stones until it goes out and turns cold.

The apostle Paul understood this principle. He knew that the followers of Christ who maintained fellowship with each other and encouraged each other would burn brightly together in a world of spiritual darkness. A believer who chose to drift from the community of faith would be destined to occupy a world that is spiritually apathetic or cold—a world that could easily extinguish faith.

In Romans 1, Paul sent a “love note” to the believers in Rome. He told them that their faith was influencing the whole world. He wrote that they were always on his mind and always in his prayers. He let them know that it was his heart’s desire to be among them, so that he could encourage them and so that they could do the same for him. Paul reminds us that the fire of faith burns brightest when those who love Jesus encourage one another.

Father, help me look for ways to consistently encourage others through my words, actions, and prayers. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

June 15–21. **Valerie Bryant Bennett** lives in Tennessee. She is a retired educator who loves family, the outdoors, and her happy little mutt, Boomer.

Choose Your Friends Wisely

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”
(1 Corinthians 15:33)

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:30–34

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

A little country church I attended sponsored an annual apple festival to raise money for missions. One year a friend talked me into managing the making of 1,500 fried apple pies for the event. Every Monday for several weeks, eager volunteers created yummy little pies to be frozen then later cooked at the event. I learned many principles during this experience: one cannot handle large quantities of sugary cooked apples without getting sticky; dough can leave hands gummy; and, most certainly, flour adheres to every surface. Even aprons didn't prevent us from leaving with blotches of white flour on our sleeves, pants, and even faces.

The apostle Paul understood this. He knew that spending time in the presence of worldly people would have an effect. One might have pure motives when joining them but leave “sticky” with bad attitudes or “floured” with negative thoughts. A friend who gossips or a co-worker who is critical can influence our own behavior and actions.

What Paul told the Corinthians was an undeniable truth: “Bad company corrupts good character.” A person who spends time in the presence of ungodly behavior (or messy pie makers) will walk away displaying evidence of it.

Father, help me choose friends who reflect the character of Jesus, and help me be good company for others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

A Friend Closer than a Brother

One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
(Proverbs 18:24)

Scripture: Proverbs 18:18–24

Song: “What a Friend We Have in Jesus”

I recently read a random online exchange between a high school student and several adults of varying ages. The student had a small group of good friends at school, but he saw others with large groups of friends. He felt sad that he wasn't as popular. The comments he received were amazingly similar, despite the difference in ages and backgrounds of the responders. All agreed that this student's few close friends were far more valuable than large groups of friends. “Quality over quantity” was their advice.

The verse for today affirms this truth. The prodigal son in Luke 15 may have enjoyed the companionship of many others in his wild living, but he journeyed home alone. Jonathan and David, however, developed a friendship so close that “Jonathan became one in spirit with David” (1 Samuel 18:1), and after Jonathan died, David took care of his son.

In the family unit, there is an implied loyalty because of connections established at birth, but in a friendship, we freely choose to be loyal. As the proverb indicates, many friends cannot outweigh the one friend who “sticks closer than a brother.”

Father, please help me show true love and loyalty to any person who calls me friend. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Friends Stick Together

“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 1:16)

Scripture: Ruth 1:11–18

Song: “Blessed Be the Tie That Binds”

The story of Ruth and Naomi tells of a woman who lost everything she loved and the daughter-in-law who refused to leave her side. Ruth’s self-sacrifice and steadfast love helped Naomi face the days ahead with hope.

One Christmas, my children and I also experienced the power of friendship in the face of loss. The day before Christmas Eve, two men broke into our home while we were out. My older daughter arrived home to find the glass broken on our back door, the Christmas tree in shambles on the floor, and all the gifts we had bought gone. That afternoon, I shared this with my best friend. The next morning, to our surprise, that friend and two others stood at our door with shopping bags full of presents. The same day, a man I didn’t know called to say he had heard what happened. He and his wife, instead of exchanging presents, wanted to buy each of us a Christmas present. Because of the overwhelming friendship expressed to us, my children said it was the best Christmas they had ever experienced.

Naomi’s loss far exceeded ours, but in both instances, the love embodied in friendship brought light into a dark place. No gift we can offer someone is more valuable.

Father, You demonstrated sacrificial love through Your Son. Help me sacrifice my own needs to fill the needs of others and to be present in the lives of my friends. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Friends Love Radically

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

Scripture: John 15:9–17

Song: “Oh, How He Loves You and Me”

In July of 2022, the Webb telescope began sending new pictures of space back to earth. The beauty of the universe was astounding. Job chapter 26 lists other wonders that offer a glimpse of the Creator. In verse 14, he makes the profound statement that these miraculous sights are only “the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him!” Imagine—the miracles of nature and the universe are only a *whisper* of the loving God who spoke creation into being.

That same incomprehensible God demonstrated His love for us by sending His only Son, Jesus, to earth. Jesus showed us the Father, and as He approached death, He told His disciples, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

The God of the universe sent Christ to express the greatest love—the love in which a person gives their own life for a friend. But Jesus did more. I wasn’t His friend when He died for me. I was wrapped up in myself, more interested in my ways than His. I didn’t seek Jesus. He sought me. Truly, His death on the cross for someone like me reveals the greatest love the world has ever known.

Father, thank You that Jesus’ love was so great that He gave His sinless life for mine. May my love for others be as selfless. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Sworn Friendship

And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as himself. (1 Samuel 20:17)

Scripture: 1 Samuel 20:16–17, 32–34, 42

Song: “God Be with You till We Meet Again”

The story of David and Jonathan might well be called the story of Jonathan and David. Jonathan initiated the friendship, courageously protected his friend David, and sacrificed his own ordained future for David. Jonathan was King Saul’s son and was to be the next king of Israel. Scripture says that Jonathan’s spirit became one with David’s on the day they met. Jonathan felt selfless love for David and gave David his robe, tunic, and weapons, symbolically offering his right of kingship to his friend.

David felt the same love toward Jonathan, but David was in crisis. He went to Jonathan when Saul, jealous of David’s successes in battle, sought to kill him. Jonathan took the risk of standing between his father (the king) and his friend David. More than once, he fiercely protected David from Saul’s ardent determination to kill him, and in his final rescue of David, Jonathan made a covenant with him then sent him away to safety.

Why would Jonathan pass his right to the throne to David? Why would he face the wrath of his father and risk his own life in defying Saul to protect his friend? In verse 42, we find the answer: the Lord is at the center of their bond, a deep bond of love that would last forever.

Father, help me be a faithful friend to others. May I always put You at the center of who I am and what I do. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

Grief for a Friend

“Saul and Jonathan—in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted.” (2 Samuel 1:23a)

Scripture: 2 Samuel 1:17, 19–27

Song: “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind”

As I grow older, I attend more funerals. Sometimes the sadness of those moments is lifted by the eulogy said for the who died. Often, I listen to a pastor or friend of the deceased describe qualities they cherished in that person or special experiences they shared. Those make me smile.

At no funeral, though, have I ever heard someone give a moving eulogy over their enemy. David is the only person I know throughout history who did that. King Saul was David’s most relentless adversary. Saul repeatedly tried to kill David, at times almost succeeding. Many of the psalms David wrote were pleas for God to save him from Saul’s hand. And yet when Saul died in battle, along with his son Jonathan, David wept for both. Jonathan was like a brother to David, so we can understand David’s grief in losing him. But Saul?

David wept for Saul because he believed Saul had been anointed by God—but the essence of David’s grief flowed from a heart that reflected God’s grace and mercy. David’s eulogy demonstrated amazing kindness and fulfilled Christ’s commandment to love our enemies. May our hearts be more like his.

Father, create in me a heart like David’s, able to show love to my friends and mercy to those who hurt me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.