

Dear  
Best  
Friends,  
Where  
Are You?

Stephanie May Wilson

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*For  
every  
story*

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## Dear friend,

Thank you for meeting me here. As I write to you, I'm sitting on a sunny window seat overlooking a corn field in Indiana. It's funny where we find ourselves sometimes.

That's what this book is about, what the small group guide you're going to be diving into is about. It's about finding ourselves someplace unexpected—someplace lonelier and more disconnected than we ever really wanted to be. But mostly it's about connecting.

This eBook and the workbook that follows are deeply personal to me because they chronicle a season I had to dig through the hard way. They're the story of how I found myself alone and disconnected—far away from the people who always felt like an anchor to me. And they're the story of how I found my way through.

I don't know where you are today, but if you're picking up this eBook, I'm guessing you're feeling a bit lonelier than you'd like to be. Maybe you moved somewhere new, or are starting a brand new season of life. Maybe your friends moved away or maybe you've never quite had the community you've always longed for.

Either way, wherever you are, it's a perfectly okay place to be. Something I'm learning is we all find ourselves in these places. Rarely do we feel as connected as we'd like to be. Rarely do we say, "My love cup is overflowing. No more for me, thank you!"

We're all here—all looking to connect, to befriend, to know and be known, to surround and be surrounded.

So welcome. Wherever you are, welcome. I'm so glad you're here. This is a beautiful, wonderful journey we're going on together.

I can't wait to get started.

*All my love,  
Stephanie*

# Introduction

It was a cold December night in Colorado, but I was fairly certain my heart couldn't be any warmer. We were home for Christmas, my new husband and I, and the streets were dusted with glistening snow. The air seemed to crackle with anticipation. Christmas was coming. Connection was coming. The warmly lit windows seemed to wink at me like an old friend as we drove by. "Welcome home," they said.

I barely waited for the car to stop before I was out the door, slamming it behind me as I sprinted up the walk. We were at my best friend's house. The familiarity of the pavement under my pounding feet felt like heaven. My people were close by. I could feel it. I could also hear their whoops of laughter echoing into the night. Their laughter always rises to the top in unmistakable bellows.

I flung open the door, not even pausing to knock, and took a few running steps before I tackled Kelsey and Michelle in the kitchen. There were no pleasantries, no small talk. The missing pieces of our hearts weren't missing anymore. I was home. We were together.

I don't normally get to do this. I don't get to stop by after work, or curl up on her couch for a Saturday girl's night in. I don't live down the street, or across town even. I live an airplane ride away.

1,171 miles away to be exact.

So with our time limited, I was determined to soak in every bit of this night.

Kelsey swirled into hostess mode immediately. She had the table set for 7 and the menu perfectly planned. She was hosting a “throwback to Spain” night, in honor of our time studying abroad together.

She had all of our favorites on the menu, and as she sautéed and stirred and simmered, the kitchen began to smell like the far away home we desperately missed.

The meal was perfection, as were the faces that surrounded the table. But my very favorite part happened next—when the dishes were still dirty and the boys headed downstairs to watch football, or funny videos, or whatever it is boys do.

We refilled our wine glasses and trooped up the stairs to Kelsey’s room, crawling immediately up and into her bed. We flung ourselves across it, and overlapped like freshly cleaned linens on laundry day. We were curled up and safe in there, in a heap of best friends and mutual understanding.

The conversation unfolded immediately, a braid of funny stories, and updates, and serious requests for advice. We slipped easily from one into the next, pulling the questions, doubts, and anecdotes out of our pockets we’d been saving for that very night.

We said the honest things that night. We admitted the things we were really afraid of, shared what was really going on. We allowed each other into our lives. For awhile, and with their help, our burdens didn’t feel quite so heavy.

I looked around at the faces on that bed—the faces that have brought me through everything, the ones who have influenced me and shaped me more than any people on the planet—and my heart felt fuller than it had in a long time.

I can’t imagine a space more sacred than Kelsey’s bed that evening. I can’t imagine anything more life-giving, more comforting, or more fun than being curled up and surrounded by a group of women who know you deeply, and love you relentlessly.

I closed my eyes for a long time as they talked and laughed. I was trying to memorize the moment, wanting to hold onto it forever. I was hoping that maybe if I didn’t open them, the night couldn’t end and we wouldn’t have to leave.

When my husband and I had finally said our goodbyes, we climbed in our car and

drove away from that cozy little house. I cried the whole way home, and he didn't even try to stop me.

I cried because I knew that sacred thing, that life-changing friendship I had in Colorado was absent from my life in Nashville. They were here and I was there, and my heart felt like it was going to crack under the distance and the loss of it all.

## The Move to Nashville

Carl and I got married and moved to Nashville just after the Fourth of July. In a sweaty swirl of love and adventure and family and transition, we melded our lives together. Then we took that melded life and packed it into a U-Haul, unpacking it somewhere new entirely.

When we first got to Nashville, I was full of hope. It felt like the land of opportunity. Every unfamiliar face seemed like a new friend just waiting to happen. We were too busy to consider the weight or the difficulty of the transition into a new life.

We unpacked, and wrote “thank you” notes, and reviewed our registry and all the gifts that piled to the ceiling in our spare bedroom. We bought and rearranged furniture. We painted the walls even though we knew we’d have to paint them white again at the end of the year.

Our lives were a whirlwind of wedding aftermath, moving, and excitement as we prepared for a new life we knew nothing about.

But then one day, unexpectedly, we were done. We were moved in. The gifts were exchanged. The walls were painted. There was nothing left to do.

With our schedules and our minds suddenly free, it took no time at all for the weight of the transition, and an intense loneliness to set in.

In an instant, I lost all hope and perspective. I couldn’t picture how this place could



possibly feel like home, how I could ever feel connected. I was right in the middle of the loss and transition of it all and I couldn't see a way out.

I don't know if this has ever happened to you, but it seems like change is much more romantic when you're peering in at it from the outside. Transition seems like no big deal. It seems wild and romantic to move to a new city.

But when you're in the midst of it, when you're in the midst of finding a new grocery store, searching for a new normal, and getting lost no matter where you try to go, the romance fades a bit and the reality takes its place.

The reality of living in a new city set in that day with a heavy thud, and I found myself deeply, deeply lonely.

Coffee shops no longer held promise of new friendships. They no longer felt like a wild frontier of people I was just waiting to love. I felt like a stranger, like a visitor, or more deeply, like a ghost. It felt like nobody could see me, because nobody really knew me. It didn't matter if I was here or not. Nashville wouldn't know the difference.

I'd text my best friends every few days begging them to pray for me. "My heart is breaking," I'd tell them, trying (and failing) to not be melodramatic.

But it was. My heart ached with loneliness, and I had no idea how to create a new community from scratch. Not a clue.

## I'm Not the Only One

When I'm in the midst of something hard, I don't always write about it. Sometimes writing helps. It puts the frustration and hurt in neat little rows. Writing helps me sort through it somehow. But sometimes it doesn't and the process of writing just reveals how much of a mess my insides are.

But this time something was different. I decided to write, and to share the mess that was swirling within me. I wrote a blog post about trying to start over in a whole new place, and took a deep breath before I pressed "publish."

The reaction blew me away. Email after email came pouring into my inbox. The comments stacked up, and "thank you's" abounded.

I wasn't the only one who'd recently moved and was trying to form a community out of nothing. I wasn't the only one who felt like a freshman all over again—not knowing where to set down her lunch tray in the cafeteria, scanning the unfamiliar faces for the kind reassurance of a friend.

And the more I've thought about it, the more this makes sense.

Our world these days is more transient than it's ever been. The days of living in one town forever with the same exact people are, by and large, over. People go on adventures, and move to different cities. Jobs take us all over the place. We move just for fun.

Sometimes we're the ones who plan on staying, the ones who plant our roots deep in our hometown. And then we're left behind when our friends are pulled away by new jobs, or transfers, or a desire to live somewhere else.

Whatever the reason, we end up feeling like freshman far more times than the few we signed up for, and it's hard!

So what do we do about it?

Unfortunately, many of us do nothing. We don't know how to make new friends and so we don't. We dive further into our careers, or just accept that this is how adult life is—disconnected. Or we cling to the people who are easiest to cling to, whether they're good friends to us or not.

We don't tackle the problem head on, we cope. It seems like the smartest, safest thing to do at the time.

I totally get it. I felt the same way.

But I couldn't do that this time.

I couldn't give up on the idea of having best friends here in Nashville because I knew what real community felt like. I knew it could change absolutely everything.

I knew the feeling of being surrounded, and snuggled in, known, and deeply loved in the most remote corners of my heart. And I was miserable without it. I didn't know how long I could survive without those kinds of friendships in my life.

So with my heart resolved, and a U-Haul's worth of fear, I decided to tackle the problem head on. I decided that I was going to intentionally make friends here in Nashville, come hell or high water.

# What I'm Going to Share with You Today

What I'm going to share with you today are some really practical tools I've learned the hard way. I'll share what I discovered while going through this process on my own—what worked, and what didn't.

I'm sharing these tricks as a fellow traveler, which makes this so much better, I think. It never makes much sense to take advice from people who haven't been there—who haven't walked the road themselves.

I'm not interested in taking advice from people who have never struggled. It's like having a math tutor who is one of those frustratingly smart people who always just “got math.” (I didn't.)

I want advice from someone who failed and figured it out, someone who found themselves in my shoes, in my situation, and dug a way through.

In Nashville, I found myself lonely and disconnected, a freshman in a new city. Slowly but surely I've begun to build something new and something beautiful. I want you to have that too, so I'm going to share how I did it.

Are you ready to get started?

# The 10 Things You Need to know When Creating a community from Scratch

## 1. Making friends isn't a passive thing. You have to get it!

Have you ever heard someone talk about waiting for their soulmate? I get the sentiment behind it. I mean, soulmates aren't something that happens on our timeline necessarily. But the whole "waiting" thing always struck me as odd.

I always wondered what that waiting would look like. I pictured myself sitting on the couch, watching Netflix marathons, and eating frozen pizzas, waiting for Mr. Right to ring the doorbell.

Maybe his car broke down right in front of my house. And maybe his cell phone was dead, and he left his car charger at home. And maybe of all the houses on the block he decides that mine is the one he's going to walk up to. And maybe he knocks on my door, breaking me out of my Netflix trance.

The problem with this scenario is that it usually doesn't work that way. God doesn't normally drop someone into our lap like that. He usually invites us to participate.

But not only that, if that scenario did happen, picture what would happen next!

I don't know how you watch Netflix, but if a stranded Prince Charming came over to my house unannounced and knocked on my door, chances are I wouldn't look like Cinderella.

My hair would be mostly up, with some random pieces falling down. I wouldn't have showered that day, and there wouldn't be a shred of makeup anywhere near my face. I'd also probably be wearing lumpy grey sweatpants, because the lumpy kind are always the comfiest, and comfy is my chief goal when marathoning Gilmore Girls.

If Prince Charming showed up at my house and found me that way, he probably would have headed straight for the phone and then high-tailed it out of there.

Thankfully, that's not the way it happened for me. It took far more effort.

That's the way I think it works with friendships too.

When we move to a new place, we wait with expectation as if a group of our best friends will just wander past and invite us to join them. We think it's that easy—instant conversation, instant connection, instant BFF. But I'm not sure it works like that.

It takes more effort on our part. It takes some participation, some action.

So that's where I think we need to start.

If we're waiting around for our best friends to wander by and invite us to join in, it might not happen. But there are specific things we can do to put ourselves in the optimal position to meet great, like-minded girls who might just become those best friend, soul-mates we were looking for all along.

So step one is to get in the mindset of taking action. Prepare your heart to make an effort here, to really put work into meeting people and putting yourself out there. Not only will that protect you from the disappointment you feel when best friends don't magically appear on your doorstep, but the understanding that we have a part to play is incredibly empowering.

You can do something to change your social situation. You can foster community. All you need to make that happen is within you right this very second. Isn't that exciting?

## 2. Keep your door open

When I moved up to college, I felt a bit like I do now. I had a few friends, so there

would be a few familiar faces in the crowd. But the crowd was large, and for all intents and purposes, I was starting this friendship thing from scratch.

Hearing about my nerves, a friend of mine—a few years ahead of me in school—gave me this advice: For the first several months of school, keep the door to your dorm room open as often as possible.

By keeping your door open, you're inviting people to poke their heads in and say hi. You're declaring, loud and clear, that you're open to drop-ins, quick hellos, and new friends however they may come.

I used this advice, and I have to say, it worked.

I left the door to my dorm room open as often as I could (whenever I was actually in there, of course), and made lots of friends this way. My open door communicated that I was friendly, that I wasn't closed off, that I was interested in meeting new people and making new friends. And I was. So I did.

As the new kid on the Nashville campus, I've been considering that advice all over again. What would it mean to leave my door open as often as possible?

Living in the real world (and having a bit more than a school-owned mini fridge to my name), leaving my physical door open isn't quite an option. But there are other ways we can keep our doors open. Here's one easy way to get started:

## **Don't put in your ear buds**

When you're boarding an airplane, just after you've found your seat and stowed your baggage in the overhead compartment, it's common knowledge that you have two choices. You have to make your choice quickly, otherwise you could get caught in a compromising position. We've all been there.

You have to decide: Ear buds or no ear buds. Ear buds are the universal signal for, "Please don't talk to me." They're like small talk repellent. They say, "Excuse me nice lady sitting next to me, but I don't want to see pictures of your grandkids. Thanks so much, but maybe try the guy on your other side."

No ear buds is like an invitation. After all, it's weird sitting shoulder to shoulder with

strangers for hours without saying at least something—“Hi,” or “Are you going home, or visiting?” or “I wish the captain would turn off the fasten seat belt sign. I really have to pee.”

We have this choice in life too. As you’re standing in line at Starbucks, what are you doing? Are you glued to your phone—another universal sign for, “Please don’t talk to me?” Or are you looking around, noticing the other patrons, maybe making small talk about the line, or the weather, or if they’ve tried the newest flavored latte.

It’s tempting, and easier, to put in our ear buds. It’s easier not to talk, to keep to ourselves, to hide rather than have to come up with something to say.

Talking to strangers is daunting, especially if you’re an introvert. I’m an extrovert, but the thought of making small talk with strangers still makes me squirm.

But when making friends in a new city, every encounter matters. Every person, every interaction is a chance to make a new friend, to make a connection, to know and be known. You never know when the barista making your latte might just be your next best friend. Or when the girl in the grocery aisle might introduce you to a whole new group of friends.

Be friendly, make the most of every interaction. It’s scary, absolutely, but if we want to connect to new people, we have to keep our door open.

### **3. Understand that you have something to offer**

One of the hardest things about being a freshman again in life is that it seems like everyone else already has their friends. You walk into a restaurant and see a crowded table full of girls who look like they could be your best friends, but there’s definitely not an empty seat at their table.

It’s easy to look around and assume that everyone else’s calendar is full, and that you’re the only one sitting home on a Friday night wishing you had someone to call.

That belief is just another way of saying, “You already have friends, so I’m just not going to bother.” But I’m going to tell you right now that’s not the case.



A few years ago, I moved to Georgia and to work at a missions organization with about 80, 20-something, like-minded, potential friends. It sounds like a friend buffet, doesn't it?

You'd think so, but about six months into living there, I found myself sitting home on a Friday night feeling incredibly lonely. I kept thinking about all the people I worked with and how they were certainly hanging out together and having fun.

I didn't have anything going on that night, and I didn't have a set-in-stone group of friends, but I assumed everyone else did. Instagram seemed to say that they did.

So I didn't try. I stayed home, laid low, and did my own thing, until one cold February day, I decided I needed more friends.

My roommate and I decided to throw a "Nothing Party"—a party for absolutely no reason on a Friday night. It wasn't expensive, we made it pot luck and told everyone to bring their coziest food, and we invited anyone we could find. We invited our whole department, anyone we ran into in the hallway, and told them we were having a "Nothing Party," and that we'd love for them to come.

On Friday evening, we heard a knock at the door. Pretty soon, our apartment was bursting at the seams with friendly faces that looked so relieved to be cozied up with friends and out of the cold.

When the night was winding down, I got what felt like a thousand hugs, and everyone echoed the same exact thing. "I am so glad you did this. I always feel like everyone else has people to hang out with but me. It was really nice to be surrounded tonight. We should do this again."

And so we did.

I had assumed that everyone else had enough friends. Everyone else had somewhere to go, people to surround and love them. But the truth was that very few people will ever say, "I have way too many friends. I'm not taking applications."

Most people have a few good friends, but would love more.

That means there is room for you!

You have something people want. You are a friendly face. You are a warm smile, and a tight hug. You are a house to host a Bachelor viewing party, or a friend to go to coffee with. You are someone who will listen when they need someone to talk to, and laugh with when they just need a buddy.

You have love, and friendship, and hospitality to give, and people need that. People everywhere need that.

So instead of walking into your new city and thinking that everyone already has their friend groups, remember that everybody could use another great friend, and that great friend might as well be you!

One last example, before we move on to number four.

I recently saw on Instagram that one of my favorite writers was moving to Nashville. She's hugely popular and people absolutely love her. She could have dinner with any number of people here in town if she wanted to.

But having just moved to Nashville, and fully sympathizing with the chaos of moving, I decided to reach out to her anyway. I also had a sneaking suspicion that everyone would assume she had way too many friends, and that she probably didn't have as many people actually reaching out to her as I thought.

So I sent her an email. I told her I know how stressful moving is, and I asked her if I could bring her and her family dinner.

She wrote back to me the most gushing, bubbly, grateful email I've ever received, and echoed the exact thing I'd thought to be true. "People assume we already have friends, but the truth is we only know a few people here. We would LOVE to have dinner!"

That's how it starts. We all need more people in our lives. There's room for you. People need what you have to give.

## 4. Finding Friends 101

But how do I find these friends to begin with?

That's a great question. It's not like there's a store in the mall where you go to buy friends. They're not available for two day shipping on Amazon Prime. So many of us are gazing around our city wondering where we should go to find the friends we're looking for. Where the heck do we start?

Although it's certainly daunting, I firmly believe there are potential friends for us in any city, no matter where we live. We just have to know where to start.

## **Step 1: Use Your Network**

One of the best ways to make connections in a new city is to leverage the ways we're already connected. Your social media presence, and your friends elsewhere can and should be instrumental in the process of you finding your people in a whole new place.

Let's start by talking about social media.

### **a. Social media**

Social media is brilliant because it allows us to reach people far beyond our physical boundaries.

One of the first things I did after arriving in Nashville was post about it on Instagram and Facebook. I reached out to my readers, followers, and far-away friends to tell them where we moved. Immediately people started commenting. Not only did we connect with people who also lived in Nashville — people we hadn't talked to in a long time, or people who had moved to Nashville without us realizing it. But other people connected us to their friends. We got comments like, "Hey @\_\_\_\_\_, they just moved to Nashville! Y'all should be friends!"

It was such an encouraging place to start.

Another way to use social media to your advantage is to join common interest groups online. There are Facebook groups for every city and every interest. It's pretty amazing. "Bloggers of Denver." "Christians of St. Louis. The internet is the ultimate meeting spot for people with particular interests and beliefs. My high school had a "drumming on buckets club" and I'm sure there's something like that to be found online too. There's something for everyone!

Put your move out there on social media, and look for people with common interests in your city. I've become great friends with people I've met over Instagram. The connective power of the internet is truly amazing.

### **b. Friends of friends**

The second way to use your network is to connect with friends of friends. When you talk to people about where you're moving, ask if they know anyone in your new city. Chances are you'll have some friends of friends who live near you that you could connect with.

We met some of our favorite people in Nashville this way. A friend of my husband's sent us a group email mandating that we hang out. We listened, and now they're some of our all-time favorite people.

But here's the kicker in all of this: You have to follow up. When someone connects you, you have to reach out and email that person. Get a date on the calendar, make that coffee happen. Your friends of friends and your network can only do so much. You have to take it from there.

I made it a point to connect with everyone recommended to me when we first moved here. I ended up going on some awkward friend dates as a result (more on that later), but was also able to meet some truly awesome women.

Ask around, put it out there online, be willing to meet up with friends of friends, and you'll have a great jumping off point for community.

## **Step 2. Look for Like-Minded Watering Holes**

The second way to find friends in a new city is to go where those people hang out. I'm not talking about stalking a bar or a coffee shop looking for friends, although I suppose you can do that too. Instead, I'm talking about joining groups, looking for meet-ups, and going to events.

Meetup.com is a great way for people with common interests to connect to each other. There are lots of great conferences around, speakers that come to talk, or fundraisers

for various causes. Churches are also a great way to meet people. Pick a church and get involved in their small groups, or house churches. Go to their mixers, or to their Christmas party.

If you're an avid reader, do a quick Google search for book clubs in your area. If you're a mom, look for groups for moms, or go to the parent nights at your kid's schools.

Think about where you and your friends would spend time if you were established in the city, and then go and be a part of those events or activities.

Especially if it's a group that meets regularly, you're sure to meet some wonderful people who you can form friendships with.

## 5. Never say “no” to an invitation

I told you that we met some of our favorite friends through a friend of a friend. Well, what I didn't tell you is that the first time they invited us to hang out, we almost said no.

They were going canoeing down a river somewhere west of the city, and we woke up just an hour before the event was scheduled to start. We wanted to stay in bed. It was a drizzly day, and I'm not the first to suggest outdoor activities ever, so we were really waffling on our decision.

Finally, we decided to say yes. Neither of us wanted to go, but we felt like we should. We knew it would take some intentional action and saying a lot of “yes” if we wanted to build a community here, so we decided to start that day.

First of all, canoeing was a blast. It was a gorgeous day. The drizzle kept us cool and the bugs away as we paddled down the river. The scenery was incredible, but the people were the very best part.

The group was funny and interesting and kind, and they accepted us as two of their own. We paddled for much of the way next to a couple who are some of our favorite people in town, and bonded the whole way down the river.

We have since started going to their church, and the girl I paddled next to invited me

to be a part of her small group. We have met some of our closest and most consistent friends because we said yes to that canoe trip.

Here's the thing: It's so easy to say no. In fact, when it comes to doing something that makes me uncomfortable, or even something that feels the tiniest bit inconvenient, I find myself wanting to back out. I rarely want to go to small group. It's scary meeting a new girl for coffee. It's so much easier to decide to put it off, or to prioritize doing laundry over meeting a new friend for happy hour.

Yes, making new friends is uncomfortable, but it's so worth it.

My husband and I have made it a policy to say yes as often as possible. Unless we legitimately cannot do something, we always say yes. We go. We make the drive. We commit and then we show up. And we have yet to regret it.

Make it a policy to always say yes to invitations. Give people a shot. Give a new experience chance. You never know what could happen..

And hey, if worse comes to worst, you will walk away with a good story tucked away for next time.

Disclaimer: This obviously excludes unsafe situations. Please use caution when meeting up with people you don't know well. Public places are always a good idea.

## 6. Be Prepared to Date

Something that amazed me about this journey was how much it felt like blind dating.

I would make plans with a girl I didn't know to meet her out someplace. I'd have to look her up to make sure I knew what she looked like so I wasn't wandering aimlessly throughout the restaurant, and then we'd have essentially the same conversation you'd have on a first date. (What do you do? Where are you from? You know the drill...)

And just like dating, some of them would go well, and some of them were super awkward. That's just the way it goes.

Sometimes just like in dating, you go on a first date and it's love at first sight. I had a

few of those—women I clicked with instantly. We could have talked for days.

With other potential friends, it just didn't happen. Conversation over dinner was painfully awkward. And at the end we both halfheartedly said, "We should do this again!" But both of us knew full well that we never would.

I liked thinking about getting to know these women as "friend dating," because it reminded me of a few important principles of actual dating.

### **a. It takes awhile to get to know someone**

Just like on a first date, hanging out with a friend for the first time is kind of awkward. You don't go from "hello" to "totally in love and totally comfortable together" in a relationship overnight, and you don't do that in friendships either. It takes awhile to figure each other out, to build that trust, to get comfortable together.

When I thought about it in terms of dating, I could watch my friendships grow with better expectations. The second date was always more comfortable and natural than the first, and so on. It takes awhile for friendships to grow, so give it time just like you would with a new romantic relationship.

### **b. Not everyone will be your soulmate, but it's worth it to find out**

I went on a few truly awkward friend dates when I first moved to Nashville. The conversation was like pulling teeth. We couldn't find any common ground, and I was itching to look at the time to see when I could finally get out of there.

It's easy to look at this as either sad or frustrating. It's harder for us to fathom that that elusive "it factor" might not be there with girlfriends. But that's just how it is. There are people we are naturally going to connect with, and people who just aren't the right fit for us.

The same as it is in dating, it's worth it to find out. Especially as you're trying to expand your network of friends and build community, it's better to have tried than to have said no without giving it a shot. You really lose nothing in the process.

## 7. Follow Up

When we first moved to Nashville, I had a lot of trouble with numbers. I had a new zip code, and a new address, and new passwords and a new code to get into our office door (not to mention a new last name to throw on top of everything else). It felt like numbers were seeping out of my head. There was just too much to remember.

This is how I always feel when I'm meeting a ton of new people. When you move to a new place, it feels a bit like drinking from a firehose. Everyone is new to you. There are a thousand new names and faces and it's all you can do to remember your own name, let alone anyone else's.

I would shake hands, say hi, smile my prettiest, friendliest, most disarming smile, but walk away empty-handed. Sure, I'd met a lot of people, but I didn't walk away with any new friends.

And that's when I realized I'd been missing a step.

The difference between someone you meet once and a potential best friend lies in one simple action: Following up.

You can meet a thousand new people, but if you never see them again, it doesn't help your cause. So instead of just saying hi and being friendly, I started saying hi, being friendly, and then I'd exchange information and send a text the next day.

It worked wonders! All of a sudden I was texting with new friends. I had coffee dates, and was invited places. Everything began to change.

And so that's the key. Meeting people is great, but the most important thing is follow up.

If you meet a cool girl in the bathroom at church (totally happens), get her number! Ask her if she wants to go to coffee sometime, and then actually text her and make it happen.

If you hang out with someone and it goes well, wait a week or so and then ask them to hang out again.

You may feel like you're doing a lot of pursuing at first, but I promise it will get better.



And pursuit is absolutely necessary if you're going to move from acquaintance to best friend.

The key is following up. Exchange contact information and don't be afraid to use it.

Follow up, follow up, follow up.

## 8. Focus On the Giving More Than the Taking

Have you ever had someone try to date you that was talking about marriage before you'd even ordered an appetizer? Have you ever dated someone you felt expected more out of the relationship than you had to give right at first?

It causes you to take a step back, right? It makes you want to put a bit of distance between yourself and this over-eager beaver.

And unfortunately when we move to a new town and are feeling lonely and a bit desperate, we can get a bit overeager in our friendships as well. We can look to new relationships to fill a hole they're not ready to fill yet, and can come on a bit too strong.

That's why we need to focus on doing the giving more than the taking.

There's a concept I love called the relational bank account. It works just like a normal bank account. You make deposits and make withdrawals. If you don't deposit much, and try to make a withdrawal, you may end up in the negative. It works this way with friendships too.

When you enter into a new friendship, be on the look out for what you can do for them. Think about how you can serve them, love them, be a good friend to them. When we come at friendships with this perspective, we're filling up the relational bank account before we make a withdrawal. We're investing in the relationship before we expect to take from it. And that's a great way to help a friendship grow.

When we first moved to Nashville, two of our friends were coming up on a seriously tight work deadline. It was a Saturday night and we were heading home from a date, when we decided to do something nice for them. We knew they'd be working late, and we were also familiar with their affinity for dark chocolate. So we decided to go pick

up their favorite treats and surprise them with a break from all their hard work.

To us, it was not a big deal at all. It was inexpensive, just a little bit out of our way, and I thought they'd be grateful, but just averagely so.

Their response was beyond anything I could have imagined.

Later, my friend would tell me that was the night they really felt like our friendship began. They felt so loved and so cared for by us that night, and those little treats spoke volumes about our commitment to the friendship.

I don't tell you that story to make myself look good. It was seriously not a big deal. We just brought them some chocolate. I tell you this because little things go such a long way and that's what I learned that day. Just a small deposit meant so much to them. It had an immeasurably positive impact on our friendships.

As you're approaching new friendships, don't go in hoping to have your needs met right away. Instead, go in hoping to meet needs. Be kind and generous and outgoing. Be the best friend you can be, and you'll find that people reciprocate.

## 9. Be intentional and give it time

This one may seem totally contradictory. It's asking you to do two seemingly opposite things. But they're both so important to remember.

### a. Be intentional

Building a community from scratch takes intentionality. It takes effort, and consistency, and putting yourself out there again and again. So much of this rides on your ability to keep your door open, to be friendly, to reach out to people, and to be a good friend to them—rinse and repeat.

But it's not that easy.

Like I mentioned in tip number 5, I am always so tempted to back out of plans. I get nervous, or uncomfortable. My couch starts to beckon me enticingly.

If I were to follow my heart in these scenarios, I'd stay put—avoiding the uncomfortable hassle of making new friends altogether.

But because I know this about myself, I've intentionally put some goals in place. Overriding my wimpy desires, I'll make a goal of meeting one new person for coffee each week this month, or having friends over for dinner twice in the next two weeks.

I have to set these kinds of intentional boundaries for myself otherwise my fear (and laziness) will take over and I'll give up completely.

So that's what I want you to do too. Don't let your heart lead the way. Don't let your fear have a say. Make a goal and stick to it. How many people do you want to meet this month? How many coffee dates would you like to have? Set a goal and stick to it. Building a community from scratch takes some major intentionality, but the payoff is so worth it.

Here's the other side to that coin...

## **b. Be patient**

Although we have such a large part to play in the formation of our community, we also can't make it happen instantly. No matter how active you are in making friends, you cannot make a tight-knit community happen overnight. Trust me, I've tried.

Instead, we have to be patient. We have to commit for the long-haul. We have to decide that this is something we're going to invest in for months, instead of days, and even years instead of months. We can't let ourselves get discouraged when it doesn't happen on our timetable.

Instead of looking at what you don't have, make sure to remember what you do have. Take stock of little victories, and celebrate them.

A few weeks ago, my husband and I were out for coffee on a Saturday morning. It was the first sunny day we'd had in awhile, and so it seemed that all of Nashville came out for the occasion. Throughout the day, we must have run into 10 different friends. We'd hear someone call our name and wave, or we'd run into a friend while standing in line at the coffee shop. That day felt like a pat on the back, the encouragement we sorely

needed. It was like someone was saying, “You can do this. This is getting better.”

So give yourself little pep talks along the way. Remind yourself of where you started, and celebrate how far you’ve come. Use those bits of encouragement to help you keep going. Ultimately, community is something that takes extended time and intentionality and investment. That’s why it’s worth so much.

Be intentional, be consistent, and be patient. Give it time. Commit to committing for the long-haul instead of looking for an instant fix. And along the way remind yourself, “You can do this. This is getting better.”

## 10. Find Something to Do In the Meantime

If you’ve ever found yourself really wanting something and not being able to instantly make it happen, you know how crazy-making that can be. When I was waiting for Carl to propose, I couldn’t think about anything else. Everything that came out of my mouth had to do with weddings or proposals, and every day seemed to pass slower than the last.

The same thing happens when we’re waiting to hear about a job. One of my best friends applied for her dream job recently. Each day she’d update us on the progress. “They’re hoping to do interviews in a few weeks,” she told us. We groaned in response. It seemed like every step took a thousand years, and we weren’t even the ones applying!

It can be really hard waiting for something to happen, and sometimes we even can become destructive in our impatience.

Carl didn’t love being badgered about the proposal, and my friend’s application process wasn’t expedited by our impatience. Friendships aren’t going to grow faster when we’re watching them like a pot of water, begging them to boil.

So in this season when you have more free time on your hands, use that time to do something productive.

Your social calendar will pick up again, and you’ll have friends to see and places to be. But in the meantime, with some free Saturday afternoons on your hands, give your mind and energy something to chew on.

This is the perfect time to start a new hobby, or to get really good at something you've always wanted to do. It's the perfect time to study French, start a blog, or learn to knit. It's the perfect time to do your best Julia Child impression, or get ahead at work, or run that 10K.

Use the free time you have wisely and devote it to something productive. It'll be good for you and good for your relationships, since you're not relying on them for all of your gratification and fulfillment.

Plus, you'll have a new blog/sweater/promotion to show for it!

# Conclusion

Starting over is tough. It's humbling, embarrassing sometimes, and totally confidence-shaking. It's been a tough transition moving to Nashville—going from a place where I had a great community to a place where I had none. I've lost count of how many times I've wanted to give up on this new city and move back to be near my friends. It's just, plain hard.

But this happens in life, more and more often, the more transient we get. We each come to places in our lives where we have to start over—when the community we spent so long forming has scattered, or graduated, or gotten jobs elsewhere.

And so these are important skills to learn. We have to learn how to start over, how to create something beautiful from scratch, because giving up on friendship isn't an option.

We need each other. We need friends like we need life-blood. I'm convinced they're one and the same.

We are better when we are connected, when we are surrounded, when we are known. And so we have to pursue friendship, fight for it, and give it a try even when rejection seems to abound.

Because when we find a little seed of friendship, when we love it and tend it and watch it grow, what we are left with is one of the most beautiful gifts in the whole, entire world.

So this is step one. If you've moved to a new city, or are starting over, or starting fresh, this is where we begin. And when we've done this—when we've had those first few friend dates, or found a friend to have lunch with every few weeks or so, then we move onto step two.

They say it takes a village to raise a child, but I believe it takes a village to help a woman become who she was always meant to be.

You have some acquaintances at this point, now it's time to create your village.

On to the workbook!



## About the Small Group Guide

Our life is a journey of piling things onto ourselves—covering ourselves with layers and layers of how we want to be seen, and who others expect us to be. The more layers we pile on the harder it is for anyone to get to know us, for us to be able to show anyone who we truly are, for us ever to feel connected. Because to feel connected, to feel truly understood and loved, we have to be known—not for our layers but for the beating heart underneath them all.

The workbook is designed to help remove those layers, taking existing friendships and deepening them into the soul-filling, life-changing connections we all so desperately need. You'll gather once a week for 6 weeks with a small group of women, and I'm going to lead you through a series of questions that will get you talking and getting to know each other.

There's no study, no homework, all you really need is somewhere to gather, a group of women devoted to deepening your friendships, and the courage to let people get to know the real you.

What happens after that will change your life. Friendships like that always do.

Find out more about the small group guide at [SMayWilsonShop.com/friendship](http://SMayWilsonShop.com/friendship)



# What Girls Are Saying

“It’s common in our culture, especially as we get older, to have a lot of people we call “friends” because we’re familiar with them, not because we’re really friends. It’s not that we don’t want to be, but decades of saving face, pushing through, never airing your dirty laundry, etc. - we may have forgotten how to actually share ourselves with one another and how to create safety so that others may share themselves with us. In her new workbook, Stephanie has created a guide to getting to know others. What you do from there is up to you, but I’d say you’ll find it difficult not to become close, and dare I say it, true friends with the people with whom you do the workbook. It’s comprised of six topics that are central to the human experience - and if you’ll be real, raw, and very brave for just six weeks - I’d be surprised if you didn’t come away with a tight-knit group who knows each other (and yourselves) much better. ”

— Kacie

“I thought we were close friends before doing this workbook. Now I’ve reached a more intimate relationship with these women than I ever thought possible. We are inseparable now, and the flow of Stephanie’s workbook really led us to that place. This book takes you on a journey to deep friendship in a way that’s neither awkward nor forced. It’s beautiful!”

— Caitlin

“This was a wonderful catalyst to some beautiful, deeply-enriching friendships. Each set of questions led to meaningful conversation and a more intimate understanding of one another.”

— Kristyn

“This was a beautiful conversation guide to help direct our time together into topics that greatly strengthened our friendship. Each week followed the next one so naturally, and each new chapter felt like exactly what we needed to share with one another. We left each session deeply encouraged.”

— Caroline

# Stephanie May Wilson

*StephanieMayWilson.com*

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