

BIO

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Lynne M. Baab (Ph.D.,
communication)

www.lynnebaab.com

Friending Lynne Baab

Lynne M. Baab is the author of multiple books and Bible studies focusing on spiritual formation in light of cultural and technological realities. A Presbyterian minister, she completed a Ph.D. in communication at the University of Washington in 2007 and moved with her husband to Dunedin, New Zealand, where she is a lecturer in pastoral theology at the University of Otago and adjunct tutor at the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership.

With InterVarsity Press, Baab has published *A Renewed Spirituality*, *Sabbath Keeping*, *Fasting* and three LifeGuide Bible studies: *Prayers of the Old Testament*, *Prayers of the New Testament* and *Sabbath*. With the Alban Institute, which specializes in congregational resources, she has written *Embracing Midlife*, *Beating Burnout in Congregations* and *Reaching Out in a Networked World: Expressing Your Congregation's Heart and Soul*.

“My long interest in friendship, coupled with the Ph.D. on new media I completed in 2007, made me particularly attentive to the many concerns expressed about the rise of Facebook and other forms of online social networking. I have written several books on spiritual disciplines, and I view friendship as one of the places in life where we live out our values and engage with spiritual truths. In many ways *Friending* brings together two streams of my writing: spiritual formation and communication technologies,” explains Baab.



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Becoming Friends with Lynne Baab

Why do we need a book on friendship in our current culture?

I see this book as vitally important for our time. Most of the articles in popular magazines about relationships, and most talk shows on TV or radio, focus on romantic or family relationships. We simply don't talk very much about friendships and how they work. And most articles written about Facebook, Twitter, texting and other forms of electronic communication paint the issues in black and white, all bad or all good. Nurturing healthy friendships today requires creative and nuanced thinking about forms of communication.

How do you define *friendship*?

Before I wrote *Friending*, I interviewed dozens of people, ranging in age from twelve to eighty-five. In the interviews, I asked how they would define *friend* or *friendship*. Sandie, twelve, my youngest interviewee, was clear and concise in her excellent definition: "A friend is someone who is there for you and who doesn't gossip about you." And Jack, a university professor in his fifties, said, "The words *friend* and *friendship* bring to mind deep sharing, deep listening, intimacy, a sense of ease, willingness to risk in care and concern, joy, laughter, fun, jokes, kidding, different levels with different folks and different friends for different times . . . but all good."

In my life, friends are the people who have listened to me and taken my ups and downs seriously. They have supported me, laughed with me, and shared their life and wisdom with me, and I have tried to do the same for them. Many of them have prayed for me and with me. Friendship is the state of being friends, and being friends requires actions of love and care.

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What are some tips for making friends?

One tip for making friends is to put yourself in places where people gather: church, hiking clubs, arts groups, community-center classes, etc. Once there, ask questions to get beyond the "hi, hi" stage. Then, as you get to know people a little bit, think about creative ways to show love. I believe any time we show genuine love to another person we are creating an environment in which a friendship might develop. Acts of kindness do not always result in friendships, but sometimes they do. And all acts of kindness shape us into people who are kind, and that is a blessing in itself.

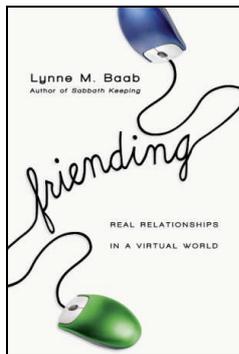
What are some basic skills for maintaining strong friendships on- or offline?

I believe the central friendship skill is the ability to initiate. Throughout my life, most of the people who have told me they are lonely have also talked about having trouble initiating. Initiative in friendship can be quick—such as a brief text message, email or Facebook comment—or initiative can involve big commitments of time and energy, such as making meals week after week for a friend who is ill or spending hours helping a friend with a project. But without initiative, friendships wither.

Listening is another important friendship skill. Something about Western culture in our time encourages us to believe we need to be talking all the time. The kind of listening that nurtures

Q&A

AUTHOR INTERVIEW



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friendship involves slowing down long enough to attend deeply and carefully to what our friend is thinking and feeling.

Other friendship skills include giving gifts, asking for help, being thankful, forgiving and remembering what our friends tell us so we can respond appropriately later. All of these skills are just as significant online as they are in face-to-face interactions.

What are common obstacles to friendship and how can we overcome them?

The three biggest obstacles to friendship in our time are busyness, mobility and the new issues raised by electronic communication—social media, cell phones, etc. Never before have so many people lived such hectic lives, never before have so many people moved so easily to different cities and countries, and never have so many options for communication existed. All of these create challenges for friendships, and I believe overcoming them requires intentional commitment to the skills of friendship that I describe in my book.

How can we use social media to further our friendships?

The principles of initiating, listening, and showing love and care are relevant in online settings. We can initiate by making contact with people who are on our mind or by responding to something a friend has posted. We can “listen” by paying attention to what our friends post and by asking questions and praying in response to what we see. Many of my interviewees talked about using email, texting, instant-messaging, Skype and Facebook to stay in close touch with their friends. Close contact keeps us up to date with our friends’ lives, so we are involved in the daily events that they care about. In the midst of that close contact, acts that show we are listening, loving and caring always make a difference.

What are the risks of using social media?

I think the biggest risk is the overload of information about people. Too much information tends to make us forget that friendship is one of the most precious gifts in the world. People are not commodities or objects; they are beloved by God and we need to view them that way. A second related risk is the addictive nature of social media. Vast quantities of information are enticing, and it’s easy to enjoy the process of accessing the information so much we forget the people whose lives lie behind it. Another risk is that we can enjoy our friends conveniently, on our own time, forgetting that love always, sooner or later, involves sacrifices of some kind.

How can our relationship with God inform our friendships?

Jesus invites us into friendship with him. As we grow in our friendship with Jesus, we will grow in other friendships as well, because Jesus invites us to abide in his love and show that love to others. As we continue in faithful relationship with Jesus, we will grow in Christian character, and it becomes easier for us to show compassion and kindness to the people around us, to forgive them when problems arise, to pray for them in times of trouble and be faithful to them over the long haul. The love of God, shown to us in Christ and made known in our lives through the Holy Spirit, is an excellent foundation for being a friend.