

FOREWORD BY JAMI AMERINE



THE ART of Amen

A CREATIVE PRAYER EXPERIENCE

CATHERINE BIRD

PRAISE FOR
THE ART OF AMEN

“Seamlessly blending together sound biblical teaching, insightful personal testimonies, soul-stirring prayers, and beautiful drawings, *The Art of Amen* is truly a masterpiece! I cannot remember another book that touched my heart so deeply. Packed full of practical tips for building a stronger and more intimate prayer life, *The Art of Amen* is sure to leave your heart full and your prayer life transformed.”

—**Jennifer Bleakley**, author of *Joey: How a Blind Rescue Horse Helped Others Learn to See*

“I love *The Art of Amen*. You are immediately drawn into Catherine’s ‘crafty’ brilliance—no tired methods or stale prayer mechanics here! Her passion for praying the Word is real. This book is perfect for falling in love with Jesus all over again.”

—**Rev. Dr. Jack Sheffield**, author of *God’s Healing River* and *Genesis Seed*

“*The Art of Amen* is a beautiful tribute to the power of prayer. Catherine Bird’s vulnerability in sharing her story invites you to rejoice in realizing that you are not alone in any feelings or insecurities you’ve ever had about talking with God. Thank you, Cat, for giving us all the tools we need to go on the prayer adventure of a lifetime!”

—**Erin Brown Hollis**, best-selling author of *Cheers to the Diaper Years* and *The Remarkable Housewives of the Bible*

“Maybe, like me, you grew up feeling there was just one way to pray. In *The Art of Amen*, Catherine Bird breaks that boxed-in thinking, showing us how to breathe new life and creativity into our conversations with God. Here we can find what we all long for: a relationship that is deep and intimate.”

—**Lynn Cowell**, author of *Make Your Move* and *Brave Beauty*

“As a mental health professional, I have studied how spiritual practices like prayer lead to increased peacefulness and reduced anxiety. *The Art of Amen* leads readers through creative approaches to prayer with biblical examples, personal testimonies, and beautifully-designed artwork to inspire a deep calm in the midst of our hectic lives.”

—**Michelle Nietert**, professional counselor and clinical director of Community Counseling Associates

“Sometimes we hear the word *creative* and immediately feel inadequate. However, this book is an invitation for each and every one of us to embrace the reality of being made in the image of a creative God. Cat’s grace and tenderness opens wide the doors to experience the joy of living a vibrant life as we worship a vibrant God!”

—**Teri Lynne Underwood**, author of *Praying for Girls*

“Jesus modeled discipleship, relationship, prayer, and so much more in the short time he lived on earth. Cat Bird pulls from his lessons and shows us how to pass them along to our children and incorporate them in every relationship. Gather your closest friends and dive deep into your prayer life with *The Art of Amen*.”

—**Shontell Brewer**, author of *Missionary Mom*

“If you are looking for a book on prayer, you don’t need to look any further than *The Art of Amen*! Catherine Bird has explored every type of prayer, from Genesis to Revelation. It is all here for us to read, digest, and be empowered to pray without fear. I highly recommend this book. Read and be blessed.”

—**Rev. Dr. John K. Graham**, president and CEO of the Institute for Spirituality and Health

“Breaking through complacency and mundane life, *The Art of Amen* is a delightful glimpse into the creative side of prayer. It’s perfect for the artsy creative and the craft-challenged alike.”

—**Amy Elaine Martinez**, host of Real Victory Radio and author of *Becoming a Victory Girl*

“I’m a girl who thrives when biblical content is presented in a way that is fun and relatable. This is exactly what Catherine Bird has done with *The Art of Amen*. I know you’ll enjoy it as much as I did!”

—**Courtney DeFeo**, author of *In This House, We Will Giggle* and founder of Treasured

“In *The Art of Amen*, Catherine chronicles her connection to prayer and to the God who listens and longs to be with us. It may be an art, it may be a rote ritual, but when you read this book, an ‘amen’ is sure to come.”

—**Bob Mendelsohn**, director of AustralAsia, Jews for Jesus

“Prayer is an essential discipline for every Christian’s faith walk, but it is also one that we often struggle with the most. Catherine’s book is a great tool for building a great prayer life at any stage.”

—**Kelly Stamps**, blogger at Kelly’s Korner

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LEAFWOOD
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A Creative Prayer Experience



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FOREWORD

Less like a plea and more like a mandate, I screamed his name, “Jesus Christ! Help us!” I instinctually reached my arm across the chest of my then-twelve-year-old daughter, as if my feeble means would lessen the blow of the oncoming eighteen-wheeler, in my lane, traveling at sixty-plus miles per hour, headed straight for us. I swerved right; he swerved left. Then, in what seemed an eternity yet was simply an instant, my van, holding six-sevenths of everyone I dedicate my life to, found haven in a ditch off I-20 West near Tyler, Texas.

The baby never flinched. The sons chirped, “That was awesome!” and a daughter, I cannot recall which one, chastised, “Mother! You are not supposed to use the Lord’s name in vain!” Dry-mouthed, shaken, and entirely thankful, I whimpered, “That was hardly in vain.”

I hadn’t thought of that dreadful scene much more until I sat down to compose this essay for my friend, Catherine Bird. Interesting, since it was a significant passage in a life played out in prayer, muddled in proper and flippant, answered and not.

Yes, I pray.

I would like to believe I am most steeped in the relational prayer that accompanies my walk with Jesus. I criticize my efforts. On days where I have overslept, missing my designated quiet time with him, I have come

to recognize it doesn't lessen him, but it certainly hobbles me. Perhaps this is the greatest of tragedies in the Christian prayer journey: the belief that prayer is a mandate to activating the power of Yahweh. I have foolishly believed the God of all is less powerful, less invested, even careless if I do not follow through with my highfalutin plans to pray. It is for this reason I profess the belief that this book is so important, so timely, and so dear.

And it left me to wonder about my prayer life and its religiosity and craft, versus conversations with a Father who adored unto the death of his blameless Son. Certainly, I am grateful; still, I confess that running out of milk or a child with an ear infection can bring me to my knees. Also, I am easily distracted by shiny things, boy bands, and Lifetime Television murder mystery weekends.

He remains.

In my relationship with my husband, there are efforts to create time for dinner alone, outside our hectic schedules. There are organic conversations and methodical sit-downs. We may pass each other in the hall and reference a bill overdue or a reminder to pick a child up from the orthodontist. Then there are moments where we purposefully step back and reconcile what went wrong, and talk about how we can do better the next time. We plan romantic dinners alone, and when those impressive plans fall apart, we order takeout and watch reruns of *Seinfeld*.

At the core of my conversational relationship with my husband, there is room to create dialogue, embrace the organic, or simply get by for now. Within that dynamic, we are committed to each other and have carved out a life according to what it means to be Justin and Jami. Most certainly, as a lover of words married to man who embraces words few and far between, there have been some rough patches. But this is us. This is our groove, this is how we relate.

Furthermore, as I jotted notes about what I believe or used to believe about prayer, I took pause to think about the conversational relationship I have with the author of this beautiful book. Catherine, or *Cat* as her friends call her, has a sympathetic, darling voice. The first time I ever heard it, she left me a voice message, offering any help her family could lend my family after she learned of a hardship we were facing. It wasn't until several

conversations later that I learned she had lost her precious mother merely weeks before she called to help me.

I love to talk to Cat. She is complimentary, sass, and kindness. She refers to her husband by his full name, which is hilarious and dear. “Travis Bird will be back later this evening.” Or, “Travis Bird, Jami wants your fajita recipe.” All this to say, I know her by our conversations. I grow in my understanding of her, and I delight in this friendship because we talk. And within those speeches we confess our devotion by laughing, crying, or simply chatting. Granted, if I never called her again, that would fade. However, the more we talk, the more I want to converse with her, and the more I understand her and her love of her God, her daughters, and the infamous Travis Bird.

In the pages of this book you will see beautiful artwork, timeless and important Scripture, and the craft of a wordsmith I am proud to call friend. However, I pray that you also uncover the unique thing that makes your prayers the cornerstone of your relationship with God. The things you say, the devotion, the rote, impersonal, desperate, formal, contrived, and passive words you direct at your heavenly Father are uniquely yours.

He knows you. He wants this ongoing dialogue with you unto his torturous death. The veil was torn, and nothing can stand between you and him. I fully believe you will be enriched by the pages that follow. It is all the things you want to say and the fun, simple, and imaginative ways to do it. It is the why and the how, it is scripturally sound, and it is all the things you may have missed in efforts to impress him. It is the adventure of creating a relational conversation with a God who calls you friend.

Prayer . . . it is complex and simple, profound and trivial, deep and shallow. It is a desperate plea for life and a flippant nod to moving the line at Starbucks. It is the carnal cry for healing and a muffled desire for last season’s jeans to zip. It is intellect and folly, perfection and disaster, fury and thankfulness. It is confident and terrified. It is rote, memorized, and halfhearted. Next it is fragrant, genuine, and heartfelt. It is song, silence, passion, and complacency. It is moving and stagnant.

It is an adventure.

An art.

And no matter the acumen or nonsense, it is the very thing that brings you face-to-face with the living God. It is a privilege to introduce you to an author who prays well and loves better. Together, we invite you to the perfected mess in *The Art of Amen*. May you never pray the same.

—Jami Amerine,
author of *Stolen Jesus* and
Sacred Ground, Sticky Floors

PART ONE

Understanding Prayer

"IS PRAYER YOUR STEERING WHEEL OR YOUR SPARE TIRE?"

—CORRIE TEN BOOM

CHAPTER ONE



CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

We joined hands as a group, bowed our heads, and closed our eyes. Then I heard, “Would anyone else like to pray for us?” Dang it, Daddy. Pretty much everyone who knows my father knows he says crazy awesome prayers, and he also happens to be an ordained Episcopal priest. This explains the loud silence that followed his question.

I opened one eye and glanced around, noticing that everyone in the circle was studiously standing with head bowed and eyes closed, reminding me of what it’s like to avoid the teacher’s eyes at all costs, lest you be the one called on to speak in front of the class. Then it happened. My one open eye landed on my daddy’s two open eyes, and they were staring right back at me.

Shoot. Busted. I was deer-in-the-headlights caught.

“Cat, would you like to pray for us?” he asked.

Thinking, “Not really,” I responded with a bright, “Sure, but I’m not great at saying prayers aloud.”

“That’s OK; God doesn’t mind,” he said. “The priest doesn’t have to be the one to always say the prayers. God likes to hear from all of us.” Right.

Taking a deep breath, I went for it, feeling self-conscious and totally inept to be the person offering the prayer for our entire group. This wasn't just a family dinner. This was a large group of people, most of whom I did know, but a few I didn't (yet). We were in Israel taking in one of the many unforgettable places that were quickly turning my Bible into a pop-up book right before my eyes. Strangers milled about. I was acutely aware of my inadequacy to be praying aloud, but I forged ahead.

Of course, everyone was quite kind when the prayer was done, probably thankful they had dodged the praying-out-loud bullet themselves. Well, the good news was it would be a while before I was called on again, at least for that trip.

BUELLER? BUELLER?

One of my favorite movies from the 1980s is *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. The storyline follows a fun-loving high school guy named Ferris Bueller, played by Matthew Broderick, who decides to feign illness in order to skip school and enjoy a day of relaxation instead. At the beginning of the movie, Matthew's character calls his best friend (Alan Ruck), who happens to actually be home sick, and talks his friend into joining him and Ferris's girlfriend for a day of fun.

While the boys are enjoying their day off from school, Ferris Bueller's sister must still go. We see a day of school through her eyes, and the audience is given a glimpse into the stereotypical day of a high school student. Hall passes were a thing, and so was detention. Popular kids and the not-so-popular kids often clashed. Some classes were more fun than others, and some classes even less so. This is where we are introduced to one of Ferris Bueller's most boring teachers. Ben Stein plays the role of Ferris Bueller's economics teacher. He's super dry and calls roll by the students' last names. For me, it was a really memorable part of the movie to hear Ben Stein saying in his droll voice, "Bueller? Bueller?"

Often this scene comes to mind when I am in a group where a volunteer is asked to pray. Usually, silence ensues. Then I want to call out, "Bueller? Bueller?" Actually, I sometimes do. For those who are familiar with this cult classic, it always brings a chuckle.

Seriously, though. Why are we so hesitant to pray?

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Merriam-Webster defines prayer as “an address (such as a petition) to God or a god in word or thought,” “a set order of words used in praying,” and “an earnest request or wish.” I love this definition, but for me, prayer is simply an open, honest conversation with God. The truth is, we all bear the image of a loving God (Gen. 1:27), are crafted for a specific purpose (Eph. 2:10), and were designed to delight in community (Gen. 1:26)—not just with our creator—but with one another as well (Rom. 12:10). So it makes sense that we long to feel connected. God did that on purpose.

Our God is also deeply creative. We have only to glimpse the world around us to see plainly how imaginative our creator is. A multitude of colors paint the various landscapes where we live, and they are vast and varied. Goodness, the human body is even a marvelous wonder, how so many tiny parts and pieces work together. The birds of the skies, the fish of the sea, and the animals of the land all reflect the artistic nature of God.

So why can't prayer be both relational and creative? I believe it can be both, and that is the heart behind this book. I really want to unpack the why and how of prayer and lead readers through a deeper exploration of creative ways we can pray beyond a regular quiet time.

I've wanted to write this book for a long time. For years, I have listened to moms and their kids in Bible study class after Bible study class struggle with the act of prayer, and not just praying aloud. As I began to really pay attention, I noticed many of us—small and tall (how I refer to children and adults)—are self-conscious about the words we offer to God through prayer. If these are supposed to be our petitions and earnest requests to God, why are we so hesitant to share them with the One who created us? He already knows our hearts, but he wants us to share with him. As a mom, I can often read the mood of my children, but I want to hear from their lips how they are feeling and why they are feeling the way they are.

I think my own insecurities about prayer actually stem from growing up with liturgical prayer. Hear me out, friends. I love liturgical prayers. They are beautiful. There is comfort to be found in recitation of confessional prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the many other prayers I've learned from the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* over the years. The challenge for me is that these prayers are so wonderful that I've often

felt like my words don't measure up to the beauty conveyed in these pre-written offerings. Or Ann Voskamp. Oh, my goodness. Talk about a lyrical linguist.

It has taken me years to find comfort in the truth that *my* words and *yours* are just as beautiful to God as the authors' words in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Not only are our words beautiful to God, but our prayers to him also serve as an act of worship. Take a moment to read the following two verses and write them in the space below:

Philippians 4:6

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

The Bible says we are to pray and remain thankful, then repeat. Think about the impact of prayer when we come before God with a humble heart of hope, expectation, and thankfulness. God isn't looking for the perfect soliloquy. He is well aware he hasn't created each of us with the gift of poetry and song. Although I often joke that when I'm in the shower or my car, I sing *just* like Celine Dion, or if I'm really feeling sassy, Pink. And when I pray alone, I sound *just* like Ann Voskamp. True story. Well, the truth is I may not be gifted with the ability to belt out a song, but my words do sound like music to God's ears. When we open our hearts and mouths to communicate with our Lord, it serves as an awesome act of worship.

Personally, I sometimes overcomplicate what is really rather simple. I'm sure this never happens to *you*, or maybe you can relate. The Martha in me once thought prayer required the perfect quiet place, the perfect words to offer, and the perfect trust that God will hear and answer my prayers (and just maybe in the timeframe I kindly suggest).

I love being a wife and mom, friends. I do. However, my sweet baby girl who just entered her teen years did not sleep through the night until she

was nearly three-and-a-half years old. I learned as a young mom why sleep deprivation is a real form of torture. There were days when I simply held my Bible in my hands, because I was too tired to open it and read. A very wise mentor shared with me a tidbit about prayer during that time that I've never forgotten. She told me in those seasons—where quiet space is at a premium, words are at a loss, and God remains silent—to find opportunities to pray and worship in the crazy rhythm-of-rush season where I am.

I learned to listen to my baby's laugh and give thanks to God for entrusting me with such a precious, sleepless little thing. I delighted in the warm embrace of my husband at the end of a long day, giving thanks that he didn't seem to mind when my hair wasn't brushed and my pants were inside out *and* backwards (yes, this really happened and, sadly, more than once). I relished encouraging words offered by friends who continued to love me unconditionally through difficult seasons.

AN OPEN, HONEST CONVERSATION

My friend Bobbie and I were talking the other day. She and I were visiting about this book—more specifically this chapter. We frequently keep in touch by phone, by text, and by an introvert's dream-of-an-app called Marco Polo. We often visit about mundane things, but we also share the depth of what's in our hearts—what may be lifting them up or weighing them down. Nothing is too trivial or too big. Any topic is fair game. Our relationship is easy, comfortable, and yet unbreakable. Our hearts have been knit together, and we embrace all that means.

Now, if I were to stop calling, texting, or communicating with Bobbie, her love for me wouldn't die. However, our relationship would likely change, and it is also likely we would cease being as close we are without regular and honest connection.

This is how I've come to view prayer with God.

A STROLL THROUGH THE GARDEN

The first time prayer is mentioned in the Bible is Genesis 4:26, which says, "Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD" (NIV).

However, if we define prayer as an easy, open, honest conversation with God, then the first prayers were actually between Adam and Eve with God in the Garden of Eden. Can you imagine? Perfect beauty. The Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were created for community with God. He delighted in his creation of them. He spent time with them. He listened. They talked. He talked. They listened.

Yes, sin entered the world, and Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Yet God did not abandon them. On the flip side, though, God also did not promise them their lives would be easy and free of trials. We know from Scripture that they worked hard by the sweat of their brows (Gen. 3:19). One of their children would grow up to slay another sibling (Gen. 4:8). The heartache and trials had to be grueling. Yet God was still present. Scripture literally begins and ends with the presence of God. First:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
(Gen. 1:1–2 NIV)

The Garden of Eden may have been Adam and Eve's first home, but it was sacred because it was also where God physically communed with them (Gen. 3:8).

Flip to the end of your Bible, and witness the same image on a much grander scale, when all of heaven has collided with the whole earth to make a perfect sanctuary for God to dwell with man:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor

crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Rev. 21:1–4 ESV)

In the book of Revelation, Eden returns and has expanded into a new heaven and a new earth where all of God’s people enjoy his presence eternally. Talk about “And they lived happily ever after!”

But we are living in the middle of the story. Trials and hardships are a guarantee during our lives on earth. God did not promise we wouldn’t endure such experiences, but he did promise we wouldn’t do so alone. Prayer is our lifeline to our creator, a loving God, who longs for us to share with him in an easy, open, honest relationship.

EMBRACING COMMUNITY AROUND US

As an introvert, I tend to recharge my batteries by spending time alone, preferably in nature. I love to sit on my patio and hear the birds sing, the squirrels chatter, and the leaves rustling in the wind. Oh, these things make my heart so happy.

It is not uncommon for me to withdraw from my friends and community from time to time and slip down into what we now all refer to as “Cat’s hidey-hole.” When I’m “in the hole,” so to speak, I rarely pop on social media, talk on the phone, or attend larger events. I skip these things in favor of hot yoga class, long walks in nature, and nesting at home. My husband especially loves these times (he’s rolling his eyes right now), because it’s often when I focus on home projects and feel inspired to tackle Pinterest inspirations (which inevitably require his help). I also escape into my hidey space when I’m writing or pressed to meet a deadline, but I have been known to sneak away just for the sake of silence and solitude.

Now, having said all that, I am blessed with an awesome tribe. I prayed for a word to meditate on and embrace at the beginning of 2017, and I laughed when God answered my prayer with a most unexpected word. My mom had been diagnosed with cancer the September before, and it had already been a roller coaster of a few months. What I thought I needed was rest. Yet the word God pressed upon my heart was *community*.

That next twelve months was the toughest season I’ve ever endured. I would not have survived it without my community. God knew I wasn’t

supposed to go through that experience alone. Friends took children to school, sometimes keeping them overnight so I could be with my mom and dad in Houston. Friends brought meals, because my children insist on eating every day. Friends sat in silence with me when I was completely out of words and cried with me when I was full of nothing but tears.

I'll share more about my mom a little further into the book, and you'll see her words of wisdom peppered throughout the chapters. She was a fierce prayer warrior and lent many words of wisdom to those around her. Prayer was one of my mom's favorite things to do, and as she was such an encourager, I want to share her encouragement with you. (Look for the "Sandy says" pullout boxes for an extra-special note or prayer on the topic we're discussing.)

The point is that God blessed me with community, a rock-solid tribe, who stood strong when all I could do was kneel in my brokenness. Your community is that same gift from God to you. Scripture is rich with instruction about how we are to love one another. A few of these passages follow.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34–35 ESV)

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Cor. 13:11 ESV)

For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. (Gal. 5:13)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Eph. 4:32 NIV)

Everything in the world is about to be wrapped up, so take nothing for granted. Stay wide-awake in prayer. Most of all, love each other as if your life depended on it. Love makes up

for practically anything. Be quick to give a meal to the hungry, a bed to the homeless—cheerfully. Be generous with the different things God gave you, passing them around so all get in on it: if words, let it be God’s words; if help, let it be God’s hearty help. That way, God’s bright presence will be evident in everything through Jesus, and *he’ll* get all the credit as the One mighty in everything—encores to the end of time. Oh, yes! (1 Pet. 4:7–11 MSG)

At the very center of community is the God who created it. Our God, the creator of all things (Col. 1:16), in his perfect wisdom, crafted us to crave what we need most aside from him—and that is one another.

.....

Sandy Says

"Is God good or what?"

.....



A BEAUTIFUL BLEND OF PRAYER AND COMMUNITY



by Bobbie Schae

I did not grow up *in the faith*, so I was an adult when I asked Jesus into my heart. I wasn’t exactly sure what *faith* was supposed to look like. As a new Christian, one of the first prayers I found myself continually repeating was, “Lord, bring me a friend to walk with on this new path.” You see, when Jesus saved me, it wasn’t a subtle change. It was more like a renovation. Jesus didn’t just come in and tidy up the place and apply a fresh coat of paint to the walls in my heart. I was a complete and total overhaul. I was stripped down to the studs and utterly remade.

Everything seemed to change at once, and this was OK. I found myself willingly laying aside much of the old me in order to give this new me an opportunity to come forth. My heart and my desires changed, which ultimately meant that my lifestyle was reformed as well. My relationships and my community were also altered, because I no longer went to the same places or engaged in the same things that I had done before Jesus transformed me.

I was like one of the homes on *Fixer Upper*! I loved the remodeling that had taken place in my spirit, but I had so many questions and thoughts. I was craving community. I needed a real, authentic, rich friendship where I could connect heart-to-heart with another sister in Christ. I longed for someone to journey with me who really understood and who could be an encouragement to me in this season.

I began to pray that God would bring a friend, another believer, into my life. This became a prayer that I prayed often and one that God has been beyond faithful and generous in answering over the years. That first year, he sent a couple that came alongside my husband and me and acted not only as friends, but as mentors in the very early years of our salvation. Later, in a difficult season of life, he sent a more seasoned woman into my life to help me grow as a wife and a young mom.

Shortly after that, God gifted me with an entire community of Christian girlfriends as he opened the door for me to be part of a variety of new ministries. As I continued to step in faith, God anticipated each step, providing the community support he knew I would need. The journey has taken a few years, but God has provided a way for me to be deeply connected with quite a few women who build me up and encourage me in my faith walk while I am able to do the same for them. It's a beautiful manifestation of how God calls us to love one another.

Honestly, I almost feel a little guilty telling you about the over-the-top generous way in which God has answered this prayer in my life. Take my sweet friend Cat, who is writing this beautiful book for you. She is a precious gift from a loving Father. She is an answer to that prayer I prayed all those years ago. We've spent countless hours talking,

praying, encouraging one another, and sharing truth and God's Word with one another. She exemplifies the type of friend that I prayed for, and she makes me a better person and a better Jesus follower.

But here's the thing, friend. God knows we *all* need and crave community where we can love one another as our authentic selves, and he designed us this way on purpose. There is something unbelievably beautiful that happens when women come together in the name of Jesus for the purpose of linking arms, loving each other well, and living in community together.

Trust me, I know. It isn't always easy. Sometimes it is downright scary! But, hear me, sweet friend. It is all worth it. God created us for community. He does not intend for us to walk alone. He knows that we are better together. If you have that kind of community surrounding you, you are one blessed gal. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for that gift. If not, below is a prayer just for you similar to the one that I prayed so fervently for myself all those years ago.

Father God,

We love you. You are a good and generous Father who gives abundant gifts to his children. Father, you did not create us to walk through this life alone. You created us to belong to a rich and deep community. You created us to be part of a body of believers.

Heavenly Father, I pray that even now, you would begin to knit the heart of this dear reader to another believer. I pray for a friend to join her in the journey. Lord, I pray for someone whom she can be vulnerable with, whom she can let her guard down with, and whom she can be entirely herself with. I pray for a friend who will sharpen

her as iron sharpens iron, but also one who will be gentle with her heart and love her well.

I pray that you will bring this dear reader someone who will build her up and encourage her in her faith walk. I ask that the friend you send will draw her closer to you.

Lord, equip this sweet reader to be that kind of friend, as well. Give her a heart to love and encourage. Create in her the desire to spur someone else along and to hold the hand of a dear sister who is also on this journey of walking wherever you lead.

Father God, we trust you. We know that you already have someone in mind. We know that you are already at work orchestrating their meeting, turning their hearts toward one another, and creating the opportunities for them to truly connect. We place this need in your hand, God, and we believe that you will answer it in a way that far exceeds our expectations.

We love you, Lord. Thank you for the gift of community. Thank you for sisterhood and friendship. Thank you for the unity that comes through you.

In Jesus's holy name we pray,

Amen

