In November of 2016, I moved to New York City, jobless and friendless. To remedy the friend part of that equation, I started attending a church in my neighborhood and then joined a small group. I made many friends in that group, one of whom was named Kelly. We became close friends, bonding over family drama and introversion.

Kelly works in fashion. A couple years into our friendship, she was between jobs and wondering what her next move would be. After lots of prayer and consideration, Kelly noticed an internal nudge. There was lots she loved about fashion, however, she’d also noticed a lot that was broken. One area that caught her attention was sustainability. She quickly realized she felt called to be part of the solution. In order to do this, she needed to attend graduate school in another state.

I was genuinely excited and proud. Kelly was following her calling and that calling was super cool! On the other, I was also kind of anxious. Our friendship would need to evolve, but what if it didn’t? What if it just ended? In the face of this situation, I found myself remembering other friendships that had ended over the years. Some I walked away from, some organically fell apart, some I was walked away from. With those memories came a wave of feelings—guilt, anxiety, sadness, and nostalgia. We all need friends, but as someone who is single, friendships are my primary and closest form of relationship.

Friendships can feel tenuous at the best of times. Someone gets a job and moves within a month. Someone starts a dating relationship and disappears into the ether. When things change and friendships shift, it can be challenging to talk about that kind of loss. Our culture doesn’t value friendship the way it values romantic relationships. Where there are rituals and norms surrounding romantic break-ups, the loss of a friend is its own kind of loss. In romantic relationships, at least in an ideal world, the relationship is defined and there is some level of expected commitment. When it comes to a marriage, it’s a whole process to untangle your lives from one another. With family, we deal with social pressure and obligation if we need to cut off that relationship.

But when we talk about friendship, what exactly is it that holds us together? I’ve heard romantic relationships described as facing one another, and friendships as standing shoulder to shoulder facing a common goal, value, or belief. We have friends or at least people with whom we are friendly, in our different spheres of life and from different times in our lives. Friendships can be superficial or deep, convenient or hard-won. They can be a source of healing and growth or a place we perpetuate unhealthy habits. We aren’t bound to one another in the same way as other kinds of relationships, and yet we need friendship just as much as any other relationship. Perhaps this is why Jesus chooses the words he does in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

Loss of a friendship can be a weird thing to talk about. Perhaps, like me, you feel like it shouldn’t be as big of a deal as it is. But if we don’t do the work of feeling our feelings and moving through the grief, it can negatively affect how willing we are to invest in our friendships moving forward.

In order to help you with that, here are five practices for when your friends leave.

**One: Write them a letter, but don’t send it.**

It can be helpful to express your unfiltered thoughts and feelings in order to move through them. However, not all of those feelings need to be expressed directly to the person in question. It can be helpful to get them all on paper and out of your head. Then you can sort through them, present them to God, and see them more clearly and objectively.

**Two: Ask yourself, “What story am I believing in this experience?”**

Writing through our thoughts and feelings can also give us insight into the deeper stories we might be projecting onto our friends. Sometimes, the stories match the situation. Other times, we are letting old thought patterns prevent us from seeing the current situation clearly and generously. If, for example, a friend is leaving in order to follow a calling, but you feel they are abandoning you, that’s probably got some roots that are worth exploring.

**Three: Write down what you will miss about having that person nearby.**

Even if you and your friend commit to staying in touch, like I did with my friend Kelly, there’s something about proximity that no amount of FaceTime calls can replace. Your friendship will look different, and that’s ok. But name the specific things you’ll miss about being able to see each other in real life on a regular basis.

**Four: Think of a few friends you want to spend more time with**

People move out, but people also tend to move in. Is there a new person at work or in your Bible Study group who you could grab coffee with? Is there a peripheral friend who you’ve always wanted to spend more time with, but haven’t yet gotten the chance? Make a list and consider sending them each a text asking if they want to hang out.

**Five: Establish new rituals you’re excited about**

If you and that friend used to meet for a walk every Friday, give yourself something else to look forward to. Maybe you and another friend can have a picnic in the park on Sunday afternoons. Maybe you can start having themed movie nights or a game night with a couple of friends every Saturday. Maybe you still go for a walk on Friday, but you listen to your favorite podcast instead.

When we lose people, it’s important for us to be honest with ourselves about the impact of that loss. It’s normal to be sad when something ends, or anxious when it changes. Sometimes, the friendship is able to evolve with the change, sometimes there is reconciliation. Other times, there isn’t. We can’t control what the other person feels or does, but we can take responsibility for our feelings. Fortunately, my friendship with Kelly survived the move and continues to evolve as our life circumstances change. However, that has not been the case with many other friendships. That is, for better or worse, how it goes. I hope these practices help you move through these shifts in your friendships so you can heal and remain open to new friendships.