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What Friends are For

Are you a loner? Or are you, perhaps, one who's best contented in a crowded room, full of other people? Either way, introvert or extrovert, isolationist or life-of-the-party, we'd venture to guess that every one of us has, and needs, true friends.

Friends are more than casual acquaintances. Friends are more than members of our social set. Friends are more than people for whom we feel an obligation. Friends, true friends, are one of life's greatest and truest treasures. The book of Ecclesiasticus says a friend is the "elixir of life." That's a great image, isn't it? Friendship is indeed a tonic, a medicine, a healing balm.

One of the greatest of all tributes to the healing quality of friendship comes from the mouth of Jesus. You remember the story. Four men wanted to take their paralyzed friend to the home where Jesus was teaching, hoping that Jesus would touch and heal him. But as they approached the house, they quickly changed plans. The house was crammed with Jesus' admirers, and it was impossible for the four men and their paralyzed friend, whom they carried on a mat, to get anywhere near Jesus. So in a daring move, the four hoisted their friend up to the rooftop, dug through the roof, and lowered the paralyzed man on his mat, right into Jesus arms. The story then tells us that Jesus, seeing the faith of the four friends, pronounced the paralyzed man healed. Because of the faith of the friends, Jesus told the man to stand up and walk.

Have you ever found yourself too confused or lost, frightened or ill to go on? Have you ever found yourself paralyzed by what you faced – but finding a true friend, discovered you could stand up to your troubles and fears, and walk on? Many of us have been fortunate enough to learn firsthand that friendship grants us courage, stamina, confidence, hope. Friendship is, indeed, the elixir of life.

This past summer, although we were on vacation for several weeks and away from our dear church friends in Vero Beach, we were able to worship at other churches where the love of the congregations for each of their members was abundantly clear. Witnessing the mutual care of those folks helped us to recognize why friendship is so critical for us all, and why our congregations are among the finest places we know to find, and keep, true friends.

You see, there among God's people, if we struggle or lack faith, the faith of our friends carries us straight to God's arms where we can be made whole again. There, if we find we've lost the melody in our hearts, the voices of friends will rise in song for us. There if we find we cannot pray, the prayers of friends will be there to see us through. There if we feel we have nothing left to give, friends are ready to offer from their abundance.

I hope you have a friend. I hope you are a friend to others. God seems to have given us into one another's keeping because every one of us needs a friend.