

Solution for Life



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The theme of our newsletter is friendship. Friendship is an overwhelming subject and can be painful for some because of the loneliness they feel. I remember being at a hockey game once and wondering how I could feel so lonely while being surrounded by so many people. Another time I was at church, a place where love is the theme, but I felt so alone. In this newsletter we will just touch the tip of the iceberg around the subject of friendship, but our desire is to give you some encouragement that you are not alone. There is one who sticks closer than a brother.

Jesus is Our Friend | by Daniel Westlund

In September of 1994, a new sitcom called Friends began that lasted for ten seasons. It involved six people and their life experiences together. Even now, 20 years later, it is still popular as people use it as a way of vicariously experiencing friendship. The need for relationships that are real goes deep into our being. An internet search on the word “friend” will bring you to multiple articles from a variety of sources on friendship, each with their own take on what friendship means. The dictionary definition of “friend” is “a person whom one knows and with whom one has a bond of mutual affection.”

One of the issues we face today when it comes to friendship is in the world of electronics. With the touch of a key on your phone or computer you can make a friend or discard that same person with ease. It ends up causing pain and stress for far too many people. The question we must ask ourselves involves how to find true friends in a fallen world.

In the Bible, we are told Abraham was a friend of God (James 2:23) and Jesus called the disciples His friends (John 15:14). The word used here is “philos.” It means “loved, dear

(beloved, valued, cherished) or friendly (welcoming, approachable).” A side note: when Jesus was betrayed in the garden by Judas with a kiss and Jesus said to Judas, “Friend, do what you came for” the word used by Jesus was “hetairoi.” It means companion, but can also mean supposed friend or imposter. When Jesus called His disciples friends at the last supper, Judas had already left to carry out the betrayal. He was not a true friend.

When we hear Jesus call the disciples His friends, we need to put it in the context of the whole conversation of John chapter 15 where Jesus tells His disciples “you are my friends if you do what I command.” What did Jesus command? “This is my command: Love each other.” (John 15:17). The word friend means loved. So, to be a friend, we need to truly love others as Jesus has loved us. True friendship flows out of your friendship with Christ. Jesus was gentle, kind, compassionate, and forgiving. The kind of friend everyone wants and the kind of friend we need to be to others.

I read a quote by an unknown author who said, “A friend is a person who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.” That is Jesus. I do

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understand it takes time for friendships to grow and develop. The disciples spent three years with Jesus before He called them friends, and just a few hours later they walked out on Him when the crowd came to arrest Him in the garden. But Jesus did not walk out on them. He remained faithful to them and came to them after the resurrection to encourage and prepare them for the task He was calling them to. What a friend they had in Jesus and what a friend we have in Jesus.

The story is told of a young man named Joseph Scriven who watched in shock as the body of his fiancée was pulled from the lake. Their wedding was supposed to have taken place the next day. Reeling from the tragedy, he made up his mind to immigrate to Canada. Packing up his belongings in Dublin, Ireland, he sailed for Canada, leaving his mother behind. He was about 25 years old. Ten years later, in 1855, he received word that his mother was facing a crisis. Joseph wrote and sent a poem to encourage and comfort her. His mother gave the poem to a friend who had it published anonymously, and it quickly became a popular hymn, though no one knew who had written it.

Meanwhile, Joseph fell in love again. But tragedy struck a second time when his bride to be, Eliza Catherine Roche, contracted tuberculosis and died in 1860 before their wedding could take place.

To escape his sorrow, Joseph poured himself into ministry, doing charity work for the Plymouth Brethren and preaching among the Baptists. He lived a simple, obscure life in Port Hope, Canada, cutting firewood for widows, giving away his clothes and money to those in need. He was described as a “man of short stature, with iron-gray hair, close-cropped beard and light blue eyes that sparkled when he talked.”

In 1896, a short time before his death, a neighbor, sitting up with him in his illness, happened upon a manuscript copy of “What a Friend we have in Jesus.” Reading it with great delight and questioning Mr. Scriven about it, he said that he had composed it for his mother, to comfort her in a time of special sorrow, not intending anyone else should see it. Sometime later, when another Port Hope neighbor asked him if it was true that he had composed the hymn, his reply was, “The Lord and I did it between us.”

The manuscript read as follows:

What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because to do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged. Take it to the Lord in prayer. Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge! Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In His arms He'll take and shield thee; Thou wilt find a solace there.

Joseph Scriven died on October 10, 1896, but his poem to his mother has touched the hearts of millions and reminds us all that we have the opportunity to be in a meaningful friendship with Jesus, and out of your friendship with Jesus will flow true friendship with many others. ■

Solution for growth

Forever Friends | by Kristen Alewine

Several times recently I've heard the statement made that you are the average of the people you spend the most time with. Some will say it's the average of your closest five people, some will say ten, but whatever the number, this idea that you become like the people you're with has been taking up a good amount of my brain space lately. There are a lot of conclusions that can be reached from this statement, but the one I've been thinking about the most is how much of my life I've spent surrounded by people who are just like me. Or at least as close as I could find. And while it's natural to be drawn to people who feel familiar, I feel as though God has been drawing my attention to the beauty of others' perspectives. Especially on things like faith, doubt, prayer, etc. As I've been finding friends who are older than me, younger

than me, who have lived different faith stories and survived different struggles, I'm noticing my view of God deepening and expanding. I don't mean to say that the things I've always believed are necessarily wrong, just that they might have been limited to the little stream I've been swimming in. Living in friendship with people who add new colors to my landscape feels like a little foreshadowing of what it might be like to live in forever community with people “from every tribe and tongue”, all reflecting their own facet of God's beauty. ■

Friendship... that raises up a lot of emotions in me. In my early child years, maybe from around third grade, it felt safer for me to be a loner and stick closer to home. My older sister would launch out on her adventures while I waited at home for her to return and tell me all about it. I remember that we had a “mean girl” who lived next door and a couple of times when I did launch out, I was hurt so would run back home and remain safely there. I even remember at elementary school feeling left out and alone during the long lunch recesses outside. My dad had to make arrangements with my fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Riley, to let me stay in and help her out during recess. Home was where it was safe with no chance of being hurt or someone breaking my heart.

But I do want to say that I have met with many people through the years where home was not a safe place. Being out of the house was where they found their solace and often through friends that stuck closer than a brother or sister. So, I’m probably not the only one that has feelings and emotions around friendship and friends.

I remained what I would call a loner until one day at a church high school youth group outing, I met Gail. She was new to the group, and I would say that something miraculous happened. We just connected with one another. It was what I would call “Chemistry.” We even discovered that we were born on the same day of the same month in the same year. We became besties so much so that I actually think I might have spent more time at her house than I did at my own. Having a neighborhood full of boys didn’t hurt. In fact, one of them years later actually became my husband now of 51 years. I felt so close to Gail that when she married her husband, John, from Minnesota, he felt like a brother to me. Our families were close, hanging out a lot, even traveling together and once actually living with them for a month. It was a life-changing friendship. But then one day, just like so many other of my friends, they moved away. My son would tell you, as a little kid back then, that the atmosphere in our home changed after they moved.

Gail lives in Oregon now with John and we live in Massachusetts. We usually connect on our birthdays, but distance is a harsh reality to friendships. I will tell you that when we do reconnect, it is like we’ve been neighbors for all these years, and I still feel that special something. Heaven will be a wonderful place with no time or space or limitations in our relationships or with our friendships. We’ve joked about asking God if Gail and I could possibly have adjoining mansions when we get to heaven.

We have been created to be in relationship with others. But life is busy and because of disappointment, hurt, or loss, so many, I think, are lonely and maybe even wounded. Recently I was reading in the book *Life Without Lack* (Dallas Willard) about how God intends us to live in relationship with Him.

I had been reflecting on friendships that I have lost or even some that were broken, and I was reminded of how deeply Jesus wants to be our friend. On earth, Jesus felt the need to be in relationship and to cultivate friendships. Mark 3:13-14 says:

“Afterward, Jesus went up on a mountainside and **called to Himself the men He wanted to be His close companions**, so they went up with Him. He appointed the Twelve, whom He named apostles. **He wanted them to be continually at His side as his friends**, so that He could send them out to preach.”

Jesus called His disciples to Himself and wanted them as close companions and to be continually by His side as his friends. Just as Jesus called His disciples to be by His side as friends, He is also calling you to be His friend. It is in close relationship with Jesus that we can step out in confidence to have earthly friendships that encourage and call the best out of us as Gail did for me. Friendships that also encourage us to live out our God ordained Kingdom Destiny.

"He is your friend who pushes you nearer to God."
Abraham Kuyper

“Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

Solution for the future

Signs of the Times | by Daniel Westlund

At the beginning of each year, I take time to reflect on the coming year and its prophetic implications. I said 2022 was a year of change and that would continue into 2023, and it did. As I give thought to 2024, I am reminded of the verse found in Acts 3:21, “He (Jesus) must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.”

A date has been set by God for the return of Christ. There is a mystery to that appointed time. As Jesus told the disciples before He ascended to heaven, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own Authority.” And though there is a mystery concerning when, we have been given signs to watch for.

In Matthew 16:1-4, the religious leaders came to Jesus asking Him to show them a sign. Jesus tells them they know how to forecast the weather by the color of the sky, but they could not interpret the signs of the times. What are three signs, based on God’s Word, I am looking at in 2024?

The first sign relates to the Gospel. “And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14) Wycliffe Global Alliance reports that at least some Scriptures have been translated into 3,658 languages, reaching 7.23 billion people or up to 97% of all peoples. The Word of God is being translated at an increasing pace, allowing the Gospel of the Kingdom to be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations.

The second sign relates to the nation of Israel and its continued restoration. In our last newsletter, I looked at the prophecy related to Israel, Jerusalem and nations of the world with the backdrop of the war between Israel and Hamas. God’s plan is unfolding and at the center of end time events is the nation of Israel.

The third sign relates to the days of Noah: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” (Matthew 24:37) What were those days like? “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled. So, the Lord said, ‘I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created and with

them the animals, birds and the creatures that move along the ground for I regret that I have made them.’ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of the time, and he walked faithfully with God.” (Genesis 6:5-9)

In Matthew 24:38-39 Jesus describes those days. “For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will at the coming of the Son of Man.” The warning is to “be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him.” (Matthew 24:44)

“When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” (Luke 21:28)

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Message from Dan and Jessie

Friendship is a precious gift from Jesus. Our world is filled with skepticism and distrust which make it difficult to have true friendships. Christ gives a gift of friendship when we are willing to trust Him. This life of trust in Him impacts our ability to be a friend and receive friendship. We may not even know why we are lonely. It our desire to give you hope that Jesus loves you and that in whatever we face His arms are open wide to love us. If you would like to talk to someone and receive prayer, feel free to email Jessie at sfl@solutionforlife.org. Place SFL Jessie in the subject line. We will set a time to pray with you.

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Blessings, Dan and Jessie