

Help from our friends

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [June 20, 2001](#) issue

I love the story of the four men who carry their paralyzed friend to see Jesus and can't get close because of the crowd. Undeterred, they carry him to the roof and lower him right into the middle of the crowd to the feet of Jesus. When Jesus sees the faith of the four friends, he says to the man, "Your sins are forgiven" and then "Rise, take up your bed and go home."

It strikes me that this is a story about friendship. Those four men know what they have to do to get their friend some help and they do it. I'm intrigued with the attention Jesus pays to them, and that he equates what they have done for their friend as faith. I conclude that when you are weak and vulnerable and paralyzed in body and spirit, having friends can save your life; and that even when you can't or don't believe, having friends who do can give you your life back.

When my wife and I were young parents, we moved to a community where we didn't know a soul. We were the youngest people in the neighborhood by at least 15 years. We were also 500 miles from family and friends. We had the great good fortune to move into a house beside Nathalie and Art, a couple in their 40s who had no children of their own and who immediately extended to us the gift of friendship. An occasional cup of coffee, a kind inquiry about a sick child, an offer of help with a reluctant oil furnace—in such acts we were the recipients of a unique gift which we now understand to have been life-giving.

When it came time to add a garage to the tiny manse, Art, who at that time was not a church member, although later he and Nathalie joined, offered to build it and to teach me how—and we did it together. When a new baby arrived ahead of schedule and I was not home, it was Art and Nathalie who provided ambulance service to the hospital. When it was our first Thanksgiving away from home and our families, we invited the couple to dinner, and even though they had families of their own, they came and shared Thanksgiving dinner with us.

Part of what a church is for is to provide access to the life-giving power of friendship. Part of why we worship corporately is that together we can affirm and trust and

believe and give our hearts in ways that any one of us on any given Sunday may not be able to. When we pray together, we are always praying on behalf of those among us who, for whatever reason, are not able to pray. When we sing, we carry with us those who are down, unable to sing, perhaps unable to do much of anything. When we stand and say together, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty," we are believing for those who today have no belief left. When we give, we give also for those who cannot.

Friendship heals. It is the greatest privilege to be able to carry one another into the presence of the Divine Healer, and it is the most amazing grace, when we can't quite make it alone, to be lifted up, held up, carried into his presence by strong arms and loving hands and faithful prayers. Maybe what we Christians in the various denominations that are so often at war with one another need most these days is a rediscovery of the grace and gift of friendship.