

Bringing Out The Best In Each Other

True friends help us become the people we were born to be. Sometime it's as basic as encouraging each other to be our best in daily activities, daily decisions, and spiritual growth. At other times, it's helping us discover our gifts and moving forward to use them for good.

Can we remember a time when someone encouraged us to have hope, to keep going, to do the right thing? What did that person do that felt encouraging? People loved to spend time with Jesus. Everywhere He went, Jesus told people that the kingdom of God was available to them. Jesus taught that anyone who was part of the kingdom of God was a citizen with dignity, a worthwhile servant of the King, the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Jesus called people forward to be the wonderful gift God created them to be.

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5 NIV)

Friendship is based on shared values and goals. At one level people can be friends just because they enjoy the same games or crafts. Deep friendship happens, however, when people share the deepest and most important values. A passion to see wrongs made right, for example, can bond friends together no matter what they have to face. If each friend sees the other and believes in the other as salt and light, that encourages and strengthens the person so they actually become more than they could have become on their own.

A real friend helps us carry our burdens, encourages and builds us up, helps us move toward restoration from a problem, and spurs us on to love and good deeds. A real friend doesn't climb into a dark and complaining place with us. A good friend helps us meet and face what comes our way and helps us find God's plan in it.

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law

of Christ. Encourage one another daily ... so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (From Galatians 6, Hebrews 3, and 10)

Toni Morrison said, "She is a friend. She gathers the pieces and gives them back to me in all the right order."

Many of us struggle with self-acceptance. Sometimes we compare ourselves with others - their looks, their gifts, their achievements. However, true friendship means seeing ourselves as peers, encouragers, and cheerleaders in each other's lives. We affirm one another for a job well done, and we open doors for each other to try new things and risk success or failure. We air our feelings out loud, without fear of rejection, and realize that our friend will help us sort out the puzzle pieces of life.

Here are some things friends do to bring out the best in us:

- Friends ask questions.
- Friends laugh and cry with us
- Friends encourage us to try new things
- Friends stimulate our faith walk with God.
- Friends affirm our strengths and are not threatened by our successes.
- Friends pray for us.
- Friends remind us of hope on the other side of our discouragement.
- Friends challenge us to take a healthy risk.
- Friends stick with us when everyone else gives up on us.
- Friends notice and compliment us on a job well done - a smile, a kind gesture, a goal reached

Watch for an opportunity to be a friend to someone, to carry a burden, to encourage and build someone up, to spur someone on to love and good deeds. Think about the unique person they are and ask yourself, "What would feel encouraging to that person? What would motivate that person to love, not just make them feel guilty or overwhelmed? What does this person need? How can I be a friend to this person?"

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. How am I being a friend?
2. How am I reaching out to include the joy and wisdom of friends into my experience?
3. What happens that moves me away from friends, towards isolation, that makes me vulnerable for relapse?
4. How deeply or how honestly am I letting myself be known by others?

Someone has said, "A simple friend thinks the problems you whine about are recent." A real friend says, "You've been whining about the same thing for years. Get off your duff and do something about it."