



March 2012

Dear friends,

God has reminded me of His love that He has lavished upon me through my friends. I don't know about you, but I have had times where I have felt unloved, misunderstood and even had a "woe-is-me" attitude wondering if I had any friends. I am not talking about friends that talk about the weather, go out to dinner and a movie or the ones who just say "how are you doing?" and keep walking. I am talking about real friends, friends that would and do lay down their lives for me.

God has given me a fresh reminder that He has brought many people into my life who take His command from John 15:12-13 seriously: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." My friends, my family in Christ... they do this for me. Do you know how sweet that is? God's love has flooded me this week through people who have been obedient to Him.

This is how my week rolled...

Thursday a friend bought my family groceries and toilet paper. We had four rolls left. Another friend gave me homemade laundry detergent when we had only enough left for four more loads. Around 15 other friends were helping us wash the discarded clothing we picked up from the Mercedes Marathon. And two friends took time out of their days to deliver bags of warm clothing to Jessie's Place and The Church of the Reconciler Houseless Ministry.

Friday, another friend came to volunteer at the office and shared stories of healing in her heart and her marriage and reminded me to stop working and eat lunch. Another friend came over for a visit and challenged me to fast for the hearts and needs of the poor. And that night, other friends had us for dinner and reminded us that when God closes a door of opportunity we can still be joyful and praise Him.

Saturday morning my little girl and I went to celebrate with a friend who is miraculously about to have a baby after years of having a closed womb. I also was encouraged by other ladies at the baby shower as they recalled and shared the faithfulness of our Father in their lives. That afternoon, I was challenged by a friend to love without expecting anything in return or any repayment for kindness, as we are told in Luke 6:27-36. She went on to explain that it is easy to love people who love you back; even people without Jesus do that. Then, we ate leftovers with friends and trusted God to provide for a family vacation, which He did provide through some other friends.

Sunday, we worshipped the Lord together with many friends we love and then shared lunch with two additional families, praying and waiting in expectation for the heart of another friend who is being drawn to Jesus. That afternoon I was able to pray with another friend as she was headed to a youth event to share about finding our identity in Christ and not in other people or things or what she does. Then, that night some missionary friends from Africa came and shared story after story of God, talking till the wee hours of the morning. God reminded me of Romans 1:11-12 and His intent for us... "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

Are you seeing this? The body of Christ! Jesus prayed for us to have this unity, this true friendship. In John 17:20-23 Jesus prayed: "My prayer is not for them (disciples) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their

message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

On Monday, our missionary friends left after a wonderful breakfast and a time together in the Word and in prayer. My heart was so full, overflowing with the joy of the Lord. Then, we ran into a father, an old friend from 12+ years ago, that homeschools, who is willing to talk to another father who will soon start homeschooling his girls. We meet the second father and his girls for lunch and were able to pass on that encouragement. Then, we went to a local park where five other families we love were there with their kids and we were able to visit together. That same night, I met seven ladies for dinner who all shared how God is breaking them, stretching them and teaching them to be more like Jesus. A friend gave me a ride home and poured out her heart with her journey through fear and we prayed together.

Tuesday I came to work to find friends volunteering, sorting coupons and working on our website to repair some technical difficulties. Then, five men stopped what they were doing to go help my husband move something very heavy at our home. Another friend emailed that she is willing to share her pain from the loss of her husband to encourage another woman who has suddenly lost her own husband. As I was headed to bed, my husband handed me a coupon for a free massage that someone gave him to give me because they heard my back has been hurting.

On and on life goes and every day I see people laying down their lives for me, loving me like Jesus. Friends sharing their resources, emailing me scripture, speaking the truth in love to me, praying for me and my family, sacrificing their time, working alongside me, transporting me around town and providing necessities my family needs. Jesus knew what we needed and He sent it through people who love Him so much that they obey Him by loving me.

As I see Jesus all around me and feel His love poured out, all over me, through His people, I am spurred on to love and good deeds. How can we be the body of Christ to one another? We can do some of what I have experienced from others this week. We can read 1 Corinthians 12 and ask God to show us what we bring to the body of Christ. Every day, we have something to contribute to this world. We are all commanded by Jesus to love as He loved us. We too can enjoy the sacrifice of laying down our lives for our friends. We can go deeper, be more transparent and face our fears. God will speak to us if we will slow down and listen. He teaches us how to love like Jesus.

Let us get our eyes off ourselves and go deep on this journey into great love. Let us love deeply and fully, being willing to admit our struggles, our weaknesses and our difficulties. Let us avoid superficial friendships and pursue the real deal. We must start with our relationship with Jesus and allow Him to teach us. He will guide us and make the opportunities to love so obvious, when we were blind to them before. He will remove the scales from our eyes and help us SEE and understand what sacrificial love means and why we should be obedient to share that kind of crazy love. And in the journey, He will radiate through our lives and draw other men and women to Himself.

Longing to love like Jesus,

Hebrews 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."