



# Life giving

I woke up this morning to find a message on my phone from a friend saying she was going to be in town for 24hrs or so this weekend and my heart leapt with joy. I immediately started mentally rearranging my plans and commitments so I could block out some time to catch up. One of my oldest friends, she lives more than 1000km away so it's pretty special even to be in the same city. This friend has loved me and cared for me and shared life's ups and downs – whether together or apart – for many decades. She is loyal and supportive and forgiving and affirming... what's not to like?

Many friendships ebb and flow – it seems they have a time and a place. Over the years I have often had the experience of meeting someone and we just 'click'. Within a few hours there's a sense that you've known each other forever and you never run out of things to talk or laugh about... a particularly bittersweet experience when you meet someone when travelling a long way from home and it's unlikely you'll find yourselves in the same locality ever again!

But I can also bear witness to the fact that some friendships sneak up on you. Sometimes you don't have an instant connection with someone. Maybe you are just acquaintances or work friends or part of a larger group of friends. But over time – sometimes it may take years – you come to realise what a deep and nourishing friendship you have with that person and how important they've become in your life. (My husband Robert just asked if I was referring to him here!)

I find myself once more reflecting on my precious grandchildren. I live in fairly close proximity to my 5yrs to 12yr old grandkids, as well as being in a close loving relationship with them all. I know not all families have the chance to be closely involved in each other's lives, so I am very grateful to have this. But even more, I am blessed by the individual friendships I am developing with each of them. In amongst the parenting & caring interactions – providing food, entertainment and 'relationship support' (also known as breaking up

and refocusing tension) there is time spent getting to know each other better, finding more out about what we have in common, what we each like & dislike and are interested in, and just enjoying each other's company and ways of being.

I have many different friendship groups. I am particularly blessed by those that have developed from within our church community. I often compare that experience to growing up in a small town. You know someone... and their siblings... and often their extended family. You know where they started out, what they aspired to or did well at, some of the mistakes they have made, the challenges or adversity they have experienced along the way. And you know about the triumphs and achievements... I think what can come with this, if we choose, is a greater sense of compassion and empathy in our friendships. "Liking" someone is no longer the defining feature of the friendship – love, and compassion, and admiration and respect play a more significant part and I think those friendships have more substance and often more longevity.

When you've known people through the good times and the bad, you've put up with their inconsistencies and foibles – and they've put up with yours. When you've experienced genuine forgiveness from someone – or found yourself needing to practice forgiveness towards someone – a friendship that genuinely moves through those experiences is often so much more resilient and nourishing in the long term. 9 Robert – I am including you here ).

Friendship goes beyond time and place, beyond age or background. It is ordinary and every-day, and spectacular and life-giving all at the same time.

Well I've got to be off. I'm going to meet a friend.

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# joy of friendship

In a year full of lockdowns, video meetings, moving across one country to then move across the world, oh and that pesky pandemic, you could say I've had my share of reasons to be distracted. Weirdly enough though, I feel closer to my friends than I have in a long time. Back in April, after my husband and I had just packed up our little car and frantically drove across the United States, we found ourselves in Kansas City in a self-designated 2 week quarantine. Other than chronologically watching all the Marvel movies, we still had way too much time on our hands. So I turned to my support system.

It had been a long while since I had that much time, without distractions, to just authentically catch up with my community. I have this group of girlfriends from uni that I have stayed relatively close to. We all live in separate corners of the US and it's been probably 8 years since we were all in the same place at the same time. But we've managed to stay updated via group messages and a shared blog.

At that point, everyone was working from home, so it was easier to work around schedules and make time for one another. We decided to start a monthly video call - that we've actually kept up - even with me moving back to Australia. We meet on their Friday night/my Saturday morning and just catch up. It seems so simple but it's often the highlight of my week. I'm always blown away by how authentic and real we can be with one another considering we haven't seen each other in years. But isn't that the beauty of good friendships? You can go years without catching up or seeing one another, then act as if no time has gone by at all.

It's been an obviously hard year for so many of us. But one silver lining I continue to fall back on is how strong my relationships are. I feel so grateful to have returned to Perth after having been away for 2 years and fallen back in with friends like I had never left at all. To walk back in to my congregation and be greeted with the same love and welcoming spirit that I had so dearly missed. If anything this pandemic has taught me that staying in contact with people really is easy, today's world makes it so simple to call someone or send a quick message. That I shouldn't let silly excuses get in the way of keeping up with friends and family.

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