

Community Church of Issaquah

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When Our Need Outweighs Our Strength

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Lately, every time I get in my car and turn the engine on, the radio seems stuck on one song that must be the song of the day. I hear it over and over. I'm not complaining, because I like it a lot – not the singer so much – but the song is really good. You'll probably remember it when I tell you the singer and the title – James Taylor's "You've Got a Friend." Actually, Carole King wrote the song and her version is best (did you know she lives on a ranch in Idaho?), but for some reason we only get this male version. I know all the words and if there's no one else in the car, I always sing it out loud. I'll spare you the ear pain of listening to my singing, but I will share the words of the song. I've actually been paid NOT to sing. It goes like this:

**When you're down and troubled
And you need some love and care
And nothing, nothing is going right
Close your eyes and think of me
And soon I will be there
To brighten up even your darkest night**

**You just call out my name
And you know wherever I am
I'll come running, to see you again
Winter, spring, summer or fall
All you have to do is call
And I'll be there
You've got a friend**

**If the sky above you
Grows dark and full of clouds
And that old north wind begins to blow
Keep you head together
And call my name out loud
Soon you'll hear me knocking at your door**

**You just call out my name
And you know wherever I am
I'll come running yeah to see you again
Winter, spring, summer or fall
All you have to do is call
And I'll be there yes I will**

**Now ain't it good to know that you've got a friend
When people can be so cold
They'll hurt you, yes and desert you
And take your soul if you let them oh but don't you
let them**

**You just call out my name
And you know wherever I am
I'll come running yeah to see you again
Winter, spring, summer or fall
All you have to do is call
And I'll be there yes I will
You've got a friend
You've got a friend**

The message of that song is clear – we all have troubles and we all need a friend. I've been there, and so have you. We need help. But you know the most interesting thing about needing help? It's the fact that most of us will never ask for help. Maybe we like our own independence, maybe we would be embarrassed to admit our

need, or maybe we don't know how to ask for help. Much of our willingness to reach out depends on the kind of help we need. Whether it's emotional, spiritual, physical or financial, these factors determine exactly what our actions will be.

- ✓ Car won't start? Need help with jump starting your battery?
- ✓ Income Taxes too complicated? Need help from H & R Block?
- ✓ Computer has a virus? Need help from the Geek Squad?
- ✓ Sink drain all stopped up? Need help from Roto-Router?
- ✓ Dog needs his rabies shot? Need help from your vet?

You see. Every day in small ways, and often some large ways, we need help, and we ask for it. These are our responsibility.

From the scripture passage today there is a verse that is often given as instruction to believers. It comes from the letters that Paul wrote to the early church in Galatia. It goes like this, "Bear ye one another's burden." And for years I thought that meant any time anyone had a burden, I was supposed to take it on myself so they didn't have to deal with it. Many churches think this is the way it's supposed to be as well. Strangely, that's the attitude of many people from all faith traditions. Someone has a problem or needs help and we're obliged to run and take that problem for ourselves. It really opened my eyes when I looked at that verse in the original Greek and found out it wasn't what I thought. In the original language in which it was written, it would best read, "Bear each other's overload," meaning when a person gets overloaded, then we have a responsibility to help. We are not asked to step in at the first sign of someone encountering a problem.

The reality is that we all have problems, our own burden to bear. Each of us bears a responsibility to take care of our own problems first, at least the ones we can handle. It's when we have more than we know what to do with that we should reach out for help.

Now, please don't hear this as saying that you should never ask for help, you should! There is just wisdom in knowing when to reach out for help. Let me give you some examples of this.

My grandson when he was a college student thought he should ask for money every time we talked. He did it in very craft ways. It was comments like, "Oh, Gramps, my bank account is totally empty," or "I just spent my last twenty dollars on gas for my car," or "Well, I would do that if I had some money." Hint. Hint. Did he need it every time? Probably not. Truthfully, he is among the worst money managers I know. He takes his salary from Albertson's and spends most of it going to concerts for every band that wanders into Missoula, Montana. It's a priority for him so when his wallet is empty, he asks for help. This raises a question. Is it fair to ask for help when your own actions are responsible for putting yourself in a place of needing help? It muddies the waters for sure. Help is still needed, but it must be coupled with self-help. Dakota's need is really his need. It's his burden. It isn't an overload – except for his grandpa.

And then there is the plea for help that comes almost out of desperation. Some of you know my spouse, Paolo. What you may not know is that he is a brilliant scientist who was engaged in cancer research and alternative ways to treat the disease when chemo and radiation aren't able to stem the spread of it. Just before Christmas he got a call from a friend in Croatia who asked for help for an 18-year-old boy who had been diagnosed with a brain tumor, a severe kind of cancer. His friend asked him to come to Croatia and see if there was anything he could do to help the boy and his family, so he flew there and spent 5 weeks at the bedside of the young man trying desperately to help. Things seemed to be improving when it was time for Paolo to return home, so he came back to Seattle very hopeful. A couple of weeks

ago he received a call from his friend that the boy had collapsed at home, had been taken to the hospital and was in ICU on life-support. Paolo hurried to make plans to go back to be with the boy even though there did not seem to be much hope. He flew there and received word just a few minutes before he landed in Croatia that the boy had just died. This is a tragic story, but it does remind us that sometimes even with all of our efforts, help isn't enough. We do our best and we grieve over our inability to help.

These two examples, though very different in message and outcome remind us of some real-life lessons that we should remember. Let me share some that I have learned with you:

- First, the call for help comes in many forms. Some seem frivolous and some seem so insurmountable that we do not know how to get our brains to grasp the severity of them. But every call for help is one that we should address. The degree of need might be small or large, but the reality is that someone needs help. At some point in our lives, we all will need help in some form. We should admit it and own it.
- Second, we must understand that even with the best intentions and efforts, there are times when we just do not have the resources to help some when they ask. Perhaps we don't have the skills, or the finances, or the time because of our own life issues. We want to answer every call for help, but it isn't always possible. Stop thinking that you have the where-with-all to take care of every problem in the world. You don't, and neither do I. We do our best, and that's the best we can do.
- Third, all of us need to put aside our pride and accept the reality that every single person in the world is going to be in a place where we realize we are "overloaded" and cannot

bear the massive burden alone. For anyone to think they are exempt from needing help is truly living the impossible dream. It is not a sign of weakness or failure to speak the words, “I need help.” I think the reverse is true. For me, it’s a sign of great inner strength to reach out when your burden is so heavy you cannot bear it alone.

- Fourth, none of us are mind readers. You aren’t, are you? I can’t look inside your head and see that you need me. But when we give ourselves to the task of building close relationship, we probably know someone well enough to see a need even when it isn’t spoken. Simply put, you don’t have to wait for a call for help if you can see that need and reach out to a person without being asked. Be sensitive to those around you. If you fall on the slippery walkway coming into the church, I can see you need help and will run out to lift you up. But if you are desperately lonely and feeling depressed and disconnected from the world, I might not see this because I don’t live in your house and see you every day. Never hesitate to reach out for comfort and care, someone to just be there for you.
- And fifth, make sure we all understand that a church is not responsible for helping every person with every need. A church is a building, and this building can’t do anything to help anyone except give you some shelter from the rain. It is the faith family who comes inside this structure that has the privilege of helping people in need. You can give financially to an organization that works to help unhoused people, or you can send a card to someone you know is ill, or you can host a lunch or dinner or coffee time or dessert time for others to tighten the bonds. That’s what faith families do. But a word of warning here – you cannot help everyone. The world is large and what this congregation can do is limited.

My challenge to you is to care for each other, recognize the needs of your sisters and brothers and offer help when you can, and never hesitate to ask for help with your overload. That's what families are for. When Paul writes in that 13th verse of Chapter 12 of Romans, "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." That's what this faith family is for. Remember the words to the song, "You just call out my name, and you know wherever I am, I'll come running to see you again. Winter, spring, summer or fall, all you have to do is call, and I'll be there. You've got a friend."

I am positive that every one of us will at one time sooner or later feel as if we are overloaded and need help. That's life. The message from God and His Word is simple – He is always here, and we, his people hope that we are always be here. We are here for you to bear your overload. All you need to do is call, and we will be there for you. Don't ever, ever forget that.