

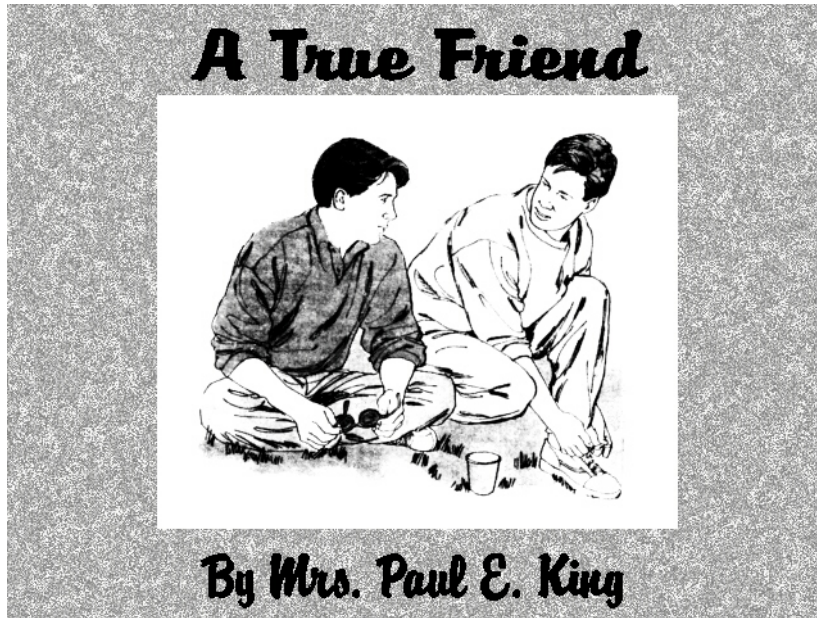
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A TRUE FRIEND
By Mrs. Paul E. King

The sun dipped behind a cloud and Loren called to his friend to stop mowing long enough to rest awhile. Wayne came over to where Loren had already settled down upon the grass and, stopping to tie his shoe, he said, "I still can't see why you do this, Loren. After all, you don't get a dime for it. And it's hard work; especially with that old push mower. How old do you think that thing is? I'm not sure that I ever saw one like it before."

Loren pulled his sun glasses off and wiped the perspiration from his face, smiling as he remarked, "Gives a fellow a good workout, doesn't it?"

"Are you kidding! It's more than a workout; it's almost slavery, Loren. That thing's horrible to push. And look at all the steps you make getting the job done. Whew! What a mower. Is it an antique?"

Loren laughed. "Not quite. But my father said old Mr. Roundtree has had that mower for so long as he can remember. He keeps it sharpened nicely -- the blades, I mean. You'll have to admit that it cuts a good, clean swath."

"What a swath! Fourteen inches?"

"It's more than that, Wayne. It's simply that all the power must come from our muscles and our pushing."

"It takes forever to get the grass down," Wayne replied.

"So, once again -- why do you do it, Loren? After all, you're not obligated. The man isn't a relative of yours."

"He's my neighbor," Loren answered quietly.

"Your neighbor? Hey, you live three blocks and a half away. How do you figure Mr. Roundtree's a neighbor?" Wayne sat down on the grass and hugged his knees to his chin.

"I'm a Christian, as I told you more than once. . . . "

"Yes, I know. And that's why you're different. I know this too. And it's because of your good difference that I keep hanging around you, trying to find out what it is that makes you like you are and hoping some of it will rub off on me."

Loren looked at his friend. Then, in a kind, gentle voice, he said, "Wayne, I have nothing that I can boast in of myself. Nothing. No goodness, no merit . . . nothing. All that I am or ever hope to be I owe to the Lord Jesus Christ who forgave me of my sins and made me a new creature in Him. It's

like I told you before, you'll have to experience salvation for yourself -- personally -- to know and see and feel what truly and actually happens to one who is born again and is changed through and by the transforming power of Christ. This isn't a 'rubbing off on you sort of thing; it's being indwelt by the Lord Himself. He comes to live within the heart."

"That sounds almost unreal," Wayne said. "But because you say it's so, I know it is. I believe you, even though I don't understand it."

"You sound like Nicodemus."

"Who's he? What a name! I never heard anybody called by a name like that."

"Some of today's names are just as strange sounding as was that of Nicodemus. He's a Bible character. He came to Jesus by night to talk to Him about spiritual things."

"Oh! Really? What did he want to know?"

"He was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. He told Jesus that he knew he was a teacher come from God, adding, that no man could do the miracles Jesus had done and was doing except God was with him."

Wayne leaned his chin down on his cradled knees and listened intently.

"Jesus gave him an instant answer as He declared, 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

"Nicodemus didn't see how this was possible. He even verbalized it by asking how a man could be born when he was old. Jesus replied that except a man was born of water and of the Spirit, he couldn't enter into the kingdom of God. And then He said, 'Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.' Born from above is what born again means and is, Wayne.

"And then Jesus stated, 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell when it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.' This is all recorded in St. John 3:1-8. This is why I say that before anyone can understand what really happens to a person who is truly born again, of God, he must experience it

for himself. It is beyond describing, Wayne, and beyond human understanding and comprehension."

Wayne sat with his hands locked around his knees, looking off into space. Not turning to look at Loren, he said, "Some of my friends think I've lost my reasoning, hanging around you the way I do instead of them; choosing your company instead of theirs. And it is quite a switch, I'll admit. We were out every night of our life, and this is a fact. I don't care how many tests we had the next day at school, the whole bunch of us went out together somewhere. And not all the places we went to and hung out at were Arby's and McDonald's, believe me. Some were pretty wild and risqué. Things went on that were scary at times, and more than once we broke and ran when we knew the cops were coming.

"It got to the place where I wondered what I was doing, running around with a group of young people whose lifestyles I didn't like and whose doings I didn't really enjoy. I knew that if we were ever caught by the police, I'd be as much a suspect as the others, because I was with them and among them, and all of this by my own willingness and consent. I knew I could be in for big trouble if the cops ever did make a raid and arrested us. That's when I began watching you and how you lived. It looked like a totally boring lifestyle, I admit. But I knew that you had no worries over cops looking for you, nor of their sneaking around and watching the places you frequented and hung out at."

"The Christian has nothing to hide, Wayne, his life is transparent. He is 'open and above board' in all things. And it's only because of Christ living in him that he is this way. The old Loren had real difficulty overcoming some of the temptations he faced because he had no one to help him. But the new, born again, of God, Loren has been made victorious through Christ. That's the difference; Christ living within."

"You're sure different from those I used to hang around with all the time. And for the first time in my life, I feel I have found a true friend. My other so called friends were nice to my face, but when I was absent and not around, they talked about me and made some pretty catty remarks about me. But they did this with everybody; it seemed to be a way of life with them. Everybody talked about everybody else when they absented themselves from whatever the gang planned. You're not like that, Loren, and I like it because you're not. You're the same no matter where you are. Every time I

see you, you're the same. And I've never once heard you criticize or gossip about anyone either."

"Thanks, Wayne. But again, all the credit and the glory must go to Jesus. It is because of His indwelling presence that one can live a consistent Christian life. Also, when you're born again you're not critical: you love people."

"I believe I'm beginning to understand, and see the light," Wayne said seriously. "If I follow you correctly, anyone who gives his heart and life to the Lord can do all things through Christ."

"Exactly. But only as he lives in Christ and Christ lives in him."

"Can a fellow be born again anywhere?" Wayne asked seriously and teary-eyed. "Like maybe on someone's lawn; or must he go to a preacher or a church?"

Loren felt his heart hammering inside his chest. "Jesus said, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' Revelation 3:20," he quoted. "You can be born again anywhere, Wayne, when you are ready and willing to be saved, or born again. Are you ready?"

"I really am, Loren."

"Then we'll pray right here, Wayne. The Bible says, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' (1 John 1:9)."

"I have so many sins to confess," Wayne cried. "They've been pressing me down like a great heavy weight. I want them to be taken away. . . ."

Amid the whispering of the trees and the singing of the birds, Wayne confessed and repented of his sins. It wasn't a sophisticated prayer nor, even, one of eloquence; it was stuttered out of stammering lips from a broken and contrite heart and it was acceptable unto God: the blood of Calvary's Crucified Lamb was applied and a new name was written down in glory.

"It's done! It's done!" came the joyous exclamation.

"My sins are gone! I feel light and happy and wonderful. Oh, I never felt so free and wonderful in all my life. I'm born again, Loren. Born again. My heavy load . . . it's gone. . . ."

The sun came out from behind a cloud, adding its radiance and brilliance to the joy displayed upon the face of the one newly born from above and, sometime later, Wayne jumped to his feet, saying, "Let's get on with the lawn. I now understand what you mean about calling Mr. Roundtree your neighbor. And too, I feel so light and free and wonderful until I believe I could mow a lot more lawns with that ancient 'hand-powered' mower."

"I'll mow this time, Wayne; unless you just feel you must. There are still some garden rows that need weeding. . . ."

"Please, Loren, if you don't mind, let me finish the mowing. I need to learn discipline, and I want to do it because now I know I won't be complaining over how hard the work is. Love in the heart -- Christ's love has made the labor light. And before I get back to that ancient mower, thanks for being my friend; my true friend."