

## LOVE IN ACTION

With a bucket of hot water, Mary climbed to the top of the stepladder. The much-dreaded chore of stripping off the old wallpaper in the kitchen was finally underway. After an hour of backbreaking rubbing, she had managed to coax off several strips. The others hung in long dangling shreds. In an effort to remove one of the stubborn shreds, she reached far out while standing on her tiptoes. The ladder began to tilt then to fall in a slow arc. Instinctively, Mary attempted to counter her plunge by grabbing the ladder. The ladder twisted wildly and suddenly shot out from under her. At first, the heavy thud did not register. On the way down she had struck the edge of the table sharply.

Several hours and x-rays later, Mary left the emergency room with five broken ribs and an order to rest. With her husband on an extended business trip it began to dawn on Mary that her problems were far from over. "The children, the cooking, the errands- what am I going to do?" As her mind raced over possible options, she heard the doorbell ring. Instantly, a familiar head popped through the door. "Don't get up, Mary. You just lie right there. I heard all about it". Cynthia's voice seemed to melt the anxiety that had been welling up inside of her. She knew she could count on this dear friend. "Thank you, Lord," Mary whispered quietly to herself.

Cynthia and Mary had developed their special friendship the previous year in a small group. Over a period of months of getting together with several others, these two had grown closely together. Warm scenes of their small group's get-togethers flashed through her mind: hot cocoa in front of a crackling fire as group members share their hearts with one another, a picnic that was supposed to be right off the cover of Better

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Homes and Gardens but didn't turn out that way. The weather turned cold and windy. The only table left in the park was in the shade far from the water and close to the spot where a dog had made a pit stop. They didn't have enough fried chicken, and the punch was lukewarm. But they didn't care- they were together. As the wind rose even higher, the little band beat a hasty retreat to Mary's house where they finished with a wonderful evening of talking and sharing. And what about the time the group helped move the Jeffersons! It was unforgettable. No sooner had they backed the truck up to the house than it began to pour down rain. Everyone was soaked to the bone, but they got the job done.

These special memories were interrupted by the sound of Cynthia thumping through the church directory to call several others in their group. As Cynthia shared the incident with a mutual friend, Mary smiled to herself as she thought about her initial reluctance in becoming a part of a small group. "I'm so shy. How could I ever open up to the others." Over time, however, she came to see that nobody has it all together, spiritually or otherwise. It was wonderfully refreshing to be loved and accepted just the way that she was.

As Mary recuperated, she was deeply impressed with the service and care she received. One day in particular stood out above the rest. Alice, another small group

friend, called and said, "Jack and I heard about your fall, and we're so sorry. Several of us in our small group have decided to come over on Saturday to finish your kitchen. And, if you don't mind, we'd like to paint your dining room while we're there. As Mary hung up the phone, tears streamed down her cheeks. "Thank you, Lord, for my precious friends."

Would you be interested in a small group?