

Two weeks ago, we started a new series going through the Life of David as recorded in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. The brief synopsis of the last two sermons is that Saul was chosen as the first king of Israel, but he was eventually rejected because of his inability to heed the voice of God. David has been anointed as the next king, but has not yet taken the throne. In chapter 17, he showed his fitness for the throne by trusting in God and slaying the Philistine giant Goliath.

This morning we're going to read selected portions of 1 Samuel 18-20, paying particular attention to David's relationship with King Saul's son, Jonathan.

1 Samuel 18:1-4 - After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond of love between them, and they became the best of friends. ² From that day on Saul kept David with him at the palace and wouldn't let him return home. ³ And Jonathan made a special vow to be David's friend, ⁴ and he sealed the pact by giving him his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and belt.

After David slays Goliath, Saul keeps him close so that he can keep an eye on him, and becomes very envious of the attention and respect David receives and wants David dead. Let's continue reading in 1 Samuel 19:

1 Samuel 19:1-5 - Saul now urged his servants and his son Jonathan to assassinate David. But Jonathan, because of his close friendship with David, ² told him what his father was planning. "Tomorrow morning," he warned him, "you must find a hiding place out in the fields. ³ I'll ask my father to go out there with me, and I'll talk to him about you. Then I'll tell you everything I can find out." ⁴ The next morning Jonathan spoke with his father about David, saying many good things about him. "Please don't sin against David," Jonathan pleaded. "He's never done anything to harm you. He has always helped you in any way he could. ⁵ Have you forgotten about the time he risked his life to kill the Philistine giant and how the LORD brought a great victory to Israel as a result? You were certainly happy about it then. Why should you murder an innocent man like David? There is no reason for it at all!"

Saul promises not to kill David, but soon goes back on his promise, and later in this chapter David has to flee for his life. Jonathan devises a plan whereby he will find out if his father has forgiven David or still wants him dead, and unfortunately he finds that Saul still wants him dead. David and Jonathan's goodbye is at the end of ch. 20:

1 Samuel 20:27-42 - But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?"²⁸ Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem."²⁹ He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."³⁰ Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?"³¹ As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"³² "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father.³³ But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.³⁴ Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.³⁵ In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him,³⁶ and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.³⁷ When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?"³⁸ Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master.³⁹ (The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.)⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town."⁴¹ After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together-- but David wept the most.⁴² Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

David will never see Jonathan again after this moment, as David must run for his life, and eventually Jonathan and his father Saul will be killed in battle. As you can imagine, this is a terrible time in David's life – the king is after his life, and makes six attempts to kill him. From a human perspective, the main reason David survived this difficult time is his friendship with Jonathan, a young man willing to risk his own life for the sake of his friend. This morning I want to talk about the power of friendship. Think about the relationships you have, and you know that **friendship is a very unique thing**, different than family, romantic relationships, and work relationships. Think about it - you don't choose your family: they have

to be there, or at least they should be there. And it is not as glamorous as romantic love – how many songs have been written about friendship as compared to songs about romantic love? Even getting along with work associates are necessary in order to provide for yourself. But a friend is different.

Friendship is the one relationship you can do without, in theory. Friends seem expendable, and it takes such effort and time to build a solid friendship. Preach a sermon series on love, sex, and marriage and you can pack a church. Preach a series on parenting and you can do the same. But friendship? Not so much.

But as David found out, it's critical to have good friends. As any parent can attest, the friends you choose will have an enormous impact on your life and how wise you become. As Proverbs 12:26 says, *"A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray."*

This morning I want to talk about three things: Why having friends is so critical, what it means to be a real friend, and how to find that kind of friendship.

Why you need friendship:

(1) Because life was meant to be shared

Because it is not good to be alone. Even though friends seem expendable, we were meant to share life with others. Think back to creation – everything was good that God created until 2:18, where God declares that it is not good for many to be alone. Even in paradise, with God present, there is a need for friendship, and so God makes Eve for Adam. God made us to need others besides himself. And this desire for community reflects God's character, for God is at His essence a Trinity, a relational being, Father, Son, and Spirit. Friendship is at the very essence of God. Life is meant to be shared, and there is joy that comes in sharing life. Even in romantic relationships or family relationships, it is friendship that makes the difference.

(2) To make it through life's troubles.

You will have troubles and tragedies and you will not make it without friends. David learned that without his friend, Jonathan, he never would have made it through the difficult trials he faced. He very likely would have gone back to a simple life of tending sheep, or developed a murderous spirit of retaliation to get back at Saul, or been killed. Think back on the hard times you've faced in your

life, and how important it has been to have friends encouraging you, walking with you and sharing the burden. When I had back surgery, a friend worked from my house to help me through the first day. Even in marriage, it isn't the erotic aspect of marriage that gets you through the hard times; it's the friendship.

(3) To guard against self-deception

The third reason you need friends is that we all have blind spots, and we need people who will be true friends to us and point out the character flaws that we can not see. Without a friend, we will go through life convinced that our view of reality is accurate. We may go through life believing that people are out to get us, or conversely that the world is a safe place. We may believe we are the greatest thing ever, or the worst. Friends can help us see the world and ourselves from another perspective.

Let me share two things that I believe comprise true friendship, more than just being an acquaintance.

(1) **Commitment** – In 1 Samuel 18, Jonathan sees that God has anointed David, and so he gives him his robe and his sword. Even though Jonathan is a mighty man, and even though as the king's son he is heir to the throne, he gives his robe and sword to David, essentially saying that he recognizes God's anointing on him and will serve David.

As Proverbs 17:17 says, *"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."*

Jonathan commits himself to David, even though it means risking his own life with his father. True friendship means sacrifice.

Certainly with Facebook, it's possible to have 1000 friends, but how many of them will be there for you at 10 at night when you need a real friend?

As Proverbs 18:24 says, *"A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."*

(2) **Openness & transparency** – the text says that David and Jonathan were one in spirit, that Jonathan loved David as himself. With a real friend, you have the freedom to be yourself, to share your true feelings.

As Paul David Tripp put it: *“We live in interwoven networks of terminally casual relationships. We live with the delusion that we know one another, but we really don’t. We call our easygoing, self-protective, and often theologically platitudinous conversations ‘fellowship,’ but they seldom ever reach the threshold of true fellowship. We know cold demographic details about one another (married or single, type of job, number of kids, general location of housing, etc.), but we know little about the struggle of faith that is waged every day behind well-maintained personal boundaries.*

One of the things that still shocks me in counseling, even after all these years, is how little I often know about people I have counted as true friends. I can’t tell you how many times, in talking with friends who have come to me for help, that I have been hit with details of difficulty and struggle far beyond anything I would have predicted. Privatism is not just practiced by the lonely unbeliever; it is rampant in the Church as well.”

Secondly, you can openly share encouragement. As Martin Buber said: *“the greatest thing any person can do for another is to confirm the deepest thing in him, in her – to take the time and have the discernment to see what’s most deeply there, most fully that person, and then confirm it by recognizing and encouraging it.”*

And thirdly, you also give your friends the right to speak into your life, to exhort you and challenge you. With David, not only Jonathan does this, but later a prophet named Nathan will do this as well. Friends are not afraid to confront in love, and friends have earned the right to do so by their commitment. Listen to what Proverbs says:

Proverbs 27:5-6,17 - *Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses... ¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.*

Proverbs 29:5 - *Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.*

The couplet in Proverbs 27 is startling – hidden love is hiding the truth instead of openly rebuking, and it is paired with an enemy multiplying kisses. If you are afraid to confront, you are doing the work of an enemy. Proverbs calls you a flatterer – someone who compliments because you want the other person to like you – not a real friend, and says that you are only spreading a net for his feet. You are leading them right into ruin by not pointing out their sin.

Make it safe for people to confront you. And be committed enough to someone to confront them in love.

Where do you find this friendship?

As powerful as the friendship was between Jonathan and David, not everyone finds that kind of friend here. But it points us to the true friend, Jesus. Remember what Jesus said:

John 15:12-17 - My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-- fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus is the friend who sticks closer than a brother, who loves at all times, and who speaks the truth in love. Even when his friends fell asleep on him in the Garden of Gethsemane, he chose to sacrifice His life for them. He gave up his status as prince, laying down his rights as the Son of God to die for us. Jesus is the ultimate friend you are looking for. And he teaches you how to be that friend, to be willing to be transparent, to serve, to be committed through thick and thin.

And once you have him, look around you. Jonathan and David were knit together by their shared desire for God to be glorified and Israel to be great. **There is something incredibly unique and powerful here.** People from all different backgrounds – Republican and Democrat, blue collar and white collar, young and old, city and suburb, are brought together by one common affinity – Jesus. There is such potential in having friends who love Jesus but may be completely unlike you, that perhaps you never would have gotten to know if it weren't for the church. **As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.** That is the blessing of Christian fellowship.

One of our highest values here at church is to get connected to other believers in meaningful ways. If you have not already done so, join a home fellowship. Go to a men's or women's event. Serve alongside others. Or, just be a friend to someone. Invite someone over, or serve someone else.

And for some of you, as I've been speaking, God has been bringing to mind someone who He is asking you to be a friend to, even when it is not easy for you, even when it feels like a sacrifice. Who is God asking you to commit to, or to confront in love?

Jesus is the friend that we need, and He teaches us how to be the friend that the people in this world need.