

“Closer Than a Brother”

Real Relationships – part #1

1 Samuel 18:1-16, 28-30 (*and in message: 19:1-7, 20:1-4, 20:41-42*)

[1-title slide] *Welcome*

Please join me in prayer. O God, your love for us is truly amazing. You never stop thinking of us, You never stop forgiving us, and You never stop calling us to follow Your Son, Jesus Christ. Teach us this morning, O God, something new, something that will make our earthly relationships better, even as we grow in our relationship with Your Son, Our Savior, Jesus. We pray this in His precious name. Amen.

How do you know if someone is your true friend? (*Wait for audience feedback.*) I was told the difference between just friends and real friends is this: Friends help you move, but real friends help you move bodies.

[2-Friends-girls] I have been blessed with close friends over the years. Jan hiked with me in Western Europe for ten weeks. Rob helped me realize that I should ask Katja to marry me. In graduate school, my friend Marc and I cared for each other when one of was sick or down, and we celebrated holidays and birthdays together. My friend John has journeyed with me in ministry for many years. More than once, we’ve called each other to sound off our feelings and share encouragement when we needed it most.

All of these relationships involve mutual sacrifice and giving. In fact, the hardest part for me is learning to receive help when I need it most, without feeling guilty. Four years ago, on New Year’s Day, when I ran out of gas on the expressway, my friend Jim brought me a tank and refused to accept any money for it. I told him I would pay it forward.

Do you have friends like that? We need those relationships. God did not create us in a vacuum. God created us for community, to sing together, serve together, learn together, pray together, celebrate and grieve together.

[3-girl alone] Yet some people in this world would rather go it alone. Maybe they’ve been hurt, maybe they’ve never been taught what a true friendship looks like. Maybe someone here is thinking right now, “Do I really have any deep friendships? How would I even grow that kind of relationship?”

Fortunately, God’s Word provides us the example of David and Jonathan to teach us.

[4-David and Jonathan] This is a long story, so I’m just going to give you the highlights. In 1st Samuel, the country of Israel asked God for a king. God fulfilled their request somewhat reluctantly, and Saul was crowned king. However, Saul was impulsive and selfish. So God rejected Saul and anointed David as the next king. As a young boy, David killed Goliath and then entered into Saul’s service.

Here we continue the story we read earlier in 1st Samuel 18. After David joined Saul’s household, Saul’s son befriended David. Literally, the scripture says, Jonathan’s soul connected with David’s soul, and Jonathan “loved him as himself.” (18:3)

[5-Rule #1] This brings us to the first rule of true friendship: If you want to be a good friend, love that person as yourself. This is one of the great commandments: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18) If you are going to love someone sincerely, you have to place their welfare above your own.

[6-Bible verses] In Philippians 2:3-4, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of the others.” How do we know Jonathan did this for David? Jonathan made a covenant with David. This is the Old Testament term for “pinky swear.” Jonathan basically said, “I’ve got your back, and you’ve got mine.”

[7-sword] However, it’s not just words that Jonathan offered. He gave tangible signs: his personal clothing and weapons. Jonathan, King Saul’s son, literally Prince John, humbly gave his princely garb to David, as if to say, “You, David, would be my next king.”

Note David’s reaction. David accepted these gifts without taking advantage of Jonathan. This was a mutual, peer-to-peer covenant; a shocking, surprising, high-stakes, respectful exchange.

[8-Saul attacking David] For a short while, everything was fine, until King Saul’s paranoia took over. David’s success and popularity irritated Saul so much, Saul literally tried to kill David, first by throwing spears at David, and then manipulating David to try to get him to do something reckless. David, an honorable man, refused to retaliate. Let’s pick up the story in chapter 19.

[9-11-verses] *Read 1 Sam 19:1-7.*

[12-Rule #2] The second rule of friendship is: when someone talks trash about your friend, stick up for them. Jonathan defended David. Jonathan took a risk talking to his dad, the king. Saul didn't know David like Johnathan did.

The closer you are to your friends, the more likely you have the inside scoop on them. When you know the truth, you need to say it, even if it means risking your own reputation.

This was not a simple father-son talk. Jonathan risked his life in defense of David.

[13-verse] Words matter a great deal. When we hear gossip about our friends, how do we react? Do we believe it? Join in? Or do we defend our friends? The more you love them, the more you will risk for them. Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers.” (Matthew 5:9) Peacemaking is a risky but necessary part of true friendship.

[14-Rule #3] First, love others as yourself. Second, stick up for them. Finally, the third rule of friendship is this: if you love someone, set them free.

[15-verses] *Read 1 Samuel 20:1-4.*

[17-Saul and Jonathan] For a powerful friendship that started out so well, David and Jonathan's relationship ended in tragedy. Perhaps it was destined; David could not be king while Jonathan was still alive. Saul's intense hatred forced David to flee the kingdom. Even so, Jonathan tried one last time to get Saul and David to reconcile.

Sadly, Jonathan failed. Saul vowed to kill David and then even tried to kill his own son. Jonathan saw the truth about his father and stormed out of room. Then he gave the signal to David that it was no longer safe.

[18-19-verses] *Read 1 Samuel 20:41-42.*

[20-David and Jonathan weeping] David and Jonathan wept, embracing as friends can only do when facing great tragedy. This would be the last time they ever saw each other alive, so they promised that their friendship would last through the generations.

[21-Proverbs] Two proverbs come to mind as I reflect on this scene. First, Proverbs 18:24 - “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is

a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Second, Proverbs 17:17 - “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.”

When we invest in friendships long enough to experience both joy and sorrow, when we stick through the good times and the hard times, we gain wisdom. We build deep ties. Adversity should have separated David and Jonathan; instead, it made their friendship stronger. Jonathan and David would take a bullet for each other.

[22-Rules] Love others as yourself. Stick up for them. Set them free. Those are the three rules of friendship that David and Jonathan teach us. This is how we honor our friends. I wonder, does any of that sound familiar?

One night in Jerusalem, 2000 years ago, Jesus met with his beloved friends for the last time before dying on the cross. This is what he told them:

[23-verses] “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. 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.” (John 15:12-15)

[24-Jesus, cross] As much as we put David and Jonathan’s friendship on a pedestal, there is a divine friendship that outshines all earthly relationships. It is the one Jesus offers us with himself. Jesus does not expect us to blindly follow him. He gives us several reasons to trust him. First, Jesus loved us even more than his own life. Jesus died to save us from our sins, going to the cross before we ever knew that we needed him. (Romans 5:8) With Jesus, it was love at first sight.

Second, Jesus never talks trash about you. He intercedes for you at the Father’s throne. (Romans 8:34) He calls, challenges, protects and supports every one of us. When people call you “loser,” Jesus is right there, saying, “Beloved, you are mine. I call you friend. Everything my heavenly Father has told me, I have made known to you.”

Finally, Jesus won’t force his friendship on you. He may initiate the covenant; however, it is always your choice to accept the free gift of grace. It takes humility. You have to lay your weapons down: your pride, your wealth,

your addiction, your security, your anger. Those burdens will prevent you from experiencing the greatest loving relationship you could ever know.

Christ loves us and set us free. We were imprisoned by our sin and brokenness. (John 8:34) Christ set us free with his own blood. Christ loved us and set us free. And as it says in John 8:36, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Friendship with Jesus is not a burden; it is freedom. Imagine David trying to flee from Saul, and not having Jonathan in his life. How much harder would it have been?

[25-title slide] As I reflect on my life, I can tell you, having Christ in my life has made a huge difference. Together, we have overcome family conflict, depression, unemployment, and uncertainty. My marriage is stronger because of Christ. My ministry is stronger because of his faithfulness. My family is not perfect, but we are far better off because of the friendship of Jesus. Why would anyone ever want to face life with him? I sure wouldn't.

I challenge you all to build the relationships God planned for you. Become friends with Christ. Live for him. Experience his love. Let him show you what discipleship really means.

Also, be the Jonathans and Davids our world needs. When people look to the church, let them see people who are willing to take a bullet for each other, laying down our wealth, weapons, pride, and insider-language.

We are called to be those who are closer than a brother, closer than a sister, friends born of adversity. We will not hide from our trouble? No! We will meet our troubles head on with the power of Christ, our greatest friend, and our Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

Memory Verse: Proverbs 18:24 “One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

Reflection Questions:

1. Who is your closest friend? Why did you become close to them?
2. What part of David and Jonathan's friendship do you most admire? What part would you wish to improve?

3. How does God show friendship to us?
4. In what ways do you show that you are grateful for God’s friendship?
5. What lessons can you apply from David and Jonathan’s friendship that improve your earthly relationships?