

The Power of a Friend

1 Samuel 18-20

If I were to ask you, "How many friends do you have?" What would you say? Would it be some number like 438, because that is how many Facebook friends you have? I have 91 Facebook friends, but I'm not a very good Facebook friend, because I never write anyone. I looked on Friday and I also have 70 friend requests, many of which have languished there for months with me doing nothing, because I'm just a bad Facebook friend. I think, "Why accept their friend request, because I won't do anything with it."

Beyond Facebook numbers, how many friends do you have? Really?

I'm reading a book right now called *The Depression Cure* by a Dr. Stephen Ilardi. He did a session for all the parents when I took Philip over to KU for his freshman orientation. His talk about dealing with depression was so interesting that I ordered his book. Anyway, he says this about friendship in America:

Compared with our counterparts from even a generation ago, we're much less likely to know our neighbors, to invite friends over for dinner, to join social clubs, to participate in a local church or synagogue . . . or to take part in community sports leagues (bowling, softball, tennis, and so on). We're less likely to get married, and less likely to stay married when we do take the plunge. We also spend less time developing and maintaining friendships. According to a recent landmark study of American social life, half of all adults lack even a single close friend they can rely on.

(Ilardi, *The Depression Cure*, 167).

That's a staggering statistic, because there is great power for good in our lives when we truly have a friend. Proverbs 17:17 says that "A friend loves at all times." Proverbs 18:24 says that "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." There is power in a friend.

Friends encourage. They believe in us. They love us even knowing the worst about us. They will shoot straight with us and point out our sin and mixed up priorities. They hold us accountable. They are someone with whom you truly face life together.

Do you have these kinds of friends that have a powerful influence for good in your life?

One of the great friendships of the Bible is the friendship between David and Jonathan. It is a friendship in which we see the power of a friend. My hope is that as we look at their friendship this morning that each of us will be encouraged to find and to pursue such relationships in our own lives.

The story of Jonathan and David begins in 1 Samuel 18:1. We read there:

¹Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. ²And Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. ³Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt.

Before this time, we are not told how much David and Jonathan knew of each other. In chapter 16 David had been brought in to play the harp in Saul's presence (1 Sa 16:21ff) and so it is possible that Jonathan would have observed him during those times. But this is the first recorded interaction between them.

After killing Goliath (1 Sa 17), David was brought before king Saul (1 Sa 17:57). We are told that after David had finished speaking to Saul that *the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David*. Jonathan feels drawn to David and a close friendship is established on this day. We are told that Jonathan loved David as himself (v. 1) and that he made a covenant with David (v.3).

Jonathan also *stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt*. In effect, in this gesture, Jonathan was transferring his own status as heir apparent to the throne to David. Jonathan, as Saul's son, was the heir apparent to the throne, but he defers to David. Did he know that David had already been anointed as king by Samuel? We don't know. What we do know that is right from the start of their friendship Jonathan demonstrates **a generous spirit of hoping for the best** for David. Good friends are like that.

As many of you know, Jonathan and David's friendship grew in a context where Jonathan's father, Saul, becomes increasingly envious and jealous of David because of David's military success and the subsequent adulation of the people. Saul gets to the point that he wants to kill him. It is in the midst of Saul's growing schizophrenic behavior that we see Jonathan's growing friendship with David.

1 Samuel 19:1 says:

¹ Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death. But Jonathan, Saul's son, greatly delighted in David.

Jonathan delights in David, which suggests a kind of emotional fondness for David based on the intrinsic qualities of David. Good friends have this kind of experience; they **delight in each other**. They find joy in the other person because of the qualities that they see in them.

Out of this fondness Jonathan seeks to protect David's life.

² So Jonathan told David saying, "Saul my father is seeking to put you to death. Now therefore, please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself."³ "And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father about you; if I find out anything, then I shall tell you."⁴ Then Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father,

And then he goes on to explain how David has served Saul so well and in verse 6 we read:

⁶ And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul vowed, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death."⁷ Then Jonathan called David, and Jonathan told him all these words. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as formerly.

Jonathan warns David of his father's evil intent and he gives David instructions to hide. But he also does more; he speaks to his father as an advocate for David (v. 4ff). Out of his friendship, Jonathan protects David and he is an advocate for David and because of this David is once again brought into Saul's court in good standing.

Friends protect one another. They are advocates for each other. They seek for the well-being of each other. They care enough to stick their necks out in this way for each other.

David benefits from this and he is kept safe and brought back into Saul's court. But this is short lived. As David continues to have success on the battlefield, Saul again seeks to kill David (19:8ff). Ultimately, we are told in 19:18 that David flees to Ramah, which was a town about one mile north of Gibeah, where Saul lived.

Then in 1 Samuel 20:1 we see the next interaction between David and Jonathan:

¹ Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?"² And he said to him, "Far from it, you shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. So why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!"³ Yet David vowed again, saying, "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your sight, and he has said, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.' But truly as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is hardly a step between me and death."⁴ Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

At this point, it seems that Jonathan is not convinced that it is his father's intent to kill David. But David drives home his point and makes it clear that as far as he is concerned death is close. And so at this point Jonathan vows to do whatever David wants him to do for him (v. 4). *Whatever you say, I will do for you.*

Friends are willing to go the extra mile. They will serve and help and care for the other. That is Jonathan's spirit towards David.

In the following verses David lays out a plan to truly determine Saul's intent. He wants to create a situation that would reveal to Jonathan Saul's true intent regarding David and then he wants Jonathan to communicate with him what he finds out. Time doesn't allow us to read all of this, but I do want to highlight that sections that continue to give us insight into the nature of David and Jonathan's friendship.

In verse 8, David says:

⁸ "Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you."

Jonathan promises that he will indeed deal kindly with David and inform him of what he finds out. Verse 11:

¹¹ And Jonathan said to David, "Come, and let us go out into the field." So both of them went out to the field.

Jonathan seeks out a private place where he can assure David of his loyalty. He promises David that he will make known his father's intent. We don't get a lot of insight into how Jonathan and David spent time together, but this is one instance in which they got away and had some moments together. This journey out into the privacy of the field emphasizes the close friendship that they shared.

Friends invest time with each other. This can be such a hard thing to do in our busy culture, but good friends find a way.

While they are spending time together, Jonathan says this:

¹⁴ "And if I am still alive, will you not show me the lovingkindness of the LORD, that I may not die?" ¹⁵ "And you shall not cut off your lovingkindness from my house forever, not even when the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." ¹⁶ So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD require it at the hands of David's enemies." ¹⁷ And Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.

Covenant language is all over chapter 20. It is their covenant friendship that is the basis of Jonathan's plea that once David becomes king that he not execute either Jonathan or his descendants. After this Jonathan lays out a plan for how he will communicate his father's intentions regarding David and then after laying out the plan, Jonathan returns to their covenant.

Verse 23:

²³ *"As for the agreement of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever."*

Jonathan reminds David of the eternal nature of their covenant of friendship. It is *between you and me forever*. They were committed. They were loyal. Much later, in 2 Samuel 9, when David becomes king, both Saul and Jonathan have been killed in battle. We are told that David searches to see if there are any left of Jonathan's household and they find one son - the crippled Mephibosheth. David brings him into his presence and has him dine at his table to show kindness to him for the sake of Jonathan. David was loyal to Jonathan even after Jonathan's death.

Friends are committed to each other. They are loyal to each other. They know that they can count on the other being there for them.

Well, the plan to discern Saul's intent involves David missing a festival meal. When he misses the first day, Saul assumes that David was ceremonially unclean and could not come to the dinner, but when David is missing on the second day of the celebration he questions Jonathan about it. Jonathan says that David has gone to celebrate the new moon with his family in Bethlehem (v. 28-9).

At that response, Saul is enraged and he curses Jonathan for having sided with David. He says that David *must surely die* (v. 31). Jonathan now knows what David had known - Saul is determined to kill David. Jonathan, like earlier, speaks in defense of David - *Why should he be put to death? What has he done?* He defends his friend and in response Saul hurls his spear to kill his own son in the same way he had previously tried to kill David. (It's a good thing Saul was a bad aim.)

The next morning Jonathan executes the plan that he had made with David to inform David of Saul's intent. And then in verse 41 it says:

⁴¹ *When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David more.* ⁴² *And Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.*

Do you remember how Joseph responded when he finally revealed himself to his brothers, in Genesis 45:15, when they had come down to Egypt? It says, *"He kissed all his brothers and wept on them."* Because of his brotherly love and affection for them he kissed them and wept on them. That is the experience of David and Jonathan here. They know that because of Saul's intent to kill David that he must go and live as a fugi-

tive away from Jonathan. Their hearts are grieved and they are not embarrassed to express their love and affection for each other.

True friends have great affection for each other. They love each other and they communicate it. Many of us men, especially, probably react to this. It might sound weak. It certainly sounds like something men just don't do. But I can assure you, David and Jonathan were not weak men. They were warriors. They were leaders. And yet they could openly show affection for a friend.

After this we are told that David *rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.* For the next portion of his life, David would be on the run from Saul. Only one more time would these friends meet. That happens in 1 Samuel 23. We read starting in verse 15:

¹⁵ Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. ¹⁶ And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God. ¹⁷ Thus he said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also."

David is on the run. Life is hard and challenging. And in the midst of that time his friend comes to him and Jonathan does what a true spiritual friend does . . . he encourages him in God (v. 16). Don't be afraid, he says. My father will not find you. And he states emphatically, YOU will be king over Israel and I will be next to you.

True friends give encouragement to one another. And obviously, as we journey through this life there are times where we all need this.

Half of Jonathan's statement was right, of course. Saul does not kill David and he become king. The other part is not right, however. Jonathan will not stand next to David as David rules as king because, as we find out in 1 Samuel 31:2, Jonathan along with Saul are killed in battle.

David eventually gets the news that Jonathans has died in battle. And in response David lamented the loss. His lament is found in 2 Sam.1:19-27. We are not going to read the whole thing, but I did want to look at the very end where he talks about Jonathan.

Verse 25;

²⁵ "How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. ²⁶ "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful Than the love of women. ²⁷ "How have the mighty fallen, And the weapons of war perished!"

What a friendship they shared. Jonathan had a generous spirit of hoping for the best for David. He delighted in David. He sought to protect and be an advocate for David. He was willing to go the extra mile. He encouraged David. They spent time together. They were committed to each other and complete loyalty. There was affection and love and they communicated it to each other. The loss of Jonathan is an unbelievable loss to David. David experienced the power of friendship. I've wondered this week if David would have ever committed his sin with Bathsheba had Jonathan not been killed.

I can't imagine any of us looking at this story and thinking, "I don't need that. I don't want that." I think that all of us long for this kind of friendship. And yet, as we saw earlier, half of all Americans don't have this kind of friend.

What does it take to have this kind of friend? There are many things that could be said about this, but I think at the core one critical thing is that we simply need to make it a priority.

John Ortberg quotes psychologist Alan McGinnis who says:

We tend to devote massive amounts of time to making money, running errands, and succeeding at our jobs, but we neglect giving our most valuable possession - time - to the experience for which we were created: community.

(Ortberg, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*, 46)

His main application is to "Assign top priority to your relationships." What kind of priority do your relationships take compared to making money, running errands, doing well at your jobs?

One of my best friends is a high school buddy named, Doug. We've been friends since 9th grade. As I've thought about making friendship a priority this week, Doug came to mind. I realized that I really haven't done that with Doug. It is always Doug who calls. For the most part, it has been his initiative that has continued to pursue our friendship. I value his friendship, but because of business I just haven't made it a priority. I was saddened this week to realize what I've missed in not making that relationship a priority.

If you have friendships, don't neglect them. Give time to them. Invest in them. Make them a priority. They are a gift from God for good in your life.

If, however, you are in the half of adult population that would say that you really don't have a close friend that you can count on, I'd encourage you in a couple of ways. First, focus more on being a good friend than on getting a good friend. Be loyal and committed to people. Be one who encourages. Have a generous spirit of hoping for the best for others. As you grow in being this kind of person you will tend to find good friends.

My other encouragement comes back to the main point - make it a priority to invest time in cultivating such friendships. There are plenty of ways that you can do this, but one

suggestion is to join a Life Group this fall. Life Groups are the main thing we do here at Faith to help create places where these kinds of friendships can be cultivated. In most cases, the twelve week timeframe of a Life Group is not enough time to form a close friendship, but it is enough time to begin to get to know some people and form the beginning of a good friendship that can be cultivated as you continue to meet and spend time together.

In his book, *A Resilient Life*, Gordon MacDonald talked about how important good friends are to living a resilient life. He talks about one couple that he and his wife have met every month for almost twenty years. He says this about that friendship:

The pressure upon their lives - as with ours - often reaches a point of intolerance. There is the pressure of leadership, the self-doubt in the midst of tough decisions, the quest for courage when goals have to be met. But when the four of us meet, all of that pressure is suspended for a time, and we refresh one another. There is much laughter, the exchange of wisdom, the promise of prayer. A friendship that endures for twenty years cannot be measured or priced.

The power of a friend. . .It cannot be measured or priced.

Amen.