

## The Life of David, 1 Samuel 18-20, "Marks of a True Friend" 3/2/25

Back in 2010, Burger King ran a FaceBook ad campaign in which they offered a coupon for a free Whopper to anyone who would "unfriend" 10 of their Facebook friends. The marketing scheme worked like this- when you unfriended the person, Burger King would send them a FB notification that they had been unfriended for a delicious hamburger, which was supposed to make you say, "Wow, this burger must really be great if I lost a friend over it." Cleaver. Well, the NYT reported that the stunt worked too well--within the 1st week, 233,906 friendships had been terminated and BK was on the hook for 23K free Whoppers. They immediately discontinued the ad.

Now, I know that SM friends are not necessarily *real* friends, but I do think the success of that ad speaks to a significant issue in our culture: the lack of deep friendships is a problem. Robert Putnam exposed this growing epidemic over 20 years ago in his landmark book in *Bowling Alone*, in his follow-up research he said that **in the past 10 years Americans have gone from an average of 3.2 friends to 1.8 friends.** That's a 40% loss of friendship. 1 in 4 Americans say they do not have a single close friend. Loneliness has been called by some sociologists "the greatest pathology of our time."<sup>1</sup>

Now some of us are thinking, "Why are we talking about friendship, this is church, we should be studying theology and spirituality." But there is nothing more theologically deep or spiritual than friendship! The Bible is a book all about friendships, starting with our relationship with God. The Bible tells us that we were made for a deep, soul-satisfying relationship with God. In Genesis, God said there was only one thing in his creation that was not good, for humanity to be alone. The Bible is unique in saying that friendship is at the center of our purpose on earth precisely because God is 3-in-1, and we are made in his image. It goes on to tell us how the first humans broke friendship with God and with each other through self-seeking sin, which had a catastrophic ripple effect through the world to the present day and explains why so many people are so distant from God, hate God, or deny that he even exists and explains why it seems no one can get along on every level, global geo-political relationships all the way down to a preschool class with two little 3 year olds fighting over who gets to hold the blue block this time. But then the Bible tells us that God in the flesh, Jesus came, and he teaches us a new way to live in relationships with the greatest commandments at the center of our being- loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving other people as ourselves...he gives a masterclass on building friendships in the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus didn't just teach us about relationships, he said in John 15- no greater love is there than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. And that's what he did. Through his sacrifice he restores our relationship with God by removing the barrier of our spiritual debt of sin, loves us first so that we have the capacity to love others, and opens the spiritually blind eyes of our hearts so that we can once again experience the deep, soul-satisfying relationship with God that we were made for and that lasts forever. The eternal state of heaven is like a beautiful community full of beautiful relationships with our friendship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the center.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,1207822,00.html>

This is why we are never more like God and living like heaven on earth than when we have healthy, vulnerable, deep, nurturing relationships.

And it's why when we minimize the importance of relationships, when we make our lives all about achieving at work, or about accumulating the most stuff, or when we are so obsessed with protecting our image, or don't want to have to deal with people...when friendships are not prioritized and we are alone we are never more living out the devils playbook for hell on earth.

So yeah, I would say the subject of friendship is pretty theologically deep and important. So today, let's learn about friendship by looking at one of the greatest friendships of all time...not Lucy and Ethel, not SpongeBob and Patrick Star, we are looking at the friendship of David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18-20.

Remember where we are in 1 Samuel which is all about David's life. *House of David* on Amazon Prime just came out, we watched the first episode, it's pretty good. David the shepherd boy is anointed by the Prophet Samuel as the unlikely future king of Israel. And the reason the Bible tells us is because he has a heart after God's own heart, which is what we are chasing after through this series. David goes on to slay the Philistine champion Goliath, becomes a national hero and this is when the evil seed of jealousy starts to rise in King Saul toward David. And the picture of King Saul we get from the narrative is someone who is increasingly paranoid and unhinged with fits of rage. Sometimes he's friendly to David and then suddenly he's trying to turn his head into a dart board. 6x in chapters 18-20 there is an attempt on David's life by King Saul. In the middle of all this we have this incredible friendship between Jonathan, who's the son of King Saul, and David. Eugene Peterson- "During this most dangerous chapter of David's life, this deep friendship with Jonathan bracketed the evil." Which is why he says, "Jonathan's friendship entered David's soul in a way that Saul's hatred never did."

So let's look at this incredible friendship against the dark backdrop of the murderous plots of King Saul. This narrative takes place over three movements- Chapter 18- A Friendship Forged, Chapter 19-20-A Friendship Tested, End of Chapter 20- A Friendship Proven.

### **A Friendship Forged.**

*18:1 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.*

*2 From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family.*

*3 And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.*

*4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.*

The language used here is remarkable. "One in spirit", literally means their souls were knit together. A Hebrew way of saying they forged a deep bond which the writer adds, was built on loving one another they loved themselves, living out what Jesus taught 1000 years before he

came. And Jonathan does something to demonstrate this bond: he gives David his royal garments. Commentaries say this was Jonathan's way of symbolically recognizing that God had chosen David to be the next King, and without the slightest hint of jealousy or resentment Jonathan divests himself of his claim as the next in line to the throne.

**A Friendship Tested- Chapter 19-20.** It's tested because in the middle of this friendship is a terrifying cycle that develops, King Saul flies off the handle trying to kill David and then Jonathan would advocate for his friend and calm his father down. Saul would promise to not kill him, David comes back to the palace, he's kind to him and everything is good for a little while, until Saul loses it again. Now, I don't know about you, but for me, someone chucks a spear at my head once, I'm out. But, if you've lived with someone who has mental illness, or someone who is emotionally or physically abusive and is prone to these swings of sweetness, is manipulative with words and gestures and then sudden fits of rage, it can be really disorienting and mess with your head. I think that's a bit of what's going on here, and like David did, I want to encourage you to get help. Don't stay in that situation.

Well, finally it comes to a head in the beginning of chapter 20:1 *Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked,*

*"What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to kill me?"*

**2** *"Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small,*

*without letting me know. Why would he hide this from me? It isn't so!"* But David says, "Listen I love dude, but that's naive. He's not going to tell you, he knows that we're boys. Besides...he's off his rocker! Trust me I'm on death's doorstep!" And so Jonathan listens to David and says, **4** *"Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you." "I'm your ride or die, just say it and I'm in."*

So they come up with a plan to see whether King Saul has truly changed or not, David will skip the monthly banquet that Saul has with all his generals, and when King Saul asks Jonathan where David is, Jonathan will tell him that David had a family issue, and they figure if Saul gets furious, then that shows he had plans to kill David, but if he's compassionate, maybe it means he's really changed. Meanwhile David will hide out to wait for the signal to see whether he's welcomed back or on the run. So sure enough, Saul asks where David is and Jonathan covers for him. **30** *Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!"* That's Bible cussing.

*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 someone to bring him to me, for he must die!”* Saul’s saying, “Don’t you get it, son? As long as he’s alive, you aren’t getting the kingdom! Bring him to me and I’ll do your dirty work for you.” But Jonathan replies, **32** *“Why should he be put to death? What has he done?”*

**33** *But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.* Ugh...yeah, I would say that’s an understatement. This leads us to the final movement in the narrative: **A Friendship Proven**

**41** *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.* What a heart-wrenching scene! Two friends, closer than brothers, who fought in battles together, bled together, supported each other through thick and thin, now are weeping on each other’s shoulders because of the grim reality that because of King Saul’s rage, they are going to be on opposite sides for a while, maybe never see each other again. What happened with their friendship? They saw each other only 1 more time in their lives before Jonathan was killed in battle. But before they parted ways, they renewed and proved their promise of friendship to one another whatever may come in the future, even to their future descendants which David makes good on years later. What an incredible friendship!

That’s as far as we are going to go in the narrative, but before we talk about what this means for us, I need to address a claim made by some people with their own agenda who use this to say that David and Jonathan had a romantic relationship. Respectfully as I can, I would just say, “You don’t know how to read your Bible.” #1 When we attempt to read things into this ancient near eastern Jewish text from a modern, western perspective it just doesn’t work. In these cultures it was not uncommon for strong men with deep friendships to weep and embrace each other in a non-sexual way. Acts 20, Paul is about to leave his friends in Ephesus to go to Rome, not sure whether he will ever see them again, it describes them the very same way as Jonathan and David. #2 The Bible knows about homosexuality, and is perfectly capable of describing homosexuality when it happens, Leviticus 18-20, Judges 19, Romans 1. #3 The Bible does not protect its heroes from scandal. We know about David’s scandals because the Bible tells us. And if this is what this was here, we would know about it. It is sad to me that some people go there, because what that tells me is that our modern culture is so impoverished of friendships that we can’t imagine a loyal, loving, embracing bond with somebody without there being some sexual

component to it. Both heterosexual people and those with same-sex attraction need a category of relationship consisting of genuine love and commitment that is not sexual in nature.

What do we learn about marks of a godly Friendship?

**Mark #1 Godly Friends are emotionally vulnerable.** David and Jonathan knit their souls together. This speaks of a deep openness to the depths of their souls to each other. Later, David had to tell Jonathan something he didn't want to hear, that Jonathan's own father was lying to him and hiding things from him. We see at the end they were vulnerable enough to let each other see their tears and their pain.

This terrifies many of us in the room. Many of us are constantly trying to control what other people, even our friends, maybe even our partners or spouses, see in our lives. We don't want anyone to see the raw, unfinished parts, the weak parts of our lives. And the problem with that is your relationships will only go so deep when we keep that from our friends. We miss out on the depths of how God designed us, which can be so healing and life-giving.

Men especially, I'm talking to you. We struggle with this and why friendship is a major theme and goal for our men's ministry this year. At our last men's breakfast we showed a bit by comedian Brian Regan. I wish I could show you but they would take down our livestream if I did, but you can watch it on YouTube. In the joke he's recounting a conversation he had with his wife. He says, "I have this friend who got divorced. I went golfing with him recently, and it's the first time I'd seen him since the divorce. So when I got home, my wife's like, "How's Gary coping with the divorce?" "Fine, I think." "I thought you went golfing with Gary today." "I did." "And you don't know how he's doing with the divorce?" "It never came up." "Is he dating anyone?" "I don't know." "Were you two in the same golf cart?" "Yeah." "You were in the same golf cart for 4 hours and you don't if he's dating anyone?" "I know he's got a great new driver."

The funniest things are funny because they are true. Only 1 in 10 men in a recent survey had someone outside his family with whom he discusses issues related to money, life, or marriage. Only 1 in 20 had a friendship in which they disclosed information about how they were feeling.<sup>2</sup> But church, we are built for vulnerable relationships. A godly friend goes to the vulnerable places. Asks you how you are really doing. Listens to your half-baked thoughts and raw emotions. And loves you enough to even tell you things that are hard to hear. A real friend tells you your breath stinks and gives you a mint, or your fly is down, or your shirt is accidentally tucked into your underwear. But also, "Hey can we talk about that angry rant you made on social media?" "Can we talk about your relationship with your boyfriend or girlfriend?" Or "I've noticed you drinking more often, can we talk about that?" This is real friendship and we all need it. This is one of the things I value so deeply in my relationship with Pastor Todd. He will look me in the eyes and tell me the truth, even when it's awkward or I am not looking for it, and I can do the same with him. Do you have this in your life?

**Mark #2 Godly friends are committed through thick and thin.** Many people treat personal relationships like business relationships. In business relationships are often user-vendor

<sup>2</sup> <https://summitchurch.com/GetFile.ashx?Guid=232be36e-f57f-4c2f-868f-71a11f94c7a7>

relationships. As long as the terms are right, as long as our needs are satisfied, we have a relationship, but as soon as the relationship isn't working for me, I'm out. That sadly describes even many marriages today. The relationship is a means to an end. That's not David and Jonathan's friendship. Notice that three times in this narrative, even through serious testing, David and Jonathan evoke a covenant bond for their relationship. Even though it means that for Jonathan, it puts his future and even his life in harm's way. **Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.** It's easy to have friends when everything is great. But friendship is tested when life hits the fan. When that day comes, what you need is not a bunch of Facebook, or Instagram friends. You need someone to just show up with chicken soup and a big hug. Someone who will take care of your laundry. Someone who will listen to your lament without judgment.

I developed a friendship with a guy from church, Dan. We were in a small group together and went on a mission trip together and we just really hit it off. Had the same sense of humor, taste in music...not long after, his life hit the fan. Suddenly he thought his marriage was over, a lot of ugly things came out about things between them, and his wife moved out of the house. To be honest, there was part of me that just wanted to fade our new friendship into the background... because I knew this was going to come at a cost. But I just sensed the Spirit calling me to pursue him. Another friend and I just started showing up at his door. Bringing a meal, a movie, inviting him over for dinner. Just being with him in his season of being disillusioned, angry, self-loathing, and figuring out what God was trying to say to him. Then miracles started to happen and he and his wife, and their marriage started to get restored. That's a story for another time. But Dan would sometimes say, "Guys, I don't know how I'm going to make this up to you." We would just say, "Dan, no one is keeping score, this is what real friends do." I'm so glad I listened to the Spirit in that moment and not to my fears. They are some of our closest friends to this day precisely because of that commitment through thick and thin. Do you have a few friends like this in your life? Are you being this kind of friend to others? Life is not about grinding at work and building our own little kingdoms, or sitting behind a screen by ourselves. It's about relationships!

How can we be this kind of friend? Dr. Crawford Lorritys, whose ministry and influence I have gleaned so much from over the years, once said this, "How can you be this kind of friend we see here in 1 Samuel? **You must be overwhelmed with the friendship of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave his own life,**

**his own sword, his own robe so that you could be saved. And in doing so, he transforms you."** Like Jonathan, Jesus forged a covenant friendship with us built on his ability to keep it, not ours. He is committed to us through thick and thin, even when we mess up and hurt him. And we can open up the depths of our soul to him without fear knowing he loves us. He proved it by giving his life on the cross for you and me. And when we are loved so unconditionally like Jonathan loved David by Jesus, it enables us to open our lives in deep friendships with others.