

## David & Jonathan: A Framework of Fruitful Friendship

1 Samuel 20

*"Friendship halves our troubles and doubles joys" - J. C. Ryle*

**Introduction:** *We were built for friendship.* I don't mean as Americans or Californians or even Christians, I mean as humans. When God created the physical universe, He did so as an overflow of image and likeness of the eternal Godhead (Gen. 1:26), who enjoyed glory and joy in a relationship *before* the world existed (John 17:5). In other words, creation was an *overflow* of the relationship that God enjoyed before the world began, and He wanted to *share* that relationship with created beings in time and space. He created a **Garden** to be worked and cultivated (Gen. 2:8), filled with vegetation that was pleasant to the sight and good for food (Gen. 2:9). He created a fitting helper for man so that he would not be alone (Gen. 2:18), so that they could fulfill the mission of God together, filling the earth and glorifying God in every place. God communicated directly with Adam (Gen. 2:15-16) and would even "*walk in the Garden*" (Gen. 3:8), showing His presence to the point that Adam and Eve had to *hide* themselves from Him. Relational friendship is hardwired into our being, a deep and good desire to know and be known by both God and man!

But friendship is hard and often feels broken, just like all relationships. A large part of our parenting process has been to help our three teenage daughters navigate friendships throughout the years, including *choosing good friends, processing inevitable hurt, loss, moving away, and disappointments.* But that process does not end in high school as it is clear that making and enjoying friendships is difficult for most adults, where we settle for acquaintances and '*buddies*' but long for a true friend: "*A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother*" (Prov. 18:24). *But why is friendship so difficult and how do we actually grow in our ability to enjoy true Biblical friendship?*

First and foremost, **sin is the problem.** Sin not only brought forth spiritual, physical, and eternal death, but it was the catalyst that broke relationship. Adam and Eve HAD to hide from the presence of God because their sin was now present and known. Moses, who remarkably used to have God speak to him "*face to face, as a man speaks to a friend*" (Exodus 33:11), could only do so in a veiled way, since Moses could NOT actually see God's face, for a sinner cannot see God's face and live (Ex. 33:20). Drew Hunter, in his excellent book "Made for Friendship", said it this way:

*"Of course our **own sin affects everything.** Sin is antisocial. It curves us inward and it drives us to isolation. The West's hyperindividualistic cultures exacerbate this. Some of us also face unique challenges where we live: cities have their own challenges with transience, smaller communities with set ways, suburbs with isolation. Yet across all locations, **three aspects of modern culture create unique barriers to deep relationships: busyness, technology, and mobility.**"<sup>1</sup>*

Sin causes all of us to *curve inward*, or another way of saying we are all *selfish from the start in our sin nature.* Selfishness keeps us from a relationship with God, since we do not want to give up the mirage of control we think we have, and keeps us from the joy of deep friendship, since **selfless love** is always a prerequisite for meaningful relationship. As much as people call out for **intimate, transparent, honest,**

<sup>1</sup> Drew Hunter, "Made for Friendship", p. 30.

**truthful, and loving friendship/relationship**, only those willing to die to self in humility are actually able to find it, with God and others. Though selfishness has ALWAYS made friendship difficult, the three areas of modern culture complicate it even more: 1) **Time** – Busyness is a barrier to friendship since time is a necessary component to friendship. Remember, whenever we talk about time/busyness, we are really talking about **values and priorities**, since time is a resource equally distributed to all 2) **Technology** – Much can and should be said about the positives and detriments of technology to friendship, but with every great leap in tech requires believers to think thoughtfully and Biblically in evaluating its effects. The advent of personal phones and devices has clearly strained the pursuit of embodied, committed, loving, and encouraging friendships. cursory knowledge has replaced quality conversation, “likes” have replaced an affirming word and presence, and the comparison game, fear of being left out and fear of missing out have left digital friendships a source of *insecurity and fear* rather than *security and hope*. 3) **Mobility** – People moving living locations, jobs, and yes, even churches at a rapid rate have created a barrier to fully orbited friendships that are committed through time, trial, crisis, sorrow, joy, heartache and victory.

This morning we want to look at how true, Biblical friendship CAN function through the framework of the relationship between **David and Jonathan**, the last major scene before David goes permanently into exile and on the run. These were two of the most unlikely of friends, separated by age, family conflict, and potential of future flourishing, as David was given the promise of the throne that once belonged to Jonathan. What we find is NOT a friendship based on conventional wisdom or modern thoughts of necessities of friendship: *common interests, personality, hobbies, or activities*, but rather a **covenant commitment, loving loyalty, and kingdom goals**. Our goal is to see friendship through the lens of the gospel, where Jesus declares us His friends and thus gives us the ability to **be** a humble, selfless, loving friend, rather than believing we have to *find* the right friends.

### **The Story of 1 Samuel 20:**

*“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17)*

David was hurting. He had served the LORD, the nation, and his king faithfully, was chosen by God through Samuel to be the next king, and yet had deferred that role to become a servant in the king’s court. Yet, the more he served, the more conflict came. Saul tried numerous times to kill him, forcing David to flee and left him on unsettled ground as to his next steps. Even Samuel could not secure him. Though he had the acclaim of the people, he did not have many who he could trust. So he turned to the one man who was closer than a brother, his **friend Jonathan**, the one who made a covenant with him (1 Sam. 18:3), a commitment that came out of a love as his own soul. David’s question: ***What have I done?*** (20:1)...*what is my guilt? What is my sin that your dad would try to kill me?* Though Jonathan was slow to admit the reality of the situation, they together hatched a plan to confirm the true volatile nature of the situation.

David would stay away from dining at the king's table, saying he had to leave to go back to Bethlehem to make a family sacrifice. Saul’s response would be clear. If he thought it was good, then it was safe to return. If Saul was angry at his absence, he would know that the desire to kill was still there, and he would need to flee. Harkening back to the covenant commitment, Jonathan declared he’d do whatever David asked (20:4) and tell him whatever he observed (20:9). Whatever the outcome, Jonathan would communicate to a hiding David in a field whether it was safe to return or not by shooting arrows either to the side (safe) or beyond (danger).

The response was clear: by the second night, Saul responded in **anger**, not only at the absence of David but in the loyalty of Jonathan TO David. After cursing Jonathan out (20:30) and calling shame on his mama, Saul actually turned and tried to kill his own son! (20:33) after Jonathan asked “**What has David done???!!!** This is why Proverbs 22:24 says “***Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man.***” They are unstable, can turn on a dime, and let their emotions rule. Jonathan now knew the true and sad reality that Saul was truly hell-bent to kill David. After shooting his arrows in the field where David was hiding, he told the young boy who retrieved the arrows, “Hurry! Be quick! Do not stay!”, signaling to David it was time to flee. They two friends wept, embraced, and committed their friendship forever as David left in tears.

Now, circling back to the particulars, what do we glean from this chapter about friendship:

### **A Covenant Commitment** (*not consumeristic vacillation*)

Friendship is a choice, since no one can force another to be a friend. And though all friendship is based on some level of commitment, our modern view has shifted, where one can move in and out of friendship at will with no expectation of sticking it out through the hard times. We can “unfriend” someone on social media as easily as we “friend” them, moving away if we don’t like the things they are sharing or posting. If someone upsets us, we simply leave the group, the school, or church we were a part of. Even marriages, the ultimate expression of covenant friendship, has become an “at will” relationship, with people leaving when things are hard, simply needing to cite “irreconcilable differences”. Again, the reason for all of these is our own **selfish bent**, since we view life through a lens of ease and comfort for OURSELVES, and if “I AM NOT HAPPY” I should pursue and surround myself with people and things that make me so...even though this is a big, fat lie from the pit.

Biblical commitment in friendship is different than is found in the world, and absolutely should be. Jonathan willingly and freely entered into a covenant relationship with David, making him his friend: “***Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul.***” (1 Sam. 18:3). This commitment was what each man drew on when difficult times came between them, as David appealed to the covenant when asking for Jonathan’s help, even though it put him at risk (20:8), and the basis for Jonathan asking David to remember his family forever after David vanquished his enemies (20:15-16).

There were reasons why Jonathan and David were friends, which we’ll cover soon, but notice that the nature of the covenant was NOT based on preferences or personalities but rather a determined commitment to each other. In a world where others cut and run when things get hard or controversial, covenant friends run toward. A true, committed friend is one that loves during loss, upholds truthfully through sin and restoration, and encourages in grief. Everyone will love during good times: “***Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend***” (Prov. 19:4), but a true friend is there to encourage when there is nothing to give.

How many friends do you have like this? How many friends are you committed to this way? I listened to a Podcast this last week on the life and ministry of John MacArthur, and he talked about his friendship with R.C Sproul. They came from different parts of the country, were separated by decades of life, and had theological divides. Yet, in John’s words, somehow Dr. Sproul decided to make Dr. MacArthur his friend, laying aside differences and entering into a committed relationship, that included sharing each

other's pulpits, enjoying some open debates (and good natured ribbing), but most impactful, standing side by side during opposition. As John faced off with opponents in defense of the gospel, Dr. Sproul not only encouraged from afar but stood next to in support, sacrificing his time and reputation to do so. That is the mark of **selfless covenant friendship**, the willingness to support at the cost of sacrifice. This in no way compromises truth or looks the other way in sin, but one that sticks close in adversity. "I've got your back" is a phrase that fills any friend with hope, and having friends that are willing to walk shoulder to shoulder is a necessity in a world ravaged by sin and deception.

### A Loyal Love

But why would anyone make such a commitment? Sounds costly, and what is in it for us? The answer to the irony of finding joy in giving oneself completely to another is found in the monumental word for **loyal love**, which is the Hebrew word *hesed*. Like all words that are translated from one language to another, it is difficult to squeeze out every aspect and nuance, but this word is powerfully packed. Translations have varied from "deal kindly" (which is what we have here in 1 Sam. 20), to "show faithful love", "mercy", 'steadfast love', and 'lovingkindness'. *Hesed* carries the idea of love, but also of compassion, affection, loyalty, reliability. "It is not merely love, but loyal love; not merely kindness, but dependable kindness; not merely affection, but affection that has committed itself."<sup>2</sup> This is the devoted love that caused David and Jonathan to covenant in friendship.

Look at **1 Samuel 20:8**, "Therefore, **deal kindly** (*hesed*) with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD." Look again at 20:14: "If I am still alive, show me the **steadfast love** (*hesed*) of the LORD, that I may not die; and do not cut off your **steadfast love** (*hesed*) from my house forever." The love they shared together was **truly uncommon**, since David would be a roadblock to Jonathan's kingly future, and Jonathan's offspring typically would not last in a deposed monarchy. But we know David cared for Jonathan's crippled son named Mephibosheth years later (2 Samuel 9) out of kindness and love of Jonathan. This kind of love creates **security, rest, encouragement, and hope**. It smashes together the twin ideas of *affection AND constancy*, where there is both a desire FOR a friend and willingness to stand by. "The order is this: **love gives itself in covenant and gladly promises devoted love in that covenant; the covenant partner then rests in the security of that promise and may appeal to it, as David does here.**"<sup>3</sup>

*But where does this love come from?* Can it just be conjured up? The answer is that this kind of loyal love is how **God loves His people!** God chose to love Israel in the OT, and set His love on them in covenant commitment (Deut. 7:6-8). When Israel sinned egregiously when Moses went up to Mt. Sinai, creating a false god out of the wealth God provided and bowed down to worship it, God could have wiped them out righteously and justifiably because of their sin. But when Moses appealed and interceded, God harkened back to the reason he was committed to them in the first place. **Exodus 34:6-7** says:

*The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **steadfast love** (*hesed*) and faithfulness, 7 keeping **steadfast love** (*hesed*) for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting*

<sup>2</sup> Dale Davis, "1 Samuel", p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 207.

*the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

This kind of love is the epitome of selflessness, the kind of love that is not based on the loveliness of another, but loves kindly *despite* unloveliness. It is NOT deserved love, but sourced in **grace alone**. When we taste of this love from God in Christ, we are free to love another this way. Again, this is the foundation of love in **marriage**, but also in our friendship together. We are not looking for people who have something to offer, but someone who is simply the object of God's love. This is a love of **give, not get**, but one that breeds joy for all.

### Pursuit of a Greater Kingdom

It is not clear if David let Jonathan know about his anointing as king, but it IS clear that both Jonathan and Saul knew that David was God's man for the present and future. Saul saw that truth as a threat, Jonathan saw it as a means by which God was advancing His kingdom. Saul cautioned Jonathan, "**For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established**" (20:31). For Jonathan, there was a greater kingdom than one of his own making or that centered around himself.

*"Let those be your choicest companions who have made Christ their chief companion."*<sup>4</sup> What unified David and Jonathan and transcended preferences and even the constraints of time? They both were pursuing the same God and same kingdom! We can have buddies at work as we spend time together each day, or have good conversations with our neighbors as we mow our lawn, or unite in our cheering for a similar sports team, but only when Christ is both the foundation and goal can we have TRUE, REAL, and LASTING FRIENDSHIP. These first things are fine and even valuable, but they do not raise to the level of Biblical friendship. This is why the main source of friendship outside of family is found in the church among fellow believers, who celebrate God's kingdom as their highest priority, who are willing to **exhort one another every day** so that we don't get hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13), where we are willing to wound in loving truth (Prov. 27:5-6), and where we commit to gathering for the purpose of stirring one another up to love and good deeds and encourage each other until Christ returns (Heb. 10:23-25). This is the truest form of loyalty and provides the foundational basis of friendship. Obviously this does not mean we can have the same level of friendship with everyone, but it does mean I will be friends with fellow Christians and church members in a more fruitful way than those I've known my whole life, but who do NOT know Christ. This is why we believe in committed and meaningful membership here, because this is a place of loving friendship as we pursue the glory of God and the magnifying of Jesus Christ together.

But that leaves us with this question: *If God loves me in a committed way, how do I love the way He does?* The answer is found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who offers us the example and ability to **be the friend we need to and rest in true friendship with Him!** As Jesus left the upper room and traveled to the Garden of Gethsemane the night before He hung on the cross, He made sure His disciples knew where they stood and what they had in Him. **John 15:11-15 records it this way:**

*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Brooks, "Smooth Stones Taken from Ancient Brooks", p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that someone **lay down his life for his friends**. <sup>14</sup> **You are my friends** if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; **but I have called you friends**, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide...

This is astonishing. The king of the universe willingly became the companion with His servants, not separating the two. He moved toward those He ruled rather than keeping separation, meaning we may **feel lonely at times but we are never alone**. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus offered each of us distinctive friendship in Him:

- 1) He came to bring us **full joy, which is His joy IN US**
- 2) **He defined love by sacrifice, and then demonstrated that love by dying for those who were His FRIENDS** – even as we were enemies of Him with nothing to offer (Rom. 5:8). The cross became a heroic act of friendship because it is the greatest act of sacrifice. “Nothing reveals God’s glory more than the dying love of Christ...when John shows us the **blazing center of God’s glory**, he doesn’t point to the sky. **He points to the cross, where the Son of God laid His life down for His friends. This is love. This is beauty. This is His greatest glory.**”<sup>5</sup>
- 3) **He calls US HIS FRIENDS!** – This friendship is not equal, since He chooses us and pursues us, then purchases us by His blood. He can call us to obedience as friends, where we cannot do the same. But this does not diminish how He brings us into intimate friendship.
- 4) **We are not merely servants, but friends** – Jesus brings us back into the intimate relationship that we were created for, allowing us to see the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4)

Jesus knows everything about us, from the depths of our heart to the grossest of our desires, and still loves us. He paid for our sin so that we could have communion with Him. He has fulfilled covenant promises to us. He has loved us with loyal and steadfast love. He has given us a better kingdom. We have rest, peace, joy, confidence, and hope all wrapped up in friendship with Him. When we understand this and lean into it by faith, we are able to **be the type of friend** that He calls us to be, since we are no longer dependent on others for the things Christ can provide. In this we are able to **share His distinct love to others who are thirsty for this relationship, since they were made for it**.

*“Here’s what we have seen: Jesus offers His friendship as a privilege to embrace, a relationship to experience, a covenant to keep, a comfort to receive, a power to tap, and a message to spread!”<sup>6</sup>*

Our hope is this is a place you get to experience true friendship with Christ and deep friendship with each other, all to His glory.

<sup>5</sup> Drew Hunter, “Made For Friendship”, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 156.