

Faithful Friend (Discussion Guide on page 12)

1 Samuel 18:1-5

The school shooter, who killed two people at a performing arts high school in St. Louis on Monday, left behind a chilling note. In it he expressed that he lived an “isolated” existence, which he claimed created the “perfect storm” for a mass shooter.

In the handwritten note left in his car, the shooter wrote, “I don’t have any friends. I don’t have any family. I’ve never had a girlfriend. I’ve never had a social life. I’ve been an isolated loner my entire life. This was the perfect storm for a mass shooter.”

No doubt there were other factors at work in his life, not to mention inherent sin, which led to his decision to commit such an evil act. But there’s something to say about the impact that friendship or the lack thereof can have on our lives. God created us with a need for intimate friendship.

In the Genesis account of creation, after God completed an act of creation, He declared that it was good. After creating man, the crown of His creation, He saw everything He created and said, it was very good.

But do you know when God, for the first time, said that something was not good? After creating Adam, God said, “*It is not good that the man should be alone;*” (Genesis 2:18).

Loneliness was the first problem in the history of man that God identified for us. And He addressed it by providing a suitable companion in a woman. But it’s important to note that although God instituted marriage between a man and a woman thereafter, marriage is not the only way in which God meets our need for relationship.

God didn’t say that remaining unmarried wasn’t good for man. He said, it’s not good for man to be alone. God created man with a need for friendship, relationship, and companionship, first with Him, and

then with others. The absence of intimate friendship is detrimental to our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Main idea: A faithful friend meets our essential need for intimacy, and helps us find our ultimate strength and satisfaction in God.

This morning we are going to examine the extraordinary relationship that David shared with Jonathan the son of king Saul. From their extraordinary friendship, we are going to learn five characteristics for being a true, faithful and life-giving friend.

1. A faithful friend is there for you heart and soul in the good times and bad.

The first characteristic is that a faithful friend is there for you heart and soul in good times and bad. After David defeated Goliath, Saul wanted David to remain in his inner circle indefinitely. It was during this time that Jonathan, Saul's son, became David's intimate friend.

In 1 Samuel 18:1 we read: *“As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”* What does it mean that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David? It means that Jonathan and David connected with one another at a deeper heart level. They were more than acquaintances or casual friends. They were more than close friends. David and Jonathan were intimate friends.

Regarding the varying degrees of friendship, Chuck Swindoll writes: **Acquaintances** are people with whom we have [occasional] contact and superficial interaction.

Casual friends are people with whom we have more contact, more common interests, and more specific conversations. Every once in a while, we will even seek the opinion of a person who is a casual friend, although there is still a safe distance between us.

Close friends are those people with whom we share similar life goals and with whom we discuss the hard questions. We do projects

together, exercise together, socialize together, and sometimes even vacation together.

Intimate friends are those few people with whom we have regular contact and a deep commitment. We are not only open and vulnerable with these people, we anxiously await their counsel. **Intimate friends** are just as free to criticize and to correct as they are to embrace and encourage, because trust and mutual understanding has been established between them.

All of these levels of friendship are important, but the most important, of course, is the last. Those who have no intimate friends have to be the loneliest people in the world. All of us need at least one person who offers us the shelter of support, encouragement and, yes, even hard truths and confrontation.”

It’s important to emphasize that the deeper friendship of David and Jonathan began at a crucial transitional time in David’s life. In addition to having recently been anointed by Samuel to be the next king, king Saul required David to remain as part of his inner circle of military leaders (v.5). King Saul was an unstable man who was troubled by an evil spirit. He would later become extremely jealous of David because of his great military success and attempted to kill him.

King Saul’s bitterness toward David would eventually cause David to go on the run and flee into the dangerous and difficult wilderness. During this time, Jonathan’s friendship played a key role in encouraging, protecting and strengthening David’s faith in God.

This brings us to a second characteristic of a true and faithful friend:

2. A faithful friend supports you by helping you find your ultimate strength and satisfaction in God.

After Saul drafted David into his army and did not allow him to return home, we read in verse 3: *“Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul”* (1 Samuel 18:3). What a contrast between Saul and Jonathan’s relationship with David.

Because of what David had to offer him, Saul obligated David to be part of his circle of military leaders. Jonathan, on the other hand, made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul.

I want to suggest to you that Jonathan was providentially sent by God into David's life with a committed love that was from God. And this love that Jonathan had for David was a devoted love that not only helped David be successful, but encouraged David to find his ultimate strength and satisfaction in God.

When the bible says that Jonathan loved David as his own soul, this means that he felt and cared for David's physical, emotional and spiritual needs as he would his own.

Notice that right after he made a covenant of loving support for David, we read in verse 4: *"And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵ And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war"* (1 Samuel 18:4-5).

David was successful not only because God was with David, but because he had a God sent true friend in Jonathan. As Proverbs 18:24 teaches us, Jonathan was more than one of those you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back type of friends. He was that friend who sticks closer than a brother. He was a friend who was selflessly there for David, who had his back, who knew his needs intimately and would literally give him the clothes off his back to help David be all that God called him to be. What a friend!

Jonathan didn't do what he did for David out of selfish ambition or self-preservation. He wasn't trying to buy David's loyalty or allegiance. On the contrary, he wanted David to find his ultimate strength in God.

Later, while David was on the run from Jonathan's father Saul, we read in 1 Samuel 23:16: *"And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God."*

The scripture goes on to tell us that Jonathan helped David find his strength in God by reminding him of God's promise to David that he would be the next king and assuring him that he would continue to be by his side.

Jonathan was David's intimate friend when he was on the mountain top and when he was down in the valley. His committed love encouraged David to continue to trust in the Lord.

Let me ask you, do you have a faithful and intimate friend? Do you know that one of the reasons that people do not have intimate friends, including Christians, is because they often equate intimacy with a romantic or erotic relationship or they believe that the choice between singleness and marriage is the choice between intimacy and loneliness? But non sexual intimacy is not only possible, it's essential.

Do you know when Jonathan died in battle, in his grief, David expressed that the loving intimacy he shared with Jonathan surpassed the intimacy he had ever experienced with a woman. In his song of lament, David expressed in 2 Samuel 1:26: *"I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women."* 2 Samuel 1:26

Now because many today cannot separate their idea of intimacy from erotic relationships, some have supposed that the intimate friendship, which David and Jonathan had, implies that they were sexually involved.

In his book, *Seven Myths About Singleness*, Sam Alberry writes: "Intimacy and sex, while often overlapping, are not identical, nor are they always concurrent. King David's words in 2 Samuel 1:26 is an example of that. Ed Shaw comments, 'Today it seems impossible for anyone to read this song without thinking that David and Jonathan must have enjoyed a sexual relationship.' But this is neither necessary nor even likely.

What we know of David's life and exploits sheds light on this. At the time he lamented the loss of his friend Jonathan, David had three

wives (see 1 Sam. 25:42–44). His relationships with women were deeply complicated. The love of a woman, in David’s experience, was far from straight forward. And so, his delight in the closeness of Jonathan’s friendship is easy to imagine. Ed Shaw asks, “Why is it not possible that he enjoyed the non-sexual intimacy of his friendship with Jonathan (also a married man) more than the sexual intimacy of his relationships with Abigail, Ahinoam and Michal?”

David’s words about the deep intimacy he enjoyed with Jonathan indicate not that it must have been sexual, but that the sexual relationships he had with the women in his life might have lacked real intimacy. We see the same dynamic today. Hookup culture means that it can be very easy to have sex with someone you barely know. It is a huge error to mistake this for true intimacy. Sexual union is designed to express and deepen intimacy within marriage. It cannot, in and of itself, create it from scratch.

Within all of us is a deep yearning to know and be known. It can sometimes feel as though sex will deliver this. It seems to be a means of exposing who we are to someone else. But divorced from real relationship, sex may be a form of physical intimacy, but only that. It will not provide the deeper intimacy we need in life. It is possible to have lots of sex and no real intimacy. But the reverse is also true. It is possible to have a lot of intimacy in life and for none of it to be sexual. Sexual and romantic relationships are not the only kinds of genuine, life-giving closeness. We need to rediscover a biblical category of intimacy that has been neglected in our cultural context and sadly even in many of our churches, namely friendship.”

Now earlier we talked about varying degrees of friendship. Too grow in our faith and be all that God called us to be, we all, married or single, need varying degrees of friendship. God not only created us to flourish in a relationship, but in community—in the body of Christ.

This brings us to a third characteristic of a faithful friend:

3. A faithful friend will not forsake you when others threaten to forsake them for befriending you.

Before David decided to go on the run from king Saul, although Saul seemed conflicted at times about David, David sensed that Saul was determined to kill him. But before going on the run, in 1 Samuel 20:1, David communicated what he believed about Saul's murderous intentions to his dear friend Jonathan, Saul's son.

At first, Jonathan did not want to believe that what David said about his father's murderous intentions, were true. But he was willing to stick his neck out for David before his father to determine for himself if indeed he was set on killing David.

Beginning in 1 Samuel 20:12 we read: *“And Jonathan said to David, “The Lord, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? ¹³ But should it please my father to do you harm, the Lord do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the Lord be with you, as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord, that I may not die; ¹⁵ and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth.” ¹⁶ And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord take vengeance on David's enemies.” ¹⁷ And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul” (1 Samuel 20:12-17).*

There's so much to learn from Jonathan's heart for God and his love for David. Although Jonathan loved David, he was not insecure. His father Saul, on the other hand, was deeply insecure. And because he was so insecure not only was he threatened by David, but when Jonathan tried to run interference for David, when he tried to be a peacemaker, his father resented him for it and tried to kill him too (1 Samuel 20:30).

In contrast, Jonathan didn't reject David when he shared with Jonathan what he believed about his father's murderous intentions,

and neither did David reject Jonathan, who did not agree with him concerning Saul, and also remained loyal to his father.

What enabled David and Jonathan to be such loyal friends without demanding that the other show them exclusive loyalty? David and Jonathan found their ultimate security in God's covenant love and faithfulness. In Psalm 63:3, David wrote of His God, *"Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you."*

Saul, on the other hand, did not trust the covenant love and faithfulness of God. As a result, rather than waiting on God and trusting His plan for his life, Saul acted independently of God. And when God judged him for his disobedience by telling him that he would no longer be the king, rather than repenting, he continued in his pride to resist God's will. He was obsessed with holding on to power and resented anyone who would stand in his way. The people of his kingdom, including Jonathan his son and David his successor, were not gifts from God to him to experience mutual love and support. The people around him were there to agree with him and serve him. Otherwise he considered them his enemies. Like Saul, we will not know how to truly love until we know the security of God's love for us.

I appreciate Paul Trip's observations about the life giving love Jonathan had for David: "Hear this truth. God incarnates His wisdom; God incarnates His love; God incarnates His protection through godly people that He places in our lives. This is God's love for David. This is God's grace in David's life coming to bear in David's life through the vehicle of this godly man who was willing to endanger himself for the sake of the future king. What a beautiful picture of biblical love. Listen, do you esteem the love of the people that God has placed in your life, placed in your life to incarnate His love, to incarnate His wisdom, to incarnate His grace, to incarnate His protection? Do you value the body of Christ? Do you understand that God has many tools in His toolbox? He has many instruments to use, and He surrounds you with His care, His warning, His grace, His protection, His wisdom. We must reject an individualistic 'Jesus and me' form of Christianity. God ordains the ministry of His people; God raised up Jonathan for David.

God gave this man what he needed at this moment through this remarkable connection.”

This brings us to a fourth characteristic of a faithful friend:

4. A faithful friend will speak hard truth to you, even at the risk of losing your friendship.

How many of you know, a friend that's only your friend when you agree with them is not a true friend. David's son Solomon wrote in Proverbs 27:6: *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”*

David and Jonathan had a serious disagreement about king Saul, Jonathan's father. When David, who knew he could talk to his friend about anything, shared that he believed his father sought to take his life, Jonathan responded: *“Far from it! You shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so”* (1 Samuel 20:2).

How many of you would agree, this was not an easy conversation for David and Jonathan to have? But rather than avoiding the conversation, David respectfully shared his concerns with Jonathan regarding his father.

We will never cultivate or maintain intimate and life-giving relationships by avoiding the hard and uncomfortable conversations. If you recall, years later, David avoided having difficult conversations with his son Adonijah, while he was growing up. This made matters much worse when Adonijah came of age (1 Kings 1:6).

But in Jonathan's case, although it was a touchy subject, David shared the concern of his heart with Jonathan about his father. And although at first they did not agree, they graciously and patiently worked out a plan to get to the truth. Although David was right, he gave Jonathan some time to see it for himself. And when he learned the truth and they saw each other again, David didn't say, I told you

so. Instead, as recorded in 1 Samuel 20:41-42, they embraced one another, wept with one another and renewed their covenant to always be there for each other and their families (1 Samuel 20:41-42).

Do you know why they were able to work through a serious disagreement without it coming between their friendship? Because their relationship was not about whose side David was on or whose side Jonathan was on. They both were more concerned with being on God's side. They were more concerned with doing the right thing before God and letting the chips fall where they may. This allegiance to God enabled them to remain loyal friends while Jonathan also remained loyal to his father the king. Remember, he died by his father's side in battle.

Now after the death of Jonathan, David would go on to have other loyal friends and mighty men that would stand with him in difficult times. But with very few exceptions, David the king didn't have a friend who was willing to disagree with him and hold him accountable in love.

When David sinned with Bathsheba, there were men around him that knew what he was up to. But nobody said, "David, what are you about to do?" We need friends in our lives that will stand between us and our sin even if it cost them. And if you don't know it yet, you do have a friend like that, His name is Jesus.

This brings us to the fifth characteristic of a faithful friend:

5. A faithful friend will risk it all to rescue you.

Although Jonathan didn't want to believe that his father wanted to kill David, he wasn't naïve about how unstable his father was. But because he had a gracious and loving heart, he was really hoping that his father would have a change of heart or that he could persuade him that David was not his enemy. So, for the sake of rescuing David, and to help bring reconciliation between his father and David, Jonathan was willing to put himself in the line of fire.

Notice that after Jonathan tried to have David excused for being absent from the king's table, we read in 1 Samuel 20:30: *"Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? 31 For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." 32 Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" 33 But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death."* (1 Samuel 20:30-33).

After Jonathan attempted to advocate for his friend David, his father turned his rage toward Jonathan, hurling a spear at him. And although Jonathan knew for himself that his father was determined to put David to death, Jonathan would not forsake his friend. Rather, he continued to stand in the gap for David.

Do you have an intimate friend like David had in Jonathan? Are you prepared to be that kind of friend? As I suggested earlier, Jonathan was providentially sent by God into David's life with a loyal love that was from God—a love that was devoted to helping David be successful and fulfill the call of God upon his life.

To have a friend like David had in Jonathan, we must, like David, be prepared to be a friend like David was to Jonathan. We must value the friends that God sends into our lives and we must be open for God to send us to be the friend that others should value.

Now we must not miss the fact that although David and Jonathan had an extraordinary friendship, which made them better men, their friendship points us to Jesus, because there is no better friend than He. Jesus is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.

In fact, you will never know how to be a true friend until you find that there is no better friend than Jesus. Jesus said to His disciples, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13)

Jesus laid down His life for us so that we can receive through faith forgiveness of sins and a friendship with God that will enable us to love others as Jesus loved us, that will prepare us to be a friend to others like Jesus is a friend to us, a friend that will never leave us or forsake us, a friend that will remain even if everyone else walks out.

Conclusion

To have a life worth living we need real intimacy, first with God through Christ and then with others. We were not created to be loners; we were created for intimacy. And to experience real and life giving intimacy we must cultivate it.

We cultivate intimacy by drawing near to God and to one another, by making time for one another. And through the development of meaningful relationships, we can stir one another up to love and good works and help one another find our ultimate strength in the soul satisfying friendship of Jesus. He is a friend like no other.

Discussion Guide

Main idea: A faithful friend meets our essential need for intimacy, and helps us find our ultimate strength and satisfaction in God

Five characteristics of a faithful friend:

- A faithful friend is there for you heart and soul in the good times and bad.
- A faithful friend supports you by helping you find your ultimate strength and satisfaction in God.
- A faithful friend will not forsake you when others threaten to forsake them for befriending you.
- A faithful friend will speak hard truth to you, even at the risk of losing your friendship.
- A faithful friend will risk it all to rescue you.

What was the first problem in the history of man that God identified for us? (Genesis 2:18). How does this problem speak to an essential need in man and what are the implications when this need is not met?

Assess

What does it mean that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David? (1 Samuel 18:1) How would you describe their level of friendship and what separates their level of friendship from other types of relationships (i.e. acquaintances, causal friends, close friends)?

After David defeated Goliath, Saul drafted David into his army and did not allow him to return home. At this transitional time in David's life, the bible says, "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:3). How would you contrast the relationship that Saul and Jonathan had with David?

What does it mean the Jonathan loved David as his own soul? (1 Samuel 18:3; Proverbs 18:24).

How did Jonathan's friendship with David help David to be successful to the call of God upon his life? (See 1 Samuel 18:5; 23:16).

In the message, Pastor suggested that one reason that people, including Christians, do not have intimate friends, is because they often equate intimacy with a romantic or erotic, or they believe that the choice between singleness and marriage is the choice between intimacy and loneliness.

Is it possible to have lots of sex and no real intimacy?

Is it possible to have a lot of intimacy in life and without having it be sexual?

Why is equating intimacy with an erotic/sexual relationship an obstacle to developing intimate friendships?

With these questions in mind, what did David mean when he lamented the death of Jonathan by saying: "I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women." 2 Samuel 1:26

What made Saul insecure when Jonathan defended David to his father and tried to be a peacemaker? (1 Samuel 20:30).

In contrast, Jonathan didn't reject David when he shared with Jonathan what he believed about his father's murderous intentions, and neither did David reject Jonathan, who did not agree with him concerning Saul, and also remained loyal to his father. What enabled David and Jonathan to be such loyal friends without demanding that the other show them exclusive loyalty? (Psalm 63:3)

David and Jonathan had a difficult conversation and disagreement about Saul, Jonathan's father. What lessons can we learn about how they resolved their disagreement? (1 Samuel 20:1-17; 41-42).

Why must we not avoid the hard and uncomfortable conversations in order to cultivate and maintain intimate friendships/relationships? (Proverbs 27:6).

Although Jonathan knew for himself that his father was determined to put David to death, Jonathan would not forsake his friend. Rather, he continued to stand in the gap for David. How does Jonathan's love and friendship with David point us to Jesus (John 15:12-13).

Application

Do you have an intimate friend like David had in Jonathan?

Are there changes that you need to make to be a faithful friend or to find a faithful friend?

What steps do you need to take to repair a friendship which was once intimate, but has been severed?

What must you do to experience real life-giving intimacy in relationship, first with God then with others?

Pray together: Scripture fed, Spirit led, worship-based prayer