

## **THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF FRIENDSHIP**

### **1 Samuel 20**

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We'll read passages from 1 Samuel 18 and 20 as we look at the theme "The Building Blocks of Friendship." First, we'll look at 1 Samuel 18:1–4; the time in Jonathan and David's relationship before enmity evolved in Saul's heart toward David.

"After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

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" (1 Samuel 18:1–4, NIV).

Then in 1 Samuel 20, these verses come after a time when Saul had sought on seven occasions to take David's life. There is a reaffirmation of the friendship under these new conditions.

"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 take my life?'

'Never!' Jonathan replied. 'You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It is not so!'

But David took an oath and said, 'Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, "Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved." Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death'" (1 Samuel 20:1–3, NIV).

After that, a conversation follows in which Jonathan and David agree that Jonathan will sound out his father at the monthly New Moon festival. When David doesn't show up for the banquet

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and Saul asks where he is, Jonathan will discern whether Saul's attitude toward David is still harsh. Jonathan will come back and let David know whether it's safe or not for him to return to the king's court. We pick up the continuing conversation in verse 12.

“Then Jonathan said to David: ‘By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unfailing kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the LORD has cut off everyone of David's enemies from the face of the earth.’

So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, ‘May the LORD call David's enemies to account.’ And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself” (1 Samuel 20:12–17, NIV).

Two days later, Jonathan shows up with his arrow bearer. There's a signal arranged. He tells the arrow bearer, “I have shot the arrow beyond such and such stone over there,” and that means David's life is in jeopardy, and he must flee. If Jonathan says, “The arrow falls on this side,” then David is safe. So David hid in the field. That's a poignant phrase. Next week we're going to talk about what to do when life's circumstances get out of control, and you're waiting for somebody else to make a decision—it's out of your hands. What do you do? Jonathan shows up, shoots the arrows beyond the stone. The arrow bearer leaves, and there is this final conversation in the last two verses of chapter 20.

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“After the boy had gone, 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.

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.”

We have before us the story of one of the world’s greatest friendships—one of the great friendships of the Bible—the friendship of Jonathan and David. The beginning of their friendship is noted in the verses we have read today from chapter 18. Jonathan became one in spirit with David. King James says, “Jonathan’s soul became knitted to David’s, and he loved him as himself.”

Unfortunately, in our society today, some assert that this text infers a homosexual relationship between Jonathan and David. Perverting this text simply shows how true it is that American men can’t dare show friendship to one another unless they become misunderstood. We, as men in this society, are largely friendless—less so in the Christian community, but certainly an aspect is true for Christian men as well. It is true that men often do not have the friends that women do.

Women seem to have their own network of friendship.

#### **I. Men find it more difficult to establish friendships.**

Why? Six reasons.

**A. Men have an aversion to showing emotion.** We are taught “Big boys don’t cry.” Yet, emotion is a very vital part of friendship. David had it here—he wept much. But we are told not to show emotion.

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**B.** Second, men find an inability to have fellowship. We find it safer to talk about a lot of external things—jobs, investments, golf scores, and the stock market. We find it easier to talk about those kinds of things rather than talking about stuff that makes friendships—talking about what’s going on inside our lives.

**C.** Third, we men often do not have friends because we have inadequate role models. We have this myth of the macho-American male—that somehow we’re not a man if we’re not in the mold of John Wayne. We’ve adopted models like this. And guys who are indoor guys and baldheaded are wimps.

**D.** Men also have trouble with friendships because we’re ordinarily competitive. Even in playing golf with my friends, I’m out to win.

**E.** Then we have an inability to ask for help. Why is it in marriages that are troubled, nine out of every ten times, it’ll be the wife who makes the appointment with the counselor? And the husband has to be dragged, if he goes at all, kicking and screaming? Because we men feel like we don’t have to talk to anybody about our problems. If we can’t handle this ourselves, we’re sure not going to lay our life out before anybody else. We have an inability to ask for help.

**F.** And we don’t have friends often because of incorrect priorities. Our priorities are making a living, financial security, getting ahead, being number one, and our career goals. Our priorities may not include the building of our relationships until we get older. It comes a bit late. In our society, it’s often easier to know more about computers than about caring. And it’s easier to try to keep up with the Joneses than to keep up with Jesus. We need to be careful about our priorities. We need to prioritize friendships. Some people are loaners. Some choose to live with a lot of anger and enmity like Saul. Some people are friendly but have no real deep friends.

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There's a difference between friendliness and having a deep friend. Friendliness is simply a general surface approach to everyone. But a friendship requires far more depth of interaction and relationship. I would suggest that in this message today we look at areas of friendship—building friendships with those who are not our blood relatives. Maybe you have a friend, and you need to think about that friendship. What makes the friendship the way it is, and how could it be made better? This message will help do that.

Secondly, we also need to turn our blood relationships into friendships—the husband and wife relationship, the parent and child relationship, and the brother and sister relationship. Our family relationships need to be infused with friendship in order to really be successful.

Then we also ought to examine what the factors are that make for a great friendship with God. We want to do all that within the context of looking at the building blocks of friendships. There are seven of them that are witnessed in the relationship of Jonathan to David.

### **II. Here's what makes good friendships—whether it's friendship with others, friendship with family, or friendship with God.**

**A.** First, companionship supersedes control or competition. That means being with your friend is more important than running their life or dominating them. Companionship is more important than trying to prove who's better—more important than competing.

If anybody ever had the rationale or a reason for competing, it was Jonathan and David. It's a natural, competitive situation. Jonathan is crown prince. That means he's next in line to the throne. David is the newly anointed king. Right away they could be at one another for power—jockeying for who's going to be number one. Not only that, but they were men of valor. They both fought valiantly on the battlefield—they could have been decorated with the medals of honor. They had similar interests because they had similar abilities. They could have been

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competitors. It's often the case when people compete, they're domineering. And domineering people do not have friends. Show me a domineering person, and I will show you a person who does not have friends. They may be friendly, but they do not have friends. Domineering parents, for example, will not have close relationships with their children. That doesn't mean we throw out the whole idea of authority. But if we domineer in a harmful way, we are not going to produce friendships with our children. And a domineering spouse can destroy the friendship with their mate. Why? To that person, control is more important than companionship. "Doing it my way" always produces a one-way street of communication rather than two-way communication. But the souls of Jonathan and David are knit together like the weaving of a garment—the yarn is intertwining little by little until the tapestry of the whole fabric has been put together. Companionship is based upon mutual respect, compatibility, and shared ideas. Jonathan and David choose companionship, and therefore they're on the road to friendship.

**B.** The second building block of friendship is that commitment keeps on being renewed in the seasons of life. Friendship requires commitment. In Jonathan and David's case we might ask, "How do you know if you have a good friend or not?" We might be tempted initially to turn to chapter 18 where we began our reading today and say, "Here is the obvious evidence that they were good friends. They did something that very few people do at the beginning of a friendship. They make a covenant of friendship." Most of us slide into our friendships. We're not exactly sure how it all happens. We don't have a formalized ceremony. But David and Jonathan had this pact—a covenant of friendship between them. They ratified that covenant by Jonathan giving David gifts. This shows us that he was more maturely successful than David, and he wanted to do something for his friend who didn't have as much as he did. Few friendships are marked by

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such a formal agreement. Yet that exchange does not answer the question, “How do you know if you have a good friend?”

The test of friendship comes when you’re in trouble. It comes in adversity. So we turn to chapter 20 and later 23 to see if their friendship is maintained when things get rough for David—when it was inconvenient for Jonathan to be his friend. We find, sure enough in those circumstances, they’re reaffirming, re-ratifying their covenant. In 20:17, Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. In 20:42, they have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord. In 23:18, the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. If you read the account of their friendship, you’ll see that Jonathan does far more for David during their lifetime. But that is the nature of friendship. It doesn’t require tit-for-tat. It simply says, “I love you, and I’ll do anything I can for you even in your downtimes. I’ll be true to you.” The only shot David ever has of doing anything for Jonathan is long after Jonathan is dead. He has the chance to befriend his son.

Proverbs 17:17 says “A friend loves at all times.” Some relationships need, from time to time, the reaffirmation of friendship—the renewal of commitment. We do not want to walk together in family simply out of the sense of contractual duty. But we should walk together as friends—reaffirming our covenant. Friends, at times, need to reaffirm that to one another.

**C.** The third building block of friendship is transparency. Transparency or vulnerability must be cultivated if we’re going to be true friends. We’ll never be friends with someone who doesn’t let us into their life—who keeps us at arm’s length emotionally. We find transparency and vulnerability in the actions of David in the early part of chapter 20. He comes to Jonathan and basically says, “I’m scared. There’s one step between me and death.” Here is David, the man of faith and valor who faced Goliath fearlessly, now saying to his true friend, “I am scared.”

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Friendship requires that willingness to be vulnerable. It allows us and requires us to share what's going on in times we don't look so good—when we're having trouble with our feelings. We're often convinced that if people ever see us as we see ourselves, the sight would repel them. So we never let them know. We hide within an image. Or we retreat within walls of silence. Thereby, we build walls when we really need to build windows. Windows are built when we are vulnerable and transparent. The people who are my true friends are the ones I am the most honest with about myself. I dare to risk and trust my blemishes with them as well as my good points. They really know how I feel about a matter, whereas other people will see more trained responses. But my friends know I can be totally off the wall at times.

Jesus was transparent, wasn't he? If ever anyone had an excuse for not being transparent and vulnerable, He did. He was the only Son of God. I would think that if He had the mentality of some, He would have said, "Since I am the only Son of God, I must never show people that I am anxious or depressed or struggling with the will of My Father. I must always keep up a strong front. I'll let them know I'm the Son of God all the way." But in Gethsemane, He gathers His friends to Him—His closest friends—and He admits to them, "My soul is girded about with trouble." Which is another way of saying, "I feel like the pits! I'm deeply depressed." What does that do? It allows us to see Jesus and get close to Him. That explains why a person like John can get comfortable putting his head on Jesus' breast.

We're not comfortable with that in our culture today. Anybody who does that is immediately suspected of having a misguided sexual orientation. But in Jesus' relationship with John, His vulnerability had cultivated this kind of honesty of expression. He didn't keep him at arm's length saying, "I'm the one who always does the miracles, so stay in awe of Me." He also let the disciples see His humanity and the times when He was down. Seeing Jesus down and knowing

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He's a man without sin shows us that when you're discouraged and depressed—it's not necessarily always sin.

George Elliot said, "Oh, the comfort of feeling safe with a person. Having neither to weigh thoughts, nor measure words, but to pour them all out just as it is chaff and grain together.

Knowing that a faithful friend will take and sift them—keeping what is worth keeping and then with a breath of kindness, blow the chaff away."

**D.** The fourth building block of friendship—verbalize your love for your friend. Say "I love you." Jonathan and David did that for one another. They expressed that love on numerous occasions. They covenanted their love for one another. Jonathan said, "I love you as I love myself." Often, we men and sometimes women as well, are uncomfortable when someone outside the family says, "I love you." Sometimes, we're even uncomfortable with someone inside the family. We see how important the verbal expression is for friendship, saying, "I love you." How difficult it often is for a person to verbalize those three essential words that are so critical in friendship—I love you.

**E.** The fifth building block is to learn the gestures of love. Symbolic acts which show love. For example, Jonathan gave things like his robe, his tunic, his sword, his belt, and his bow to David. When you are really a friend of someone, whether they're in your bloodline or not, you reach out in special ways with gifts, and you attach meaning to your gifts. They're symbolic. Generally for your deepest friends, you do not grab gifts for them in a hasty moment. No, we want to find something that is wonderfully symbolic—we make something, we create something, we think of something they'd especially want, and we go about it with great delight. We watch with anticipation as they open our gift. We invest our friendships with symbolic meaning.

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**F.** The sixth building block of friendship—allow the other person space in the relationship. That may be number one. We need to choose in friendship to still leave a person free to make their own choices. There are two kinds of choices we make in life—choices that are clearly right and wrong choices. And then there are choices of preference. If we're going to have a true friendship, we need to leave our friend free to choose their own preferences—not imposing our own preferences or will upon them.

The classic example of this is the last sentence of 1 Samuel 20 where it says, “Then David left, and Jonathan went back to town.” That was Jonathan's choice of preference. It was not right or wrong. Whether he went back to Saul or whether he went off into exile with David—it was not a right or wrong choice. It was a choice of preference. David could have said to Jonathan, “If you're going to be a friend to me, then you're going to go with me. I know my friends are people who hang with me. If you go back to your dad, you're in the enemy's camp. You can forget it.” But he gave his friend space and allowed him to make his own choices of preference.

That's critical in friendships because friendships are destroyed when we don't do that. A friendship does need honesty. We need freedom to tell another person where we're coming from. But that honesty cannot be encapsulated within a negative attitude. We must be cautious with criticism in friendship and the spirit with which we give correction or advice. D. L. Moody was asked why he didn't criticize his fellow ministers. He said, “Right now, I'm having so much trouble with D. L. Moody, I don't have time to find fault with the other fellow.”

This matter of space is important within family relationships as well—parent-child relationships. On the one hand as parents of younger children, we have got to keep a firm grip on things because we want to give our children roots. But we also want to give our children wings. To give them wings, I think, is more difficult than to give them roots. Wings let them fly free. It breeds in

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them a kind of independence. It's not always easy to keep those two in balance. We, as parents, struggle on whether we're going to be authoritarian or whether we're going to be laissez-faire and let anything go. Somehow, the truth is in the balance between those two—having authority and yet being relaxed and easy. Parents who are always invading the space of their children in choices of preference are going to sabotage the chance to make friends with their children later in life. If you keep harping on something in a friendship—harping on another person's choice of preference—you are going to sabotage that friendship. Instead of changing that behavior, it's actually going to become more extreme from what you want.

**G.** The seventh building block of true friendship is—true friendship deepens our walk with God. David and Jonathan's conversations, whenever you run across them, always reference the Lord. He is incorporated as part of their life pilgrimage and perspective. Look at the very last mention we have of their meeting. What a poignant mention it is! It's in 1 Samuel 23:16. David has been fleeing from Saul for a long time in the hills. He's twice turned down opportunities to kill Saul. David is on the ropes once more. Jonathan seeks him out. What does Jonathan do when he comes? "And Saul's son Jonathan went to David and helped him find strength in God." That's a powerful Scripture. A friend helped him find strength in God. That's what a good friendship ought to do for us.

When Jonathan was killed, you'll notice David sinks into catastrophic sin. David doesn't during Jonathan's lifetime but after his death. I wonder if the reason he strayed so far and so bad was because he no longer had his friend strengthening him in God.

How do we tie all of this together and apply this to our lives? I encourage you—with your blood relations and among your friends—to be a real friend. How do you be a real friend? Follow these building blocks. Your friend's companionship is more important to you than controlling or

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competing with them. Your commitment to them is real and ongoing. It keeps being renewed. Continue to cultivate transparency and vulnerability. Be willing to open your life to that person. Verbalize your love. Say, “I love you.” Find many ways to say it. Your friendship is marked by loving deeds. You find symbolic ways to say to another person, “I love you.” You allow your friend some space. And in that friendship, you draw each other closer to the Lord.

On the other hand, do you have a friend who’s doing this for you? If you do, you’ve got a real friend. Treasure that friendship. Friendships are the most wonderful thing in life. Whether the friendship is within family or includes persons outside the bloodline. It is the most wonderful possession to have.

### **III. One last thing—look at your relationship with God.**

Jesus said, “I no longer call you servants. I call you friends.” Is He our friend using these seven building blocks of relationships? He is. Our friendship is more important to Him than competing with us or controlling us. Of course, He’s Lord, and He does control us. But He says, “I don’t want you serving Me in a master-slave relationship. I want you as my friend.” Companionship is important to Him. His commitment to us is real and ongoing.

When do we most know if we’ve got a real friend? When we’re down. When we’ve failed. When we’re discouraged. When we’ve transgressed. That’s when we need friends. Does He come along and renew His covenant of love to us in those times? Yes, He does. He says, “I am with you always. I will never leave you.” He renews His friendship to us in times we don’t deserve it and are unworthy of it.

Does Jesus cultivate transparency and vulnerability with us? Of course He does. I’ve used Gethsemane as an example of the Lord’s transparency.

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Does He verbalize His love? He does. “I call you My friends. No greater love has a man than this—to lay down his life not only for his friends but for his enemies. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son.”

Is His friendship marked by loving deeds or by gestures of love? Of course! He went to the cross for us. He took a towel and washed feet. He invests His friendship with loving deeds.

Does He allow us some space? Of course! Freedom is very important to Him. He’s not going to force us to make any decision we don’t want to make. He’ll let us be free to make it—not break our arm to do it. Especially in choices of preference. He says, “Whom the Son of Man sets free is free indeed.” Becoming a follower of Jesus doesn’t mean you become a robot. That’s what a cult does to you. A cult produces the same kind of mentality—the same sort of darkened look in the eye. Everybody doing it in rote, all wearing the same clothes, and doing the same routine and ritual. Jesus sets you free from being the cookie cut-out of everybody else. He gives you space. And space is essential for freedom.

Does Jesus help you grow spiritually? Of course! He has come to grow us and give us stature and wisdom that He himself has. Proverbs 18:24 says, “He is the friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

The model for our human friendship today has been the model of Jonathan and David. They were wonderful friends. But Jesus opens up a deeper level of friendship that goes beyond even that of Jonathan and David who loved each other as they loved themselves. Jesus gives us a new standard in John where he says, “A new commandment I give to you, not that you love one another as you love yourself. But that you love each other as I have loved you.” Apply the building blocks of friendship and then add the icing on the cake—“As I have loved you.” And

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you will be a friend, and you will have friends. And you'll be a friend to God, and you'll know God's friendship to you.

#### **Closing Prayer**

Our Lord, as we come to You in this moment of prayer, I realize that there may be friends within this congregation today who do not know You personally. They may have a very inadequate understanding of You. They see You as the remote control man upstairs—the God who's far away or the God who sits in judgment. You are the God of all creation and the Lord of the universe. But You've also shown us in Jesus that you choose to be friends with us. You desire fellowship with us. You say to us, "I stand at your heart's door and knock." Then You say that if You come in, You're not going to get us down on our hands and knees scrubbing the floor and waiting on You all day. But You say, "I will come in and eat with you." You will commune with us and have companionship with us.

Lord, in our lives, help us not to make our relationship with You some difficult thing. Let it be exactly what You purposed it to be. You gave your life in order to draw us out of enmity with You, out of ignorance of You, into relationship with You, into friendship with You, and into being members of Your family. We want to do that. If there's anyone here today who has not done that, who has not acknowledged You as Lord and friend, I pray that today they will.

Then, Lord, I pray for families who are having difficult times with friendships within their relationships. I pray that You'll help us go over these building blocks of friendship and not wait for the other person to do them. Help us to set them into practice ourselves. Bring friendship within families, Lord. We ask for works of healing and reconciliation, so that friendship can take place.

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Then among us, as the body of Christ, make us true friends to one another—not strangers passing one another on Sunday morning. But help us within the richness of the body of Christ to find those deep and powerful human relationships which help us find strength in God. We ask this in Your name. Amen.