

# The King Who Befriends

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God's people need godly friendships.

Friendship is a strange thing nowadays. Just twenty years ago, it would have been seen as the height of exaggeration (not to mention arrogance) for a person to claim hundreds or thousands of “friends.” But today, this is true of just about anyone with a Facebook account.

We have more friends than ever, don't we? Well, not really. What kind of “friends” are these? I may have 1,500 Facebook friends, but I don't really know even half of them. They don't really know me either. (And I'm certainly not inviting all 1,500 of them to my birthday party!)

## Voices from the Culture

“I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light.”<sup>1</sup>

—Helen Keller (1880-1968)

The problem in our day is not that we lack *people* around us. We cross paths with people all the time. No, our problem is that we lack true *friends*. We are overly connected but incredibly shallow. Our notion of friendship has shifted to the point that it affects even the few friends we *do* have, leading us to settle for shallow relationships everywhere.



When you were growing up, who would you say was your closest friend? What made your friendship so close?

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In this session we take a look at one of the greatest examples of friendship in the Bible—David and Jonathan. Jonathan shows us what it means to be a true friend by being utterly committed to David’s well-being, by risking his own welfare for the sake of David, and by strengthening him in his faith. The example of Jonathan points forward to the truest and best friend of all—Jesus Christ Himself, who redefines friendship and transforms us into the kind of people who can be true friends to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## 1. True friendship is grounded in covenant commitment (1 Sam. 18:1-3).

*<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father’s house. <sup>3</sup> Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.*

It doesn’t take much knowledge of royal lineage to figure out that this friendship wasn’t an obvious one. As Saul’s oldest son, Jonathan was the king-to-be. But even though Jonathan was next in line, David was the one who had been anointed, the man whom *God* had said would be the next king.

Shouldn’t David and Jonathan be rivals then? In most cases, yes. But in this story, David and Jonathan become fast friends—with a covenant commitment based in Jonathan’s loving David as much as he loved himself.

Covenants start with the needs of the other person. They start with *loving someone as you love yourself*. The relationship is paramount in a covenant, which means that it’s founded on trust, not distrust. Most importantly, however, covenants are codified ways that people commit themselves to each other. Take marriage, for example. According to God’s intention, marriage is not a deal that we broker in order to get our needs met. It’s a promise of a husband and wife putting each other first, no matter what—in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, for better and for worse.

### Voices from the Church

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”<sup>2</sup>

—Timothy Keller

The commitment Jonathan made was covenantal because it was a vowed friendship without conditions. He pledged himself to David. The fact that he would be inclined to help David at all is a sign that he was putting the interests of his friend ahead of his own desire for the throne.

 What are some ways you can tell that someone is being a friend to you only for what they can receive?

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 What are some ways you can tell that someone genuinely cares about you selflessly?

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Consider the commitment between a parent and a child. That kind of unrelenting, “I’m always going to be here for you” love we see modeled by a good parent is the kind of commitment we see here between Jonathan and David. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself—a fulfillment of what Jesus would later command: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you* (Matt. 7:12), and *Love your neighbor as yourself* (Matt. 22:39).



### Voices from Church History

“A friend is to be loved freely, for his own sake, not for the sake of something else.”<sup>3</sup>

—Augustine (354–430)

 What are the obstacles that get in the way of friendships built on this kind of selfless commitment?

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## 2. True friendship risks one's welfare for another (1 Sam. 19:1-7).

*<sup>1</sup> And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David. <sup>2</sup> And Jonathan told David, "Saul my father seeks to kill you. Therefore be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself. <sup>3</sup> And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything I will tell you."<sup>4</sup> And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you. <sup>5</sup> For he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine, and the LORD worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?"<sup>6</sup> And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, "As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death."<sup>7</sup> And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.*

At this point, Jonathan had nothing to gain in his relationship to David. He had everything to lose. Remember: Jonathan was the king in waiting. But he literally took off his robe, placed it at David's feet, and said, "My inheritance, my place on the throne, what is rightfully 'mine'—I lay it all down at your feet and commit myself to you" (18:3-4).

Jonathan sacrificed for David. He lived out his covenant, even when things got difficult. When adversity struck David, Jonathan was there. When death seemed certain, Jonathan was there. When the odds were stacked against him, Jonathan was there.



When has someone risked something for your sake?

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What did their actions communicate about their commitment to you?

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The nature of Jonathan's risk is found in his pleading to his father, King Saul, on David's behalf. Jonathan knew that his father was in the wrong. To oppose his father's wishes or to speak favorably of David, however, was to risk his father's wrath upon himself. Later in the story, when Jonathan stood up for David, Saul was filled with rage and actually tried to kill his own son—his heir (20:32-33)! Every day that Jonathan kept his promise to David was a day things became more difficult in his relationship with his father. But Jonathan knew who was on the Lord's side. So he remained faithful to his covenant commitment of friendship.

God knows we need friends who are willing to risk their own reputations, their own comfort, or their own welfare for our sake. It's one thing to *have* such friends; it's another thing to *be* that kind of friend.

 When have you showed intentional and consistent kindness to someone, like Jonathan to David?

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### Voices from the Church

"God's truth is most effectively learned and lived in relationships. Friendships hold the promise of grace!"<sup>4</sup>

—R. Kent Hughes

## 3. True friendship strengthens us in our faith (1 Sam. 23:15-18).

*<sup>15</sup> David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. <sup>16</sup> And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. <sup>17</sup> And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this." <sup>18</sup> And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.*

Here we see David on the run and afraid. He was far from home. But when Jonathan heard about it, *he acted*. Historians tell us that the distance Jonathan trekked was about 30 miles. That’s an incredibly long walk to check on a buddy. But Jonathan knew that a true friend is one who walks in when everyone else walks out. So he walked...and walked...and walked. Jonathan was not a passive friend. He took time, spent energy, and risked his own welfare—all to make sure his friend David was strong in his faith.

 What are some examples of passive friendship?

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 How can we be more intentional in strengthening a friend’s faith in God?

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Intentionality, of course, isn’t everything. In fact, intentionality is pointless if it doesn’t have a purpose, a *direction*. Those people who point you to God, who strengthen you to do His will—*these* are the ones that we need. David would be called “a man after God’s own heart,” yet even he needed someone to encourage him. Why would any of us think we need any less?

Friends who strengthen our hands in God don’t do so by *minimizing* the problems in our lives. When Jonathan showed up, David was still on the run. The fear was still real. But Jonathan provided something else to go along with the fear—hope. He pointed to a greater promise, God’s promise that David would be the king. And just as David had hoped in God in days gone by, he could do so again. Jonathan didn’t present himself as the answer to David’s problems. He presented God’s promises as the answer.

## 99 Essential Christian Doctrines

### 88. Edification

Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church’s preaching and teaching of Scripture (Eph. 4:11-12), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.



What happens when a friend considers himself or herself as the answer to your problems?

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Why is it important that our friendships point us to God as the answer?

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The story of Jonathan points forward to Jesus. Jonathan may be a wonderful example of friendship, but he was only a shadow of our truest Friend. Jesus would fulfill everything that Jonathan hinted at.

Like Jonathan, He would serve us at great personal cost to Himself. Like Jonathan, He would come to us in need—but instead of walking 30 miles, He crossed the gap between heaven and earth. Jonathan gave up his right to the palace to help David get in; Jesus purchased our place in the palace at the cost of His own blood. He made His cause *ours*, taking our sins and our sorrows, swallowing death in our place so that we would have life eternal. Here is the friend we've always searched for, the only One who risked it all, who always strengthens our hand in God, who commits Himself eternally to our good. How can we reflect on that without bursting into song: *“What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!”*

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged; Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our ev'ry weakness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge; Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.  
In His arms He'll take and shield thee; Thou wilt find a solace there.<sup>5</sup>

—Joseph Scriven (1819-1886)

## Conclusion

The beauty of true friendship with Christ frees us to be ourselves to the glory of God. Many of us are afraid to open ourselves up to others. We are afraid they may walk away. But if we remember what Jesus said to us—“*You did not choose me, but I chose you*” (John 15:16)—then we can have the confidence that Jesus didn’t call us “friends” because we were the popular ones, the smart ones, or the righteous ones. He calls us friends because of His mercy. Period.

This assurance—and *only* this assurance—gives us the ability to be vulnerable. We aren’t afraid to open ourselves up to people, as if their judgment is going to destroy us. We’ve already been exposed to Someone far more important, and He responded by declaring us *washed, sanctified, and justified* (1 Cor. 6:11). So we can be honest about our weaknesses, which is the path to really connecting with others. You can impress people with your strengths, but you can only connect with people through your weaknesses. And only the gospel gives us the power to be content in our weakness.

Without Christ, we will always get to a certain spot in our friendships and then not know how to go deeper. Forgiveness will be a hurdle too high for us to surpass. But through Jesus’ friendship to us, we learn grace. As He accepted us, so we accept others—not based on their merit but based on God’s lavish grace. Jesus’ friendship to us gives us the freedom to become the friends we’ve always wanted to be.

**CHRIST CONNECTION:** The story of David and Jonathan gives us an example of true friendship and offers us a picture of God’s covenantal love for people. Because of Jesus’ commitment to us, His sacrificial love, and His strengthening grace, we are called the “friends of God.”



### Voices from Church History

“Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see.”<sup>6</sup>

—Corrie ten Boom  
(1892-1983)



# HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

**MISSIONAL APPLICATION:** God calls us to befriend others in the way He has befriended us: by committing to one another, sacrificing for one another, and strengthening one another.

1. How can our group/church help facilitate friendships built on selfless commitment?

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2. What steps will you take to reshape your view of friendship according to Christ's—one of sacrifice and kindness, even toward your enemies?

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3. How can we strengthen one another to obey in faith regarding our gospel mission?

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