



## FOCUS VERSE

### Proverbs 18:24

A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

## LESSON TEXT

### I Samuel 18:1-4

1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

### I Samuel 20:16-17, 30-32, 41-42

16 So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies.

17 And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

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30 Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?

31 For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die.

32 And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done?

.....

41 And as soon as the lad was gone, David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.

42 And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.



## FOCUS THOUGHT

True friendship is a shared adventure where no one is seeking an advantage.



# CULTURE CONNECTION

## My Arm-Pit Buddy and the Doctor

I have been blessed with many friends—genuine friends. They aren't just my friends when we bask under the golden sun on a blue, cloudless day. They are also there when the wind is howling and I'm seeking refuge from one of life's tornadoes. I also like the fact that my friends are not high maintenance; I don't have to constantly stroke their egos or be in constant contact.

Two friends I'm thinking about now are from my Bible school days. We all married and became missionaries. We all are state-side now and geographically are separated by hundreds of miles. However, a phone call erases the distance and time as we pick up our friendship where we left off.

One friend calls me his "arm-pit buddy." He towers over me and when he extends his arm, I can walk under it. I have great memories of an evangelistic trip he and I and other students made while we were in school.

The other friend is the one my wife refers to as my arguing buddy. She mistakenly thinks that all we did in Bible school was argue and debate. I can't help it if he wouldn't listen to the voice of reason—mine. With his EdD in education, he has far exceeded my accomplishments, and I esteem him for it. I also think he's mellowed. I still enjoy hearing his voice on the phone.

Faithful friends are worth their weight in gold, and I'm a very rich man.

### OUTLINE

- I. JONATHAN AND DAVID**
  - A. Jonathan Was Not Influenced by Others
  - B. Jonathan Gave Up the Throne
- II. CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE FRIEND**
  - A. Models Trustworthiness
  - B. Loves Unconditionally
  - C. Sacrifices Self If Necessary
- III. VALUE OF FRIENDSHIP**
  - A. Two Are Better Than One
  - B. We Can Choose Our Friends
  - C. We Have Someone to Lean On and Confide In
- IV. JESUS—OUR COVENANT FRIEND**
  - A. Jesus Stressed Friendship
  - B. Jesus Was a Friend of Sinners
  - C. Calvary Sealed the Covenant

### CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

A loner may say he or she does not need friends but is complete living life alone. However, the end result of living in isolation is not

only solitude but emptiness. Human beings were created for community. God longed for fellowship, so He created Adam. But God's assessment of Adam's solitude was, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Seeing Adam's need for companionship, God created Eve.

A recent study cited in the March 23, 2013, issue of *ScienceNow* confirmed the dangers of social isolation. In her article "The Dangers of Social Isolation," Traci Watson reported that in data from 6,500 Britons age fifty and older, research showed that over a seven-year period the most socially isolated subjects had a 26 percent greater risk of dying than other subjects. In addition to extreme loneliness, other factors included health problems and a lack of proper care and support. While difficult to pinpoint the cause versus the outcome, the take-away from this study was a resounding endorsement of humanity's need for community.

Friendship is one of God's greatest blessings and also one of our greatest responsibilities as Christians. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." A true friend will be

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

there through the difficult times of life, when there is nothing for that person to gain. It has been stated that if at the end of one's life, a person has five true friends, that person is truly rich. That is a sobering thought, yet truth is represented in that saying.

People in today's society lead fast-paced lives filled with countless social interactions and acquaintances. They are connected in more ways than ever, but these points of contact often result in shallow relationships. While they may be "people rich," they remain "friend poor" due to the lack of authentic, meaningful friendships. They may hide behind overextended schedules and social media facades, envying the seemingly perfect lives of others. The lives of such people become hollow and devoid of genuine significance when they shun real community.

John O'Donohue described this phenomenon in his book *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*: "Most people are enduring a marginalized isolation. One of the great obstacles to modern friendships is the 'religion of rush.' People are rushing all the time through time. Friendship takes time."

It stands to reason that the fewer authentic relationships one develops, the more difficult it becomes to develop such a relationship. Fear of the unknown, in this case fear of not knowing what an authentic relationship requires, freezes a person in isolation. As individuals become more isolated, their presuppositions become increasingly cynical. They assume people will hurt them, so it becomes easier to build walls around their hearts. An encounter with a new person is clouded with questions of that person's motives for being friendly.

True friendship, however, requires trust. In such a friendship, neither party is trying to gain an advantage. Kahlil Gibran, in his book *Sand and Foam*, offered this perspective: "Friendship is always a sweet responsibility, never an opportunity." True friendship requires an honest, authentic investment in another person, yet that investment yields a lifetime of benefits for both individuals. In the end, a real friend is someone who will honor, serve, encourage, and protect you, and that relationship will bring joy to your life. This is the kind of friendship Jonathan and David had.

### I. JONATHAN AND DAVID

As the son of King Saul, Jonathan had every material thing he desired. His father's throne guaranteed him wealth and status, and certainly there was no shortage of people surrounding him. However, Jonathan experienced a unique bond with David. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David" (I Samuel 18:1). Jonathan made a covenant with David (I Samuel 18:3–4), which was renewed in I Samuel 20:11–17.

#### A. Jonathan Was Not Influenced by Others

Even in the face of extreme opposition, Jonathan's commitment to David was not swayed. King Saul, infuriated with Jonathan's forging such a bond with David, called for David's execution. (See I Samuel 20:30–33.) Jonathan, ever loyal, defended David still, questioning what David had done to deserve death.

#### B. Jonathan Gave Up the Throne

Why would Saul be so enraged by Jonathan's friendship with David? Saul knew that David had been anointed to be the next king of Israel, and as long as David was alive, Jonathan would never inherit the throne. (See I Samuel 20:31.) Saul's displeasing ways meant not only the end of his reign, but that his would-be royal line had lost the chance to rule. Saul's response to God's decree was reflective of his spiritual state. He decided to take matters into his own hands and attempt to defeat the plan of God with his own military force.

Saul felt that Jonathan's acceptance of God's plan was absurd. Yet Jonathan maintained his integrity, and he refused to protect his interests at the expense of David's life. Not even the throne of Israel was worth Jonathan's betraying his dearest friend. Nothing was more important to him than being a friend to David, regardless of the personal cost to himself.

## II. CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRUE FRIEND

### A. Models Trustworthiness

Jonathan's life demonstrated many characteristics of a real friend. Above all else,

Jonathan was a person of integrity who proved he could be trusted. When it would have been simpler to align with his father's ill will for David, Jonathan remained honest and true to his covenant with David. Transparency is a hallmark of authentic friendships. In the face of struggles or tough times, a true friend will honestly address the challenges but will commit to persevere through those setbacks. Shrouds of secrecy and facades of false promises are enemies to relationships because they erode trust and commitment.

### **B. Loves Unconditionally**

Unconditional love is hard to fathom and equally difficult to find in human relationships. As Saul's anger raged, he became consumed with the notion of self-preservation through the destruction of David and the prophets. In the face of such hatred, Jonathan remained steadfast in his love for his friend. Jonathan would not be corrupted, nor would he forsake the covenant he had pledged and reaffirmed to David. God forged their bond, and Jonathan's love for David was a picture of God's love for us. God's love for us is not swayed based on circumstances or thoughts of personal gain, nor was Jonathan's love for David.

### **C. Sacrifices Self If Necessary**

There was truth in Saul's pronouncement to Jonathan that he would never be king as long as David lived. From that perspective, it would have seemed to be in Jonathan's best interest to follow his father's plan and ensure the death of David. But when David was anointed to be king, the destinies of these two men became intertwined on a deeper level. One friend was pedigreed, but the other was called. One would rise, and one would fall.

Saul understood the implications of his pronouncement; however, he failed miserably in his response. Saul's response was carnal; he arrogantly thought he could thwart the plan of God by killing God's chosen servant. Jonathan, on the other hand, was willing to sacrifice himself rather than destroy his friend. Jonathan did not pursue his own interests but remained a man of integrity, even in his death. Being a true friend is not about doing what is

expedient for one's self. A real friend is a servant who sacrifices for another.

## **III. VALUE OF FRIENDSHIP**

In a society that celebrates quantified outcomes and results, it is difficult to describe the value of friendship. As previously stated, scientific research confirms the benefits of strong relationships; however, such data falls short of conveying their value. In fact, as with most things in life, one usually does not realize the value of a friend until faced with a situation that reveals the desperate need for one.

In his book *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life*, Henri Nouwen poignantly described the significance of true friendship and what the friend looks like: "When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing, and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares."

Friends are those who walk with us through the midnight and serve as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ here on earth.

### **A. Two Are Better Than One**

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 declares, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." When two are faced with a challenge, there is strength in the fortitude gained from working together. The end result is not based solely on "me," but rather on "we." That does not negate the contributions and value of an individual. It does, however, empower the individual to realize he or she is part of something larger than one person, and it provides momentum to move forward.

There is much to be said in today's context regarding accountability partners. An accountability partner is someone who helps another person keep a commitment. First

used in connection with weight loss programs, the concept has been extended to other areas of life, including moral purity, addictive behaviors, and even financial decision-making. For Christians, this concept bears true throughout Scripture. God received much glory through partnerships such as Moses and Aaron, Esther and Mordecai, Peter and John, Paul and Silas, and many more.

## **B. We Can Choose Our Friends**

“Friends are the family you choose for yourself.” This popular anonymous quote highlights one of the greatest aspects of friendship—the power of choice. There are many relationships in life over which we have little input. We cannot choose our parents, our siblings, or other family members. While most of us may choose our place of employment, there is little input regarding coworkers or supervisors. Friendship is unique in that it offers a window into the values and priorities of the individual. In whom do we confide? Whom do we allow to speak into our lives? For whom do we make time? The answers to these questions can reveal our personal goals. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). From that perspective, we should carefully choose friends who will build us up, not tear us down or hold us back.

There is a delicate balance in developing relationships. Believers should not avoid befriending people who do not share their values or spiritual goals. A true friend is not in pursuit of a self-serving relationship but endeavors to strengthen the other person. A better way to think about relationships is to understand the various types and purposes of friendships. Christians are called to love others as they follow the example of Jesus Christ. Genuine love yields friendship, community, encouragement, and support. This is the benchmark for which believers should strive with all people.

There is a difference, however, between reaching out to others with the love of Christ, and allowing someone to have influence over our inner thoughts and desires. When our souls are in need of encouragement, spiritual nourishment, and uplifting community, we need friends who will steady us in the love of Christ. The key distinction is the level

of influence friends have in our lives. Solomon admonished, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23). For that reason, we must choose our closest friends carefully.

## **C. We Have Someone to Lean On and Confide In**

When we have real friends, we do not walk through life alone. One of the most beautiful aspects of friendship is that we can trust and lean on someone who wants what is best for us. Our hopes and dreams, and even our fears and suffering, can be shared with another. Depending on the circumstances, we can celebrate together or weep with each other.

There is power in journeying through life with someone we can trust, not only from an emotional perspective but also from a spiritual aspect. Just as we have an innate need for fellowship and community, the Bible also reveals the spiritual power gained when two walk together for the cause of Jesus Christ. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). How does this work? When we are authentic and open with a trusted confidant, we can unite in prayer to overcome temptation or sin. By joining together in prayer, we multiply our faith and God moves on our behalf.

We know there is power in prayer, but when we join together with another for prayer, something exponential happens in the spirit world. Deuteronomy 32:30 proclaims, “How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up?” Agreeing with someone else in prayer can make our prayers more effective than praying alone. The prayer of agreement with a friend, according to God’s will, can yield mighty results in God’s kingdom because it follows the scriptural principle of bearing each other’s burdens and casting our cares on Christ.

## **IV. JESUS—OUR COVENANT FRIEND**

An anonymous story about a frightened little boy has been used in countless sermons over the years. The story goes that during a powerful storm one night, a frightened little

boy could not sleep. He got out of bed and knocked on the door of his parents' room, declaring, "I can't sleep!" His mother got up to soothe him and took him back to his room. After he was back in bed, she offered some words of comfort. "Son, you know that we love you, and we are right here, close by." He nodded his agreement. "And you know God loves you and He is with you all the time. He is in the same room with you, right?" The boy nodded affirmatively. "So you are going to be just fine here in your room now, right?" Her son's response was not what she had hoped to hear. "No, Mommy! I know God is with me all night long, but I still want to sleep with you. I need someone with skin on!"

While the circumstances may be different in each scenario, at some point in life, each of us has likely felt like the frightened boy. We find strength in God's Word, and we experience hope from the power of His Spirit. Yet we long for a tangible, physical presence to help carry us through our dark days. That is the beauty of friendship, for it is a wonderful gift from God to remind us we are not walking alone. Godly friendships model His love and faithfulness, and they encourage us to remain steadfast as we love God and love others.

Proverbs 18:24 states, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Jesus Christ is the dearest friend we could have. He is our covenant friend because He purchased our ransom with His own life. We have the privilege of serving a God who came to earth "with skin on." Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, lived among His creation and made a way of escape from sin for all of us.

## A. Jesus Stressed Friendship

No greater example of friendship can be found than in the life of Jesus. His entire purpose on earth was to serve others. Philippians 2:7 declares that Jesus "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." This path required shame, scorn, and agony. He willingly sacrificed His life to reconcile humanity with its Creator and to redeem us for eternity. Truer words have never been penned than these: "Greater love hath no man

than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Through His example, He taught us how to be true friends. In the same passage in which He proclaimed His sacrificial love for us, He commanded us to have that kind of love for each other: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12). In fact, He connected our relationship with Him to our response to this command: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). To be friends of God, we must be friends of others and follow the selfless example of our Savior.

## B. Jesus Was a Friend of Sinners

When a lawyer attempted to trip up Jesus, he asked Him one of the most famous questions in Scripture: "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus described a scenario in which the person least expected to help was the one who demonstrated God's love. Jesus wanted us to know that Christians are called to love all. In fact, Jesus continually pushed the limits on what it meant to be a loving friend. One of the most compelling narratives in Scripture is when, at the point of His capture under the cloak of secrecy and betrayal, Jesus called Judas "friend" (Matthew 26:50). What a model of love and forgiveness!

Jesus' love was not reserved for those who deserved it. How refreshing to know that His love was extended to everyone. In fact, His friendship with sinners was particularly offensive to some religious leaders. (See Matthew 11:19.) External markers of holiness did not grant friendship with Jesus, nor did the lack thereof disqualify a person from His love. The ministry of Jesus demonstrated that man sees the outward appearance, but God knows the heart. (See I Samuel 16:7.) Everyone sins. While sin separates us from God, it does not have the power to alienate us from Him. The love of Jesus was so rich and free that it tore through the harsh exteriors of the least likely candidates for His friendship. It still does. No matter the sin, the love of Jesus can reconcile us to Him. The redemptive power of His love can call us His friends.

Make no mistake; Jesus did not condone sin when He walked upon earth, nor does He

do so today. He always called sinners out of darkness into truth. Jesus declared, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). We can know the truth only through relationship with Him, for Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Jesus’ ministry was based on the truth that all have sinned and come short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). There is a false view that an individual must “get right to get God.” But the truth is that we must get God to get right. There is no other way to be redeemed or reconciled apart from the grace of God that we all desperately need. His love penetrates the bonds of our sin because His love is stronger than the force of sin. The description “a friend of publicans and sinners” (Matthew 11:19), meant to shame Him, gave insight into the purpose and passion of Jesus Christ.

### C. Calvary Sealed the Covenant

Because of sin, human beings needed a spotless, pure sacrifice to stand in the gap for them. The most incredible act of God’s love took place on Calvary. When Jesus Christ gave His life as the atoning sacrifice for sin, He did so for the sins of the world: “And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). As Jesus ministered among the people, He drew them to Him. When He died on the cross and rose from the grave, He secured an eternal victory that would forever deem them friends of God. How was this possible?

Calvary sealed the covenant between God and humanity. We can be eternally reconciled with Him, receiving the greatest friendship of all time, because His love did what our efforts could not do.

## INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Jesus unequivocally settled which commandments are the greatest: Love God and love people. Friendships provide the opportunity to do both because through loving, godly relationships, we demonstrate our love for God. Friendships allow us to experience the love of God in a tangible way. True friends will encourage us, strengthen us, and sacrifice for our good.

In today’s society, the frenetic pace of life often makes it extremely challenging to develop and sustain friendships, but believers must find ways to commit to community and take time for others. Robert Brault shared, “I value the friend who for me finds time on his calendar, but I cherish the friend who for me does not consult his calendar.”

Transcending power and position, the friendship of Jonathan and David modeled the faithfulness of God to us. The example of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice is the greatest demonstration of love ever known. As we seek to live out unconditional love for others, we must empty ourselves of our own motives and pray that we will decrease so He can increase. (See John 3:30.) ■

## REFLECTIONS

- What characteristics of a friend do you consider most vital to a healthy relationship?
- In today’s lesson, in what ways is true friendship modeled through the lives of David and Jonathan as well as through the life of Jesus?
- In looking to their examples, what is the most difficult aspect for you in attempting to be a good friend?
- What are obstacles to developing healthy relationships today?
- How can believers overcome those obstacles?