

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, February 3, 2008**

ANATOMY OF A FRIENDSHIP

1 Samuel 18:1-9; 19:1-7

Today I want to focus on yet another famous story from the life of David, this being the story of a friendship between David and Jonathan. I want to read two brief passages from 1 Samuel this morning, two passages which give us insight, snapshots into this remarkable friendship. First, we will read from 1 Samuel chapter 18, beginning with verse 1 and then chapter 19, beginning there with verse 1 as well.

Not everyone is blessed to have a friend like Jonathan. But the truth is that everybody *needs* a friend like Jonathan. This friendship between Jonathan and David was an uncommon one and David was extraordinarily blessed by this friendship with Jonathan. The very name Jonathan means “gift of God.” Without any question or any doubt Jonathan was a treasured gift from God in David’s life.

True friendship is a precious commodity. To have a friend who knows you intimately, who knows you inside and out, who knows what makes you tick and who accepts you just as you are. To have a friend with whom you can share your deepest hurts and longings, your doubts and fears and dreams. To have a friend who will listen to you without lecturing and will confront you without condemning. To have a friend who will defend you when you’re not around to defend yourself. To have a friend who finds great joy in your success and happiness. To have a friend who looks out for your well-being even at the risk of their own. To have a friend who rejoices with you when you rejoice, a friend who grieves with you when you grieve, a friend who bleeds with you when you’re wounded. To have a friend like that is all too rare in our world. But that’s the kind of friend Jonathan was to David.

There are a number of lessons about friendship that we can learn from this friendship between Jonathan and David. *First* among them is this: A true friend demonstrates loyalty. Jonathan expressed his loyalty to David by entering into a covenant of friendship with him. It was a covenant to which Jonathan would prove faithful. Jonathan demonstrated his loyalty to David by speaking well of David to his father Saul when Saul had determined to kill David. Listen again to what we read moments ago in chapter 19, beginning in verse 4. It says:

Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The Lord won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”

Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be put to death.”

Jonathan demonstrated his loyalty to David by protecting David from the evil intentions of his father Saul. Even though Saul took that oath that David would not be killed, there are six different occasions in 1 Samuel where Saul attempted to take the life of David, where Saul was pursuing David in order to kill him or attempting to orchestrate events that would result in David’s death. When Jonathan heard of plots against David, he would inform him, he would warn him about it. When Saul came after David with the intent to kill him, Jonathan hid David in order to protect him.

In the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien, novels that have been made into a series of films, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, which is the first book and movie in the series, Frodo Baggins, a hobbit, is given the unenviable task of destroying a ring in The Cracks of Doom in a dark and evil land called Mordor. His task is fraught with mortal danger.

Gandalf, the wizard, understands such a perilous journey could cause anyone to become discouraged. Gandalf encourages Frodo’s best friend, Samwise Gamgee, to accompany Frodo on the trip. In fact, Gandalf makes Samwise promise he will never leave Frodo. Several other brave individuals accompany Frodo as well. These nine travelers become the “Fellowship of the Ring.”

Well into the journey, the lives of those in the Fellowship have been endangered on multiple occasions. Concerned for the safety of his friends, Frodo makes a private and noble decision to slip away from his friends and make the remainder of the journey on his own. Frodo steps into a boat and quietly pushes away from the shore.

Suddenly, the branches on the sloping hill above the shore begin to snap and give way to a tiny hobbit warrior. Samwise Gamgee crashes through the branches and onto the shore shouting, “Frodo! Mr. Frodo!”

Frodo yells back, “Go back, Sam! I’m going to Mordor alone!”

Sam is not deterred. He continues toward Frodo, splashing into the river up to his waist. “Of course you are, and I’m coming with you!”

“You can’t swim!” Frodo shouts. “Sam! Sam!”

Sam tries desperately to swim out to the boat. Frodo watches as Sam begins to sink beneath the murky surface of the river.

Frodo reaches down and grabs Sam’s wrist, pulling him up and into the boat. Frodo looks at Sam as if to say, “Why? Why would you risk your life attempting to swim out to me?”

Frodo embraces Sam, “Come on,” he smiles.

Sam made a covenant – a covenant of loyalty to his friend Frodo.

Jonathan entered a covenant of loyalty and friendship with David. Jonathan demonstrated his loyalty to David and proved his faithfulness as a friend by remaining true to the promise he had made. A true friend demonstrates loyalty.

Second, a true friend looks out for the best interests of his or her friend. Just as Jonathan looked out for the best interests and well-being of David.

Jonathan’s father, Saul, was consumed with jealousy. Jealous because of the song the people sang in 1 Samuel 18 after David had defeated Goliath. They were singing:

Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands (18:7).

Saul was jealous because it was obvious the favor or blessing of the Lord was on David and no longer on him.

He was jealous because he realized that God intended to give the kingship of Israel to David.

So Saul, in his jealousy and increasing paranoia – thinking that David was out to get him and his kingdom – saw David as his enemy and was determined to eliminate him.

Jonathan could have been just as jealous of David as his father Saul was. *Could* have been. But he was not. Jonathan could easily have hated David for his popularity and the high esteem in which people held him. Jonathan could easily have viewed him as his adversary. After all, as Saul’s son, Jonathan was first in line to succeed him as king of Israel. He was the heir apparent to the throne of his father Saul.

But Jonathan was not jealous of David. He was not jealous of David’s success or popularity with the people. He was not jealous of the obvious hand of blessing from God on David’s life.

Jonathan was not jealous *of* David. He was jealous *for* David. He was jealous for God’s best in David’s life. He was jealous for David’s success. He was jealous for David to receive and experience the fullness of God’s blessings and favor.

It is one thing to be jealous *of* someone – to envy their success, their gifts, their intelligence, their beauty or prosperity. It is another thing to be jealous *for* someone, as Jonathan was for David, and to seek the best interests of that person, even when it may be costly for you.

That is the kind of friend Jonathan was to David.

Third, a true friend knows how important it is just to be there when a friend needs you.

Bob Greene tells this story in his book *And You Know You Should Be Glad: A True Story of Lifelong Friendship*. He says:

There are a handful of people, during your lifetime, who know you well enough to understand when the right thing to say is to say nothing at all. Those people – and there will be, at most, only a few of them – will be with you during your very worst times...

When, during an already painful juncture in my life, my wife died, I was so numb that I felt dead myself. In the hours after her death, as our children and I tried in vain to figure out what to do next, how to get from hour to hour, the phone must have been ringing, but I have no recollection of it.

The next morning – one of those mornings when you awaken, blink to start the day, and then, a dispiriting second later, realize anew what has just happened and feel the boulder press you against the earth with such weight that you fear you will never be able to get up – the phone rang, and it was Jack.

I didn't want to hear any voice – even his voice. I just wanted to cover myself with darkness. I knew he would be asking if there was anything he could do. But I should have known that he'd already done it.

"I'm in Chicago," he said. I misunderstood him; I thought he was offering to come to Chicago.

"I took the first flight this morning," he said. He had heard; he had flown in. "I know you probably don't want to see anyone," he said. "That's all right. I've checked into a hotel, and I'll just sit in the room in case you need me to do anything. I can do whatever you want, or I can do nothing."

He meant it. He knew the best thing he could do was to be present in the same town; to tell me he was there. And he did just sit there – I assume he watched TV, or did some work, but he waited until I gathered the strength to say I needed him. He helped me with things no man ever wants to need help with; mostly he sat with me and knew I did not require conversation, did not welcome chatter, did not need anything beyond the knowledge he was there. He brought food for my children and, by sharing my silence, he got me through those days.

The ministry of being there is one of the greatest and most powerful ministries one friend can offer to another. Sometimes what a friend needs is not for us to do something, but simply to be there. Call it the ministry of standing by. The ministry of being available.

Everybody needs the kind of friend you know you can call at any hour of the day or night – even at 3 A.M. Jonathan was that kind of friend for David.

Let me ask you today:

Do you have that kind of friend in your life?

Are you that kind of friend to someone else?

Are you a 3 A.M. friend – the kind of friend someone can call at 3 o'clock in the morning and know you will be there for them?

A true friend knows how important it is just to be there when a friend needs you.

Fourth, a true friend is there not only to walk with you but even to carry you when you are weak and your load in life is heavy. Paul said in Galatians 6:2:

Carry each other's burdens, and in doing so you will fulfill the law of Christ.

What is the law of Christ? The law of Christ is to love one another, as Christ has loved you. That's the new commandment Jesus gave to His disciples in the upper room on the night before He went to the cross. The new commandment, or the law of Christ, is to love your neighbor as yourself. That's the second part of the Great Commandment that Jesus articulated when someone asked Him what was the first and most important commandment of all. To love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. That's the kind of love Jonathan demonstrated for David, because the text tells us that Jonathan loved David as himself (18:1).

In Ecclesiastes chapter 4 it says:

Two are better than one...
If one falls down, his friend can help him up.
But pity the one who falls
and has no one to help him up.

I told you a story from *The Fellowship of the Rings*, the first installment in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Before I close let me tell you another story from that trilogy – this one from the final book and film of the series, *The Return of the King*.

In this final book and film, as the trilogy approaches its climax Frodo and Sam are still together and they're climbing Mount Doom, carrying the ring of power. The only way to save Middle Earth from the forces of evil is to destroy the ring by throwing it into the fires of Mount Doom.

The climb up the mountain is treacherous. There are fireballs hurling through the air like meteors. Lava seeps down the smoke-shrouded mountain. Gollum, a pitiful creature who once possessed the ring and is now obsessed with it, looks to kill Frodo and seize the

ring for himself. Sam protects his master by fending off Gollum's attack and knocking him back down the mountain.

With Gollum temporarily gone, Frodo and Sam resume their climb up to the top of the mountain. Frodo alone must carry the ring, and the burden of it becomes so heavy that he collapses. His exhaustion is so great, he can only whisper and feels unable to take another step.

Sam cradles Frodo in his arms and seeks to comfort him. He reminds him of what life was like back in the Shire. But Frodo wearily replies: "I can't remember the taste of food, I can't recall the sound of water or the touch of grass. There's nothing."

Then Sam says: "Let's be rid of it [referring to the ring] once and for all. Come on, Mr. Frodo. I can't carry it for you. But I can carry you. Come on."

Sam hoists Frodo onto his back and carries him to the top of Mount Doom, where after they endure some final struggles the ring is ultimately destroyed.

Sometimes God calls us to bear one another's burdens. Sometimes He calls us to bear one another – to carry one another.

Let me ask you again today: Do you have that kind of friend in your life? Do you have a Jonathan whose heart has been knit to yours? If you do, praise God and know that you have been wonderfully blessed. Such a friend is a rare and precious gift.

But perhaps an even more important question to consider than "Do you have that kind of friend?" is this: Are you that kind of friend to another? Have you become a Jonathan in the life of someone God has put in your life? Someone, like David, who needs a friend they can count on?

- A true friend demonstrates loyalty in friendship.
- A true friend looks out for the well being and best interests of his or her friend.
- A true friend understands the importance of simply being there.
- A true friend is willing not only to be there but to carry you when you are weak and your load in life is heavy.

In the name of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit and the strength that He alone can provide, may we be that kind of friend. The kind of friend Jonathan was to David.

Lord, let it be so. To the praise and glory of Your name. Amen.