

# “Best Buds”

1 Samuel 18: 1-9



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When George Barna, expert on demographics in the Christian faith was researching the greatest needs of people in our early 21<sup>st</sup> century society, tops on the list was friendship. “Friends” the popular sitcom is now in syndication after an extended run. Friendships, what we know become more influential in the teenage years than anything else, are highly formative for us all.

*There was a farmer who was troubled by a flock of crows in his corn field. So he loaded up his shotgun and sneaked along the fence-row, determined to get a shot at the crows. Now the farmer had a very “sociable” parrot who made friends with everybody. Seeing the flock of crows, the parrot flew over and joined them (just being sociable, you know). The farmer took careful aim and BANG! The farmer crawled over the fence to pick up the fallen crows, and lo,*

*there was his parrot – badly ruffled with a broken wing, but still alive. Tenderly, the father brought the parrot home, where his children met him. They tearfully asked, “What happened, Papa?” Before he could answer, the parrot spoke up: “Bad company!”*

It’s important to choose our friends carefully. Friends are also important because they pull us out of ourselves. Dale Carnegie wrote, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

*Henry Ford asked a man who his best friend was? The man started naming a couple of people that could be his best friend. But Ford said, “No, I will tell you who your best friend is. Your best friend is the one who brings out the best that is in you.”*

On this Friendship Sunday at St. Luke’s, I decided to look with you at one of the great friendships of the Bible. The bible says in the book of Proverbs (18:24) that “there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother.” While we have many friends, throughout our lives, the number of truly close friends that we are able to maintain through the years and across the miles is much smaller, often fewer than a handful. We treasure our friendships. David and Jonathan are two such friends. Their story reads like an elaborate soap opera, and yet from it are some clues about what it means to be true Christian friends. What do I mean by Christian friends? They are friends who model the love of Christ to each other.

The story of David and Jonathan really includes another, Jonathan’s father, King Saul. Yes, Jonathan was the rightful heir to the throne as the eldest son of King Saul. You may remember that when Saul was chosen as Israel’s first king, it was because of his impressive stature (a head taller than most) and his military expertise. He was the king and one day, Jonathan, his son would be king. But Saul had a tragic flaw that is common to many gifted leaders. He was self-consumed, unable to allow others to shine around him. This personality flaw had even affected his relationship with his son. Everybody loved Jonathan. He was deeply loyal and daring. I Samuel 13 tells the story of how he led a raid against the rival Philistines, killing 20 of their elite soldiers, only to have his father blow the trumpet of victory and take credit for the raid. I Samuel 14 tells of a battle led by Jonathan in which the LORD interrupts with an earthquake. The Philistines run away in terror. Saul then, opportunist that he was, proclaims a fast unto the LORD until all “his enemies” are avenged. All glory to Saul. After the battle was one, Jonathan and some of the soldiers ate some honey, breaking the fast that the king had commanded. Saul decides to make an attack on the Philistines that night,

but the priest asks Saul to consult the LORD first. Saul gets no answer and assumes that there has been sin that caused God's silence. Saul is obviously as impatient as he is paranoid. Saul says, "Even if the sin is in my own son Jonathan, he will surely die." They play this strange game. First, he casts lots to see if the sin is in the people or in him and Jonathan. The lot falls on him and Jonathan. Then he orders that lots be cast to find out if the sinner is the king or his son. The lot falls on Jonathan. Jonathan admits eating the honey and breaking the fast and the king orders his son's execution. It is the people who then rise up and spare Jonathan's life.

In I Samuel 15, Samuel tells Saul that he will be replaced as king because of his disobedience. Saul spends the rest of his life trying to prove Samuel wrong. In I Samuel 16, David, in a secret ceremony, is anointed as the next king by the prophet. The next chapter tells the killing of Goliath by David and then today's lesson tells of the natural friendship that develops between David and Jonathan. Their friendship is understandable. They are warriors who have both faith and seemingly no fear. But Jonathan also recognizes that his friend David was more than a great warrior. He would be the next king. Jonathan now has a choice. He can act as he has been taught, find a way to get rid of his replacement (to which his father would gladly have provided all that was necessary). Perhaps he could send him into battle and then when the clash begins order soldiers to back off and allow David to be killed – as David would later do to Uriah the Hittite. But Jonathan's love for David is greater than his ambition and his desire for notoriety. The Bible says that **"the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."** Alan Carr, entitled his sermon on Jonathan and David, "The Prince and the Pauper," for Jonathan was the son of the king and David was nothing but an ex-shepherd boy.

But Jonathan then does something astonishing. He takes off his outer robe that would have been specially made for him as the prince and future king. He then takes off his armor. He removes his sword, his bow and his belt and insists that from now on they be worn by David. What kind of friend would empty himself in that way? Paul writes in Philippians 2, that

**"Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave being born in human likeness..."**

Yes, Jesus took the form of a servant. He became the pauper so that we could become children of the king. It is that kind of self-surrender and self-humbling that is key to authentic friendship. Jesus says to his disciples, **"I no longer call you servants, but friends."**

Jonathan has set himself aside. From then on, in battle, he looks like Jonathan, like a future king. And God blesses David in his battles as he wears the armor of the son. We are told in God's word that we are to prefer one another over ourselves. That's what friends do. We know that David eventually becomes a great warrior himself. Who transformed that "diamond in the rough shepherd boy" into a warrior? I think I know. Friendship gives preference.

The story of Jonathan and David continues as father Saul then becomes more and more jealous of the ever more popular David. He tries to marry off two of his daughters to David, just so he will be more distracted and less effective on the battlefield. But eventually he sets an organized plot, and it is Jonathan who intercedes and stops the plot. But Jonathan's intervention is only short lived. Jonathan and David have an argument in which Jonathan claims that his father would not really harm David. So they devise a test, told in I Samuel 20. David doesn't show for several days at his place at the table. Jonathan says that David has gone to Bethlehem to be with family. Saul doesn't buy it and curses out his son and throws a spear at his own son, accusing him of choosing David over the king. Jonathan then goes to David and tells him to run for his life and they are never again able to be the friends they once were. One of the key things about our relationships is that we can feel safe with each other. We can trust that we will protect each other. In this case, Jonathan puts himself in harm's way to protect David. Again, Jonathan reflects the love of Christ.

Jesus said to his disciples,

**“No greater love has a man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”**

The end of Jonathan and David’s friendship is powerful. In an attack by the Amalekites, another rival city-state, Saul and his sons are killed. The words of David’s grief are recorded in II Samuel 1:25-27,

**“How mighty are the fallen in the midst of the battle. Jonathan lies slain in your high places. I am greatly distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved are you to me; you love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How the might have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”**

The language may feel strange to us. But there is a friendship available to you and me that is far greater than any human love. Yes, this morning I am inviting us to a higher level of friendship in which we give preference and protection to each other. But even more, I invite you to consider your greatest friendship – the friendship of the one who preferred you and gave up everything, of the one who so loved you that he gave his life for you.