

## David: Developing a Heart for God, Pt.4 - A Heart for Friendship

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[Run slides 1-6 with sound on]

[slide 7, blank] In May 1970 Gale Sayers, the Chicago Bears running back, was given the George S. Halas award

as the most courageous player in professional football at the Professional Football Writers annual dinner in New York.

Sayers had been rookie of the year in 1965, but midway into the 1968 season

he suffered a ruptured cartilage, two torn ligaments in his right knee and was out the rest of the season.

After rehab, Sayers returned to the Bears line-up in 1969 and won another rushing title.

But what amazed the professional football writers is what Sayers said as he accepted the Halas award.

Sayers did not speak about himself; he spoke about his friend, Brian Piccolo [run video, slide 8]

Brian Piccolo was Sayers' close friend, and he was lying in bed dying of cancer.

He died at the age of 26, a symbol of courage and a cherished friend.

The Bible records another amazing friendship, a friendship that displays courage and loyalty, love and fidelity, in the face of conflict and crisis.

[slide 9] That friendship is the friendship of David and Jonathan; two young men who loved one another deeply [open your bibles to 1 Sam. 18, p.204].

The love between Jonathan and David is described as souls knit together, as most wonderful, even more wonderful than that of any woman.

And so, quite naturally, one commentator raises the question, “Does this hint of homoeroticism?”

We live in a world that immediately eroticises almost any expression of man-to-man love

and leaves us confused about what’s appropriate and what’s inappropriate.

Rather than view deep male-to-male love as automatically homoerotic, our story today celebrates it as something else... as *friendship* – friendship the way God intends it to be.

So there are some corrective lessons we can learn from the friendship of David and Jonathan

that frees us up to explore and express the fullness of love in same gender r’ships,

because there is a difference between having a homoerotic r’ship and having the loving friendship of another person.

How can we fully explore and express the kind of love Christ calls us to in our friendships?

And how can we develop the kind of friendship David has with Jonathan? Those are the questions we want to answer today. So let’s get to it.

[slide 10, blank] David and Jonathan hit it off right away. Look at v.1 of 1 Sam. 18. “Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.”

Another way to say it is that the ‘soul’ of Jonathan was knit together with the soul of David.

Max Lucado writes, “as if two hearts were two fabrics, God ‘needle and threaded’ them together.”

They are in the truest sense of the word, soul mates. Jonathan ‘loves’ David with the whole of his being as David does Jonathan.

It’s a beautiful poetic description of the depth of their love for one another. They are in essence ‘kindred spirits’.

Jonathan follows up this kindred connection in v.3 with a covenant of friendship and support for David.

Now think about this: these two young men by all rights should have been rivals.

Jonathan is the rightful heir to the throne. Yet David is the ‘golden boy’ chosen to be the next king.

What are the odds of them forming a close-knit friendship?

It would be like Joe Biden and Donald Trump becoming close-knit friends following Biden’s inauguration.

But God gives them this wonderful gift of connectedness at the soul level.

Jonathan has bound himself to David in terms of personal loyalty and love, as well as in covenant, or commitment.

In effect he’s saying to David in v.3, “I promise whatever happens, whatever my father does, whoever the people cheer for,

you can count on me. I am here for you. I am your friend. This is my covenant; my solemn vow.”

Jonathan then seals his commitment of love and loyalty to David in v.4 when he gives David his royal robe and armour in a dramatic act of transference.

Jonathan is transferring to David his rightful claim to the throne. Why does he do this?

I think he sees what God is up to. He recognizes God has called David to be king and he wants David to know it.

This kind of friendship, energized by love and sealed by covenant, is rare today.

This is a friendship that shows a depth of intimacy and commitment few have ever known.

This is a friendship that involves risk and self-sacrifice, courage and commitment.

We live in a society that is prone to have shallow r’ships.

We live under the illusion that our own self-fulfillment and self-gratification are the primary goals of a r’ship.

But the pursuit of such shallow r’ships can never result in the experience of loyal friendship given and received.

Now Jonathan’s friendship, his commitment of loyalty and love to David, is soon put to the test.

Look at 19.1. There we read that Jonathan is very fond of or takes great delight in David.

But his father, King Saul, wants David dead. It’s not clear yet if he knows about the friendship Jonathan has with David.

What is clear is that Saul is paranoid about holding on to power.

He knows that David is to succeed him as the next king but he's going to do everything in his power to keep the throne in his family.

Loyal to his friend, Jonathan, in v.2, warns David of his father's intentions and tells him, v.3, to go into hiding until he's had a chance to talk to his dad.

The next day, v.4, Jonathan acts as David's advocate and persuades his father not to put David to death.

Though King Saul takes an oath in v.6 not to kill David,

he soon goes back on his word and makes several more attempts on David's life. But David manages to escape each time.

As we move into c.20. David's been on the run from Saul. You can call him mint jelly because he's on the lamb!

He meets up with Jonathan in Raw-mah' and asks him why Saul is still hell bent on killing him.

Jonathan is shocked. He doesn't want to believe it. Look at v.9, "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?"

David explains to him what's really been going on with the repeated attempts on his life.

He also tells him, as we read in v.3, that Saul now knows about their friendship which puts Jonathan in a precarious position.

How can he honour his father and yet remain a loyal friend to David? Consider the conflict Jonathan faces.

He loves his father but sees his father's sin. He wants to be loyal as a son, but he is horrified by his father's intentions.

What will love demand of Jonathan when his loyalty to his father collides with his loyalty to David?

As we read in v.4, Jonathan vows to help David any way he can. His response reveals the deeper issues involved in being a true friend

– the wrenching conflicts, profound tensions, and costly loyalty that practicing true love requires.

David comes up with a plan in vs. 5-7 to expose Saul's true intentions. Jonathan agrees to the plan, and they reaffirm their love for each other again in v.17.

As the plan is put into motion, Jonathan soon realizes the full extent of his father's hatred for David. Look at v.30ff.

"You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!"

This, according to the footnote in the NET, is a very domesticated translation of the Hebrew expression *na-avav ham-mar-dooth'*

*and* fails to capture the force of Saul's unrestrained reaction.

Saul, now incensed and enraged over Jonathan's friendship with David, is actually hurling very coarse and emotionally charged words at his son.

A better English approximation of the sentiments expressed here by the Hebrew phrase would be "You stupid son of a bitch!"

Saul is full of bitterness and frustration. That he would address his son Jonathan with such language,

not to mention his apparent readiness even to kill his own son over this friendship with David in v.33,

indicates something of the extreme depth of Saul's jealousy and hatred of David.

Continuing with v.31, "Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?"

As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!"

"Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asks his father.

But Saul hurls his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knows that his father intends to kill David."

Jonathan is willing to risk everything – his future throne, his place in the family, his father's hatred, even his own life – for his friend.

V.35, he finds David at their prearranged meeting place and tells him the bad news.

They'll have to go their separate ways. Though both are valiant warriors they are also men of tender hearts.

And so, v.41, "They kissed each other and wept together - but David wept the most."

Then Jonathan says to David, v.42, "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."

They would meet only one more time. In c.23, David is still being hunted down relentlessly by Saul. He's ready to give up.

But Jonathan, v.16, seeks him out and gives David much needed encouragement.

This is the last time they will see each other. Jonathan dies soon after in battle by his father's side.

David will go on through life as king without his friend.

In 2 Sam. 1, after Jonathan and Saul have died in battle, David gives the tribute at their funeral.

In v.23, he talks about the r'ship between Saul and Jonathan. Then chokes out these words in v.26:

"I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women."

And David knew the love of women! He will have a couple of wives and still has some action ahead with Bathsheba.

But maybe that is his problem. He never has this kind of love - the loyal, committed love he had with Jonathan - with his wives.

I wonder how often, through the years, David goes into his room and pulls out the box where he keeps the royal robe and sword Jonathan gave him!

I wonder how often he remembers his friend and remembers what his friend said him to.

Years later, David says in 2 Sam. 9, "Is there anyone left in Saul's house that I can show kindness to for Jonathan's sake?"

And he finds Mephibosheth, Jonathan's crippled, frightened son. David seats him at his own table and treats him like his own son.

I wonder if every time David looks at that boy, he remembers his friend, and the covenant love they had.



What an amazing story of friendship! – a friendship grounded in covenant love and practiced through the loyalty each gave to and claimed from the other.

And loyalty is the key to understanding the human commitment modeled in the friendship of David and Jonathan.

The Hebrew word used is *kheh'sed*. It's a difficult word to translate into English.

Various translations will refer to it as kindness, mercy, or steadfast love.

But perhaps the closest equivalent in the context of our story today is loyalty; a loyalty that expresses itself in a covenant relationship with another person;

a loyalty in friendships that finds its full meaning as commitment made in the name of the Lord.

As David says to Jonathan in 20.8, "Show *kheh'-sed* (loyalty) to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord."

And in v.14: "Show me unfailing *kheh'-sed* (loyalty) like that of the Lord."

And the freeing point of this story is that we can love like this too. How?

Start by asking yourself, "Do I have a Jonathan in my life? If not, how can I find one?"

I have some bad news for you. This is not something that is completely under your control or mine.

There is no special drive-thru window out there someplace where you can just drive up in your car and say, "I'll take one kindred spirit please."

There is no place on the Web labelled soulfriendship.ca with next day delivery at your front door. If there was, we would all be surfing the Net for one.

The kind of friendship David and Jonathan have is a special gift. And there's an element of mystery to it.

But there are some things you can do to open yourself up to receiving it.

One of the great books on friendship was written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Ale-red of Ree-vo' [Aelred of Rievaulx]. It's called, "Spiritual Friendship."

In it he writes, "We owe love to everybody, but a spiritual friend is one to whom I entrust the secrets of my heart."

Ale-red goes on to write about 3 phases in the development of true friends [slide 11].

**The 1<sup>st</sup> phase is simply searching.**

This involves prayer. You begin by praying and telling God about your desire. "God, send me a loyal, loving friend."

And be open to the people he puts in your path. That's the searching process [slide 12].

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase is to test the waters.**

If you find someone that you think might be a true, loyal, loving friend, you need to spend some time testing the waters with that person.

Let's say you find someone you think might be a good candidate for this special friendship.

Don't schedule a lunch with that person and say, "I want to meet with you and be shaped by you and be committed to you every day for the rest of my life."

If you do they might just get up and run out of the restaurant. Go slowly, be patient. Test the waters over time by taking little relational risks.

For example, you may begin by disclosing some area of struggle in your life and then watch how the person responds.

Is there a level of empathy there? Do they listen well? Or do they only want to focus on talking about themselves?

Are they wise and discerning in their response? Is there kind of a judgmental spirit attached to them? Do they honour confidentiality?

You need to have these kinds of questions in mind as you take little relational risks.

If you find the person trustworthy, you can then share at a deeper level. But test the waters.

Then comes the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase in developing a true, loyal, loving friendship [**slide 13**]. And that 3<sup>rd</sup> phase is to **establish a covenant**.

A covenant is a statement of commitment.

When you make a covenant it can save you both a lot of hurt and help you both become more intentional in deepening your relationship.

The covenant may include things like - How often will you meet? What are you going to do about honouring confidentiality? How will you handle conflict?

When you covenant with someone in a loyal, loving friendship, will it last a whole lifetime?

Not always. David mourned the loss of Jonathan after he was killed in battle. And David never replaces Jonathan.

But even the gift of one true, loyal, loving friend for part of your lifetime is a gift that can have lasting influence in shaping your life.

**[slide 14, blank]** Do you have a Jonathan in your life; a true, loyal, loving friend? Can you be a true, loyal, loving friend to someone?

True friends are not self-centered and always seek the best for their friend.

True friends intercede with God on behalf of their friends.

True friends love their friends as they love themselves.

True friends seek to be loyal and loving to their friends no matter what the cost.

Let's sing together song 812 "Blest Be The Tie That Binds."

Prayer: Father, oh to have a friend like Jonathan. A soul mate who protects you, who seeks nothing but your best interest,

an ally who lets you be you, someone you feel safe with, someone around whom there is no need to watch your words.

Help us to find a friend like that, or, help us to be a friend like that; a loyal, loving friend. In Jesus name we ask, amen.