



PURSUING THE HEART OF GOD
"David, a man after God's Heart"

"THE HEART OF A LOVER"

1 Samuel 18:1-5

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Out of the horror of war come some remarkable true stories of epic friendship. One such story comes from World War One.

Two Americans were fighting side-by-side in the brutal trench warfare of France. Both had grown up in the same Midwest farm town. Inseparable buddies since childhood, they had enlisted together, trained together, and were shipped out together.

During an attack into the face of German machine gun fire, one of the two was mowed down. While life oozed from his bullet-riddled body, his friend watched from the safety of his trench until he could stand it no longer. But, as he scrambled over the top to rescue his buddy, his sergeant pulled him back.

"Are you crazy!" he growled. "It's too late to save your friend. You'll only get yourself killed."

As soon as the sergeant turned his back, the soldier went over the top again. A shout went up from the trenches as he slogged across "no man's land" into withering gunfire. He pulled his friend out of the muck and staggered back with him in his arms. Only now his buddy was dead and he was mortally wounded. As he lay beside his dead friend, the sergeant was both deeply moved and angry.

"What a waste!" he muttered. "Your friend is dead and now you're dying. Was it worth it?"

The dying soldier gasped, "Oh yes, Sarge. When I got to him, the only thing he said was, 'I knew you'd come, Jim.'"

That friendship in the trenches of World War 1 is the gospel in miniature. Jesus came from the security of heaven and across the "no man's land" of a sin-sick world to rescue his friends. In reality, we were his enemies. But he chose to call us *friends*. We were already dead in our sins. But he chose to die for us.

I can hear the angels of heaven cry out, "What a waste!" I wonder if any of them asked, "Was it worth it, Lord?" Surely those of us who have been rescued from sin and brought back to life would respond, "We knew you'd come Jesus! And we know that you will come again!"

May I extend the story another step? Surely you have wounded friends: maybe a spouse who lies beside you in bed, crying silently; a rebellious child or irresponsible relative who is once again in trouble; a neighbor who has gone off the deep end; Christian brothers or sisters fighting to keep their heads above water, and you wonder whether you want to expend resources to rescue them; or perhaps it's a nonbeliever who desperately needs your mercy, but wants nothing to do with your gospel. Friendship is often messy, and always costly. Maybe that's

why we have lots of acquaintances, but few friendships. Dr. Warren Hultgren of the First Baptist Church of Tulsa, Oklahoma famously said,

“The Christian army is the only army in the world that not only leaves its wounded to die on the battlefield, but also turns around and stabs them to death.”

We are all desperate for a *real* friend to whom we could whisper, “I knew you’d come Jim.” Reporter Walter Winchell used to say, “A real friend is one who walks in when the world walks out.” The king of New York radio Bernard Meltzer put it another way: “A true friend thinks you are a good egg, even though he knows that you’re slightly cracked.” Most folks walk out on us when they see cracks in our shell.

A John Lennon song says, “I get by with a little help from my friends.” But in an age of instant messaging and nonstop twittering, most of us have few *real* friends. Novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote, “Loneliness is the central and inevitable fact of human existence.” After an audience with Queen Victoria, the great poet Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote, “Sitting there in all her majesty, she was after all just another lonely old woman.” The same could be said of most postmodern Americans.

The truth is: when God created humans in his image, he created them for relationships. After each day of creation, he proclaimed, “It is good.” But, after he created Adam, he said, “It is *not* good that man is alone.” In today’s edition of *Pursuing the Heart of God*, we are introduced to one of the most passionate relationships in all of literature: David’s friendship with King Saul’s son, Jonathan. From it, we learn this principle:

A pursuit of God’s heart is an investment in intimacy.

Intimacy is not necessarily about romance. It is much deeper. When Jonathan was later killed on the battlefield, David lamented,

“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.” (2 Samuel 1:26)

David speaks of an intimacy that is for more profound than sexuality. Jonathan first loved David when he watched him march out in faith and defeat Goliath. It was the *heart* of David that captured the heart of Jonathan. 1 Samuel 18:1 says about this about their friendship:

“After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in *soul* with David and he loved him as himself.’

At the heart of friendship is soul oneness. The ancient Greek sage Socrates wrote, “What is a friend? A single soul dwelling in two bodies.”

Remember the first principle in our series: **the heart of the matter is the heart**. If we pursue the heart of God we will discover that it is a heart that seeks intimate relationships. It is impossible to have the heart of God and be a loner. Once connected to God's heart, we will want to connect to others' hearts. Conversely, if our hearts are closed off to other people it is because we have already closed off our hearts to God. Mark this down as an unalterable truth: **at the heart of every disconnected human relationship is a "disconnect" from the heart of God**. Your sociology *is* a reflection of your theology. David was a great friend to Jonathan because he was already a great friend of God. That's why we need to learn these four truths at the very beginning of 1 Samuel 18:

1. A friendship is a single soul in two bodies

Right from the beginning we see the essence of friendship in verse one: "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." The best translation for "one in spirit" from the original Hebrew language would be "knitted" or "woven together". It speaks of different threads being woven together tightly until they become a single fabric. David's son Solomon would later describe friendship using similar imagery:

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work. If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend them-selves. *A cord of three strands is not easily broken.*" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

This idea of different persons coming together in oneness—threads knit together to form a single fabric or strands woven into a single unbreakable cord—is at the heart of biblical theology. We read in Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let *us* make man in *our* image...' God is one, and yet he speaks in the plural as *us* and *our*. God did not create humans because he was lonely. He has always existed as Three Persons living in the oneness of perfect friendship. To paraphrase Socrates: this friendship was one soul in *three* persons. In John 10:30 Jesus said, "I and the Father are one." He repeated in John 14:9, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." If I could paraphrase Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 4:12: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the original "cord of three stands" that can never be broken. Triune God is the reason for every friendship, from marriage to a Jonathan/David relationship.

Let's go back to the dawn of creation. After repeatedly saying that everything he made was good, God says in Genesis 2:18, "It is *not* good that the man is alone." How could God say that Adam was alone? The animals of the garden surrounded him. God walked with him. The key is in that phrase, "it is not good." How do you define the word *good*?

Jesus defines it when he says in Matthew 19:17, "Only God is good." When God says, "It is not good that the man is alone." he is saying, "It is not like *God* for a man to be alone."

Adam walks with God, but he is not God. Animals surround him, but he is not an animal. He is alone because no one is just like him. So God makes a human for the human—someone who is of the same substance, equal in every way to Adam. Why? Because the three persons of Triune God are all of the same substance, equal in power and glory. But he makes a *woman* for the man—someone who is so uniquely different that the genders still can't figure each other out. Why does God do that? Because the three persons of Triune God are uniquely separate persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And then, he tells Adam and Eve to enter into a covenant of marriage and consummate it by "becoming one flesh." Why? Because, though the three persons of Triune God are uniquely separate, they are, at the same time, One God.

We are driven to find friends—those soul mates who share our heart's longings, visions, and values—because God made us in his image. We cannot exist as solitary creatures. Aloneness withers our souls. Jonathan was ashamed of himself when he hid behind the rocks every day that the giant Goliath came out to challenge the Israelites. He must have been ashamed of his father, King Saul. But when he saw the shepherd step out and take on that giant, he knew that he had found a person who exemplified everything he ever wanted to be as a man.

When God said of Adam in Genesis 2: 18, "I will make a helper *suitable* for him." the original Hebrew could be translated, "I will make a helper who supplies whatever the man lacks." Jonathan had found a man who possessed what he lacked and desperately needed—the heart of God. He heart immediately pursued the heart of the giant killer, and now one soul resided in two bodies. It is no wonder we often use the word "soul mates" to describe a deep friendship. These friendships are rare and costly. Socrates wrote, "Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow-ripening fruit." It does not come quick or easy. Irish playwright Oscar Wilde said, "True friends are hard to find, difficult to leave, and impossible to forget." If you will read on, you will discover that Jonathan and David's friendship required intentional effort.

2. Healthy friendships are *other* focused.

Most of us never find true friends because our focus is on ourselves and what others can do for us. As a result, we are takers rather than givers. We use up others to fill the vast emptiness of our own neediness, and then move on to suck others dry. But users inevitably become abusers. Notice the contrast between Jonathan and Saul. Verse one says, "Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." Jonathan focuses on the great heart of David and wants to

share that heart. He loves David as much as he loves himself. Jonathan is *other*-focused, not *self*-focused.

In contrast, we read in verse two, "From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house." Read the sad tale of a relationship turned into a rivalry and you will see that King Saul had the classic profile of a user. Look again at that expression, "...Saul kept David with him..." Users are possessive people. They see others in terms of usefulness. Saul needed a giant-killer in his arsenal of weapons; a mighty warrior to advance his kingdom; a hero to psyche up his army. He saw that his son admired David, and figured that this brave shepherd boy would be a useful role model to help Prince Jonathan grow into a king who could extend *Saul's* dynasty. David was a great musician and psalmist who had already come to his palace and soothed him when tormented by evil spirits. David could meet his emotional and psychological needs. Maybe David could even marry one of his daughters and breed lots of other giant-killers for his family.

Watch out when you see your friends, or your spouse, or your family, or your church only in terms of what they can do for you. Beware when you begin to complain, "He, she, or they didn't meet my needs." The alarm bells should go off when you get envious of a friend's good fortune, or resent their friendships with others, or your focus and conversation becomes all about *you* and how everything affects *you*. Those are all the telltale signs of a user. Eventually the king, who was so possessive that he wouldn't even let David go back to his father's house, became manipulative, jealous and insecure. His relationship with David turned into a rivalry. Finally, Saul tried to kill David. Has your marriage or a friendship turned into a rivalry between two wills rather than one soul in two bodies? I would bet that there is a user's heart somewhere in the mix. Check it out. It might even be your own heart! If the problem is in your heart (or even in the other person's heart), it is more critical than ever to pursue the heart of God.

Saul later bailed out on David. Users always do. In the end, Saul was a lonely soul who had alienated everyone around him. Users eventually become so disillusioned that they wall themselves off from people, unwilling to endure the pain of disappointment. So many of us become critical, picky, and eventually friendless. An old Jewish Hasidic proverb says, "The one who looks for a friend without faults will have none."

Look at the greatest friendship of all: Jesus said of his Father, "Not my will, but yours be done." He often said, "My will is to do the will of the Father who sent me." Jesus was always *other* focused. He focused on his Father, and he focused on those he had come to save. He taught us to pray to our heavenly Father, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done..." He told us to go into the world, reaching out in mercy. When you read the description of the Jerusalem Church in Acts 2; 42-47 one phrase repeats itself: "they were together." When you become a follower of

Christ, you become a both a David and Jonathan. You grow beyond Saul, making it less about you and more about others.

3. Friendships are sustained by covenant relationships.

Verse three jumps off the pages of Scripture: "And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself." Acquaintances and good buddies are a dime a dozen. They start with attraction, morph into infatuation, and sometimes bloom into something special *for a season*. But somewhere along the way, reality sets in. The person who was the good egg shows his or her cracks. The honeymoon is over. Optimism turns to realism and then pessimism. Inevitably, everyone except Jesus disappoints. The German film star, Marlene Dietrich talked to a reporter about all the people who had let her down. Then she made this wry observation: "It's the friend who you can call at four 'clock in the morning that really matters." How often have you been wounded by the friend who *wasn't* willing to be there at four o'clock in the morning? Claude Mermet was right when he said, "Friends are like melons. To find a good one, you have to go through a hundred."

All of us have a long list of *former* friends. Some have a list of *former* spouses, *former* churches, and even *former* family members. Friendships don't just happen, and most never last. That's why covenants are so critical. David and Jonathan made a covenant. In ancient times, covenants relationships going during tough times. We begin our marriage with a covenant: "for richer or *poorer*, in better or *worse*, in sickness and in *health* as long as we both shall live." When you find that *soul mate*, make a covenant, complete with promises and assured with commitments. Then remember that it is for life. Keep it life. And, sometimes, when you disappoint each other (or life disappoints you both) revisit the covenant and reaffirm it.

There is a poignant scene in 1 Samuel 20. The jealous king has banished David, and the shepherd from Bethlehem is on the run. David will spend the next decade running from Saul. Jonathan and David meet for the last time. It is a heart-wrenching scene. Jonathan knows that David has been chosen by God to sit on the throne. He knows that both he and his father will both die in a battle yet to come. Jonathan is afraid that David might forget their friendship and take vengeance on his family when he becomes king. David is also insecure. He worries that, when he and his friend are separated, Saul will turn Jonathan's heart against him. Life tests friendships. We drift apart. We are torn apart by circumstances. Time and distance cause doubts. Even Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" So 1 Samuel 20:17 says, "And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him..." That night they both reaffirmed the covenant vows they had made in the Valley of Elah a decade earlier. Sometimes, husbands and wives need to revisit and reaffirm their vows. So do all of us, because covenants alone sustain lasting relationships.

4. Friendships are advanced by mutual submission.

There is nothing more critical to any friendship than what we read in verse four: "Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt." Do you realize what Jonathan is doing? He is the crown prince of Israel. When he takes off his robe, it is the purple robe of royalty. His tunic is the dress of the heir apparent. His weapons bear the royal insignia. When he gives those things to David, he is transferring his throne to David. He is saying, "After watching you walk out into that valley with such a great heart of faith in God, and boldly defeat that giant Goliath, I know that you alone are worthy to be the my king." Saul was clueless as to what was happening or he would have gone ballistic. But David and Jonathan knew because they were a single soul in two bodies.

This scene in the Valley of Elah is like the scene described by St. Paul in Philippians 2:55-8:

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ: Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross."

Jesus laid aside his royalty. He was the King of Glory. But he set his glory aside. The Crown Prince submitted to the will of his Father in heaven and stripped himself naked. Because he was of one heart with his Father, focused on his father's will and not *self*-focused, he entered into a covenant to die for his friends. It required utter submission. He humbled himself in obedience, even to the point of death, to glorify his Great Friend in heaven and redeem his millions of friends on earth. David too submits to Jonathan. He never tries to seize the throne. Their friendship is a reminder that all successful marriages, all lasting friendships, all enduring families, and all transforming communities only advance through *mutual* submission. People must be willing to obey each other. They must be willing to humble themselves. The old country western song has it right: "Pride is the chief cause for the decline in the number of husbands and wives."

We all long for *genuine* friends and friendships: that person who thinks you're a good egg even when the cracks show; the one with whom you can share your soul; and the one to whom you can say, "I knew you'd come, Jim." God has made us for such relationships. Only Jesus will ever be that friend completely and everlastingly. But, if we pursue and possess the heart of God, we might just discover some other meaningful friendships along the way!

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