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<th>SUBJECT</th>
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<td>TEXT</td>
<td>1 Samuel 18:1-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>TITLE</td>
<td>&quot;THE FRIENDSHIP FACTOR&quot;</td>
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<td>SCRIPTURE READING</td>
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Slade and Sherman sat across from each other in a train compartment, on their way to Bowlville, Alabama. They exchanged niceties and then Slade asked Sherman, "Are you from Bowlville?" "Yes," Sherman responded. "Lived there all my life." "Do you happen to know a man in Bowlville named Chad Smith?" "Chad Smith the grocer?" Sherman replied, "Of course, I know him like I know myself." Slade asked, "What kind of person is he?" Sherman retorted, "I'll tell you what kind of person Chad is. He has a temper like an old goat. Dishonest? The scales in his store are fixed so that he always makes an extra profit. And he beats his poor wife black and blue. He is mean to the kids and disrespectful to old folks." Slade was shocked. "How can you be so sure of all these dreadful things?" he asked Sherman. Sherman responded, "Who else should know better? Chad is my very best friend!"

Such a story is not that hard to believe today, for we are living in a troubling day for friendship, especially for men. A recent study concluded that only one man in five in America has a real friend. Nothing needs to be recovered in American society today as much as the friendship factor.

David also needed a friend, and he found one in an unlikely place. Jonathan, son of King Saul, became David's best friend. The story of their relationship will enlighten us on the meaning of friendship today.

The Definition of Friendship

Webster defines a friend as "a person whom one knows well and is fond of." A quip defines a friend as "someone who steps in when the whole world steps out."

The biblical writer provides the best definition in the description of the friendship between Jonathan and David. He explained that "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself" (v. 1). Today, we would probably say "they bonded" with each other. That bonding is the key to true friendship.

Norman Wright distinguishes four different levels of relationships we experience with various people in our lives. Minimal relationships involve simple, surface-level verbal interaction which is usually pleasant. Moderate relationships go beyond the minimal relationships by including the element of emotional attachment. In moderate relationships, we want emotional support and are willing to give emotional support. Strong relationships add yet another element. Strong relationships develop when we become involved with people by helping them in tangible ways. In strong relationships, help is given when needed and accepted when needed. Quality relationships include the added element of loving trust. At this level we can reveal our inner needs, thoughts, and feelings with confidence.
True friendship is found at that fourth level. Friendship connects us in quality relationships with other individuals to whom we give emotional support, for whom we provide help, and with whom we share our deepest needs and thoughts. We need such friendships for several reasons.

We need friends for structure. A relationship thread is woven into the fabric of society. This is part of what it means to be created in the image of God. As God is a relational, covenant making God, so we are relational, covenant making people. Friendships provide the structure for our lives.

We need friends for support. The Bible says, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up" (Ec. 4:9-10). No one can make it through life alone. We must have the support of friends.

We need friends for sharing. When God looked at man, He declared, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Everyone needs someone with whom they can share their feelings and their fears. Trying to stand alone is a lonely experience. The relationship between friends, then, is an essential element of life.

**The Difficulty of Friendship**

If friendships are so important, why do so few of us have them? Several barriers block these relationships.

One barrier is humanity. The teacher said to one of her students, "Jay, suppose you loan Ralph $100 and he agrees to repay you at the rate of $10 a week. How much money would you have after seven weeks?" Jay replied, "Nothing." "Nothing," the teacher uttered. "You don't know very much about math." Jay responded, "You don't know much about Ralph."

Anyone who says developing friendships is easy doesn't know much about Ralph or Billy or Betty or Susie. Within human nature is a tendency toward self-centeredness, a streak of selfishness, that makes it very difficult for us to become involved in a relationship with another person which demands emotional support, help, and transparency.

One of the remarkable things about the relationship between David and Jonathan is that they changed the focus from self to the other and were willing to be open to each other.

Another barrier is mobility. Transience has become a way of life for Americans. One out of five households changes its address each year. We have moved from the north to the south and from the country to the city. This affects the development of friendships in two ways. First, we don't have time to really get to know each other. In addition, we wonder whether it makes sense to make the investment of time and effort to develop a friendship, when that person will soon leave us.

David moved from one place to another. Yet, David and Jonathan were able to make the most of the time together they did have.

A third barrier is activity. An executive retired after 40 years in the corporate world. On the first Monday of his retirement, his wife cooked his breakfast—two eggs over easy, sausage and toast—just like she always did. He looked at the eggs and said, "I don't like my eggs cooked like this." "My dear," she exclaimed, "I've been frying them 'over easy' all these years. Why didn't you complain before?" He explained, "I just never had the time!" That's the problem with most of us, isn't it? We just don't have the time to develop real friendships.

Jonathan and David faced the same pressure of busyness. Yet, they found time to develop a meaningful relationship with each other.

If we will think about it, each of us can recall friendships which alluded us because of humanity or mobility or activity. These are barriers which make it difficult to inject the friendship factor into our lives.

**The Demand of Friendship**

Maybe you are beginning to recognize the need for developing some friendships in your life. How do you go about it? What are the demands of friendship? Let's see if we can learn some quick lessons from the friendship of David and Jonathan.
Friendship demands **consecration.** The Bible says, "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself" (18:3). David and Jonathan decided to be friends and they put a high priority on it. They made a covenant with each other.

This is still true about friendship today. Significant relationships come to those who assign them enough importance to cultivate them.

Friendship demands **contribution.** The Bible says, "And Jonathan stripped himself of his robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt" (18:4). Jonathan gave to David the symbols of his position. David, being from a poor family, could not reciprocate materially, but he gave himself to Jonathan.

This is still true about friendship today. Friendships cost. They demand a willingness to give of what we are and what we have to another person.

Friendship demands **communication.** The Bible says, "So Jonathan told David saying, 'Saul my father is seeking to put you to death. . . please be on guard in the morning, and stay in a secret place and hide yourself . . . if I find out anything, then I shall tell you!'" (19:2-3). Jonathan and David shared things with each other. When Jonathan found out something about his dad's plans, he shared those with David. When David had questions about Saul's plans, he asked Jonathan about them. They were open to each other.

This is still true about friendship today. Dr. Paul Toumier had a patient once who told him, "I can open up with you because you understand me." "No," Toumier replied. "It is the other way around. I understand you because you open up with me." Friendships are built and developed in the context of communication.

Friendship demands **consideration.** The Bible says, "Then Jonathan said to David, 'Whatever you say, I will do for you'" (20:4).

Jonathan and David did not just talk about their friendship. They demonstrated it in their willingness to do anything necessary to meet the needs of the other.

This is still true about friendship today. You remember the old joke. The comedian says, "There is nothing Joe wouldn't do for me. And there is nothing I wouldn't do for Joe. So Joe and I go through life doing nothing for each other!" The opposite is true of genuine friendship. Friends go through life doing everything they can for each other.

Friendship demands **commiseration.** The Bible says, "When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David more" (20:41). The demonstration of their feeling for each other and the expression of their emotion was an essential part of the friendship of David and Jonathan.

The same is true of friendship today. In our day of homophobia, we have become reticent to express our love to those of the same sex. Friendships will never go beyond surface relationships until we are willing to express our feelings for each other.

Friendship demands **consolation.** The Bible says, "And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God" (23:16). What a wonderful phrase that is! Jonathan encouraged David in God. That was the expression of their friendship at its best.

The same is true of friendship today. Anyone who helps another person stay on his feet and keep going is a true friend.

This is why developing friendships is so difficult, because friendship is demanding. It demands consecration, contribution, communication, consideration, commiseration, and consolation.

**Conclusion**

Charles Kingsley was once asked, "What is the secret of your life?" He answered, "I had a friend."

That truth is demonstrated in David's relationship with Jonathan. But David's story also reveals a deeper truth. To have a friend we must be a friend. Because of the mutual sharing and caring between David and Jonathan, they developed one of the most beautiful examples in history of the power and purpose of true friendship.