

Comments from Facebook

"good friendships are so important. Friendship needs to be a give and take relationship....not all one sided. Your best friend is always your cheerleader and listens when you need her without interruption. She gives advice you need to hear even if it's not what you want to hear."

"You don't always get to choose your friends, sometimes they are chosen for you. Mrs. Pauline Farner was my second grade teacher and she asked me to show the "new girl" (Lynn) around. I often wonder if Mrs. Farner saw something in us that she put Lynn and I together at the age of 7 because 40 years later we are still friends."

Listen to your parents...they are good judges of character!!!!"

"I always like to think that you have to" be a friend, to have a friend". And "A friend is a gift you give yourself"."

"When I asked Allie, she said, "if a friend makes up lies, they aren't your friend." Katie says, "you can't judge them by their looks." Ry says, "be nice to the new people who come to your school because they need friends." For me, it's that listening is more important than talking/offering my 2 cents."

Washington D.C. is full of statues. Two in particular tell a story about friendship. At the east end of the National Mall is a statue of General Ulysses S Grant. Seated atop his war stallion, this memorial to Grant depicts the legendary story of the great general from the Civil War who went on to become President of the USA. Grant was considered by many to be a very strong man who stood against the storm when all others stood back. His leadership during the Civil War is considered one of the keys to the victory of the North.

Some two-and-a-half miles away, in a pleasant but nondescript city park, stands a more commonplace memorial. The statue of this lesser-known Civil War figure, Major General John Rawlins, has actually had eight different locations and is hardly ever noticed by visitors. Rawlins had been a lawyer in Galena, Illinois, where Grant lived just prior to the war, and he became Grant's chief of staff. Rawlins knew Grant's character flaws, especially his weakness for alcohol.

At the beginning of the war, Rawlins extracted a pledge from Grant to abstain from drunkenness, and when the general threatened to fall away from that promise, his friend would plead with him and support him until Grant could get back on track. In many ways, it was Rawlins who stood beside the seemingly solitary figure of Grant the great general. Rawlins' memorial is modest compared to the mounted glory afforded Grant, yet without his unheralded love and support, Grant would hardly have managed even to climb into the saddle.

Friendships like that of Grant and Rawlins are rare today. We have substituted real friendships for a collection of digital connections that we call Facebook. The social media giant that boasts over 600 million subscribers allows people to pretend that they have hundreds of friends; but as one commentator has written; “They are a superficial likeness of my friends- little dehydrated packets of images and information, no more my friends than a set of baseball cards is the New York Mets.”

In this fast paced world in which we live many have lost the deep, meaningful, shaping friendships of the past where “a friend’s highest purpose was to summon us to the good by offering moral advice and correction.” In exchange we have begun to practice what one writer calls ‘nonjudgmental friendships of unconditional acceptance and support.’ The writer goes on to say: “In these fragile relationships a friend takes our side, validates our feelings, supports our decisions and helps us to feel good about ourselves. We tell white lies, make excuses when a friend does something wrong, and do what we can to keep the boat steady. We’re busy people; we want our friendships fun and friction-free.”

This morning I want to challenge you to take a look at your friendships- the real ones not the digital ones- and ask yourself what characterizes those friendships. Are they true friendships that will last the test of time and benefit both you and your friend? And what does it take to be a real friend- the kind that will say and do whatever is necessary to make you the best person that you can be; even if it is hard to hear?

One of the famous friendships in the Bible is that of David and Jonathan. Theirs was a unique relationship in that Jonathan was the son of King Saul and therefore next in line to be King; but David had already been anointed to be Israel’s next king instead of Jonathan. Add to that the fact that King Saul was out to kill David and despite what could have been a very tenuous relationship, David and Jonathan were best friends.

1. What made Jonathan and David best of friends was the fact that their relationship was founded on doing God’s will over and above their own egos, comfort or personal agenda. (1 Samuel 20:23, 42)

C.S. Lewis claimed that the essence of friendship was “a common quest, a shared vision and a unified mission.” Think about some of the best friendships you’ve developed. Most likely they came from sharing a common purpose. (team, project, etc)

So how do you make a life-changing friendship? Start by making a decision that you will love and obey God; that you will follow Jesus and keep him first in your life. Then as you grasp God’s vision and mission as found in scripture you will be drawn to others who have a similar vision and passion.

Even in a small group, if your goal is just to make friends or have a good time, your small group will become stale. If your goal in going to church on Sunday morning is just to see your friends or preserve fond memories of better days in the pristine past, your faith will grow old and stale. The key is to get excited about God, to pursue Christ, to follow him, to have your life captured by a vision for God's glory, and to share the message of Christ. Then you'll find others who are captured by the same vision. Suddenly you'll find yourself fighting, praying, and battling beside them. You'll never have to worry about having true friends.

Key to finding quality relationships is a shared faith and passion for Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 6:14 "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers."

2. Another aspect of Jonathan and David's relationship is that they had depth. Their relationship is described as Jonathan 'becoming one in spirit with David.' (18:1) As you read about their friendship you see that David was able to speak out of the depths of his soul when he spoke to Jonathan.

Isn't that what the New Testament tells us should mark our friendships and community: Love one another...confess your sins to one another...encourage one another...pray for one another. David and Jonathan modeled what real Christian friendships should be like.

If you don't realize your deep need for brothers and sisters in Christ to walk with you through life, not just for the good times, but to share the deepest parts of your life, then you may have one of two spiritual problems.

The first problem would be that you don't realize that you're in a battle—a battle for your heart. You're oblivious to the battle that is raging all around you. This is a tragedy, because it necessarily means that you're losing the battle.

Another problem would be that you're in the battle, but you're not fighting it God's way. God's way is in community. If you're fighting it like a Lone Ranger you will never succeed on your own.

Friendships need to have depth, the kind of depth that enables us to know one another intimately so that we can be encouraging and strengthening of one another.

3. Notice what Bible scholars call the "covenantal language" of this friendship: Jonathan "made a covenant with David" (18:3), David says, "Show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord" (20:8) and Jonathan asks, "Show me unflinching kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live" (20:14, 15). The key word is the Hebrew word *chesed*, which

means fiercely loyal love. It is the word translated as the loving-kindness or steadfast love of God. It means that God has made a covenant with us and he won't negate it. It is loyal love.

This theme of loyalty was taken seriously by these two friends. David and Jonathan lived out Proverbs 17:17 which says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." In other words, friends won't let you down just because your life is complicated. Jonathan is willing to be David's friend even when it's risky, costly, or inconvenient. David's life and problems were messy; rather than back away and be comfortable, Jonathan willingly walked into the mess of David's life. A friend will be willing to walk into the mess of your life or else they are not a true friend.

Later on, when Jonathan was dead, and David was secure in his rule of the kingdom, David looked all over his lands and asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Samuel 9:1). Friends are loyal, even when it's inconvenient.

When was the last time someone told you, "I am there for you, and I'll do whatever you need to get through this battle"? That's not usually what happens. Perhaps our biggest fear is that people will see the real us—the real messiness of our life will be exposed, and then they'll bolt.

Pastor John Ortberg recounts his experience with the real messiness of his life. He sat down opposite a long time friend and said, "I don't want to have any secrets anymore." Then John went on to tell him everything he was ashamed of in his life. "I felt vulnerable because I was afraid that I was going to lose connection with him. Much to my surprise, he did not even look away."

John says I will never forget his next words: "John, I have never loved you more than I love you right now." Then John recounts, "The very truth about me that I thought would drive him away became a bond that drew us together. He then went on to speak with me about secrets he had been carrying."

Listen to how John reflects on that encounter. If I keep part of my life secret from you, you may tell me you love me. But inside I think that you would not love me if you knew the whole truth about me. I can only receive love from you to the extent that I am known by you.

Loyal friends will love you through anything. They will never walk away no matter what happens in your life.

Jonathan and David's friendship provides us an important backdrop this morning as a place from which we can discuss our relationships with one another.

Jonathan and David teach us three important principles.

1. Friendships should flow out of a common commitment to be passionately committed to following Jesus.
2. Friendships are about depth.
3. Friends are loyal.

Now I want you to take some time to reflect on friendships. Here are a series of questions that you can discuss with one another.