

## What a Friend We Have in Jesus!

1 Samuel 20:12-17 (NIV)

<sup>12</sup> Then Jonathan said to David, "I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know?" <sup>13</sup> But if my father intends to harm you, may the LORD deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. <sup>14</sup> But show me unfailing kindness like the LORD's kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, <sup>15</sup> and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family—not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth." <sup>16</sup> So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account." <sup>17</sup> And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

When you think of God, what names or titles come to mind? Is it the LORD, the great I AM WHO I AM, the unchanging and eternal God? Is it the names of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Is it the Almighty or Creator? Is it, like last week, the Good Shepherd or the Lamb of God? Is it as we remember at Christmas Immanuel or Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace?

When we talk about the name of God, there is not just one name that he uses for himself. His name doesn't fit into just one box, one category, or one definition; he uses different names and different titles to convey different truths about himself to us. So, here's one more title or name that God uses: Friend.

Do you think of God as your Friend? I mean, a friend is someone you have as a companion, someone who prefers your company, someone with whom you share interests and activities and pastimes, someone who is there with you, spends time with you, helps you move, is a shoulder to cry on when you need it. Does God feel a little too high up, a little too distant to be a friend?

The average person on Facebook has 338 friends, but what kind of friends are those? Are those Facebook "friends" just people that you met at some point in your life, relatives that you want to see pictures of the latest family events, people you knew in high school who you occasionally get curious about and want to see what they are up to? Most of the time, these kinds of friends are more just people we know than true, good friends.

A good friend discloses their life to you and you do the same with them. You get real with each other, share what's really on your mind. Sometimes this will be the hard stuff, the things which trouble us and keep us up at night. Other times, and more often, these will be the things that give us such great joy in life - the triumphs, the accomplishments, the jokes, etc.

David disclosed his life to Jonathan. David had risen in popularity when he killed the giant Goliath for King Saul, Jonathan's father. King Saul then made a point of sending David as the tip of the spear into the subsequent battles along with his son Jonathan, and David was very successful. So successful that the people had a song about David, that Saul had slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands. Saul was so jealous regarding David that he tried to kill him. When Saul ordered his attendants and his son Jonathan to kill David, Jonathan stuck up for David, spoke well of him, and convinced his father to rescind this order. But it didn't take long before Saul, overcome with evil, tried to kill David again without Jonathan's knowledge. David fled and sent word to Jonathan that Saul was trying to kill him. Jonathan met with David to find out what was happening. He listened to David's struggles.

A good friend also is supportive. They're there for you. They can't and don't always fix your problems, but they listen. They pray with you and for you. This is what Jonathan did for David. He listened to David and even put himself in position to mediate between his father and David. Jonathan was there for David when he needed a friend to rely on – sharing in the trials as well as the victories.

A good friend works to protect as many people as possible. Jonathan assumed the best of his father, assumed that his father was still keeping his word and not pursuing David, instead of instantly feeling ill towards his father. He had convinced his father once before to call off his murderous pursuit of David, and he was ready to try again. Jonathan said to David, "I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father intends to harm you, may the LORD deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace." (verses 12-13)

A good friend loves others as he loves himself. Jonathan wanted David to be blessed by God, even over his own family when he said, "May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father." (verse 13) He went even farther loving his friend more than himself when he declared, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account," (verse 16) knowing that it may very well mean that his own father is among that list of enemies. Being the prince and heir to the throne, you would think that Jonathan would side with his father, but instead he showed unfailing kindness to David.

Have we been a good friend like Jonathan was to David? Have we been there for them every time that we have needed them? Have we always assumed the best about others? Have we always kept our word to our friends? Have we tried to be a mediator to help people get along with our friends? Do we love our friends just as much as we love ourselves? Have we shown our friends unfailing kindness?

We know that we have not always been that good friend. We have fallen short in the friend department. As we have failed this way, we failed not only our friends but also our God who commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Forget about just the random neighbors; we don't even love our friends the way that God tells us to. How could Jonathan be such a good friend to David?

Jesus, God himself, our Maker, our Savior, also calls us "friend." "I no longer call you servants," Jesus said, "because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15) He said this the same night he gave his disciples that new command to love one another as he had loved them, after he had once again shown regular humans his unfailing kindness in service to them, washing their feet.

God calls you and me his friend, just as he did with his disciples! Why? It's not about what we have done for him or how we have treated him but what he has done for us. He chose us first to be his friends, his preferred company. This wasn't a pity selection or a forced companionship. He picked you to be his friend showing you his unfailing kindness when he laid down his life for us. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13) He laid down his life for us to take our sins away, to keep us with him, to have nothing separate us. And because he has taken our sins away, he speaks up for us, mediates for us to God the Father, telling him that there is no punishment for us anymore because he paid the price. As we sang in our hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," he carries all of our griefs and burdens, joys and delights, requests and petitions to the Lord. He intercedes for us, prays for us, because he calls himself our Friend.

Jesus is the best Friend we could ever have because his love for us is unfailing. He has chosen you, and he always will. He did what we could not by loving us more than himself. That's why he laid down his life for us. He pursues us because he has chosen to be our Friend, promises to be with us always to the very end of the age. He wants us to be with him as his friends.

Jonathan was such a good friend to David because he knew and had experienced that same unfailing kindness from the LORD. This is how we in turn are good friends to others. That may not be everyone at church. But with the unfailing kindness that the Lord has shown us, we show that same goodness to others. We love as our Friend, Jesus, has loved us. This is bigger than just sharing common interests or getting along. We do good with genuine love and care because our Lord has and always is unfailing kind to us and has chosen us as his friends.

We may have some of the greatest friends here on earth, but in Jesus we have a Friend who is even better. Yes, we need God to be our Creator, our Savior, our Shepherd, our Lamb, our Wonderful Counselor, our Mighty God, our Prince of Peace. He is still all those things to us, and he is also our Friend because he has chosen to be, because he has laid down his life for us, because he lives to serve us with his unfailing kindness. Amen.