

6 Qualities of a True Covenant Friend

The Bible says Christians should experience deep connections with each other because we share the same indwelling Holy Spirit. In fact, the Greek word for fellowship, as used in Acts 2:42, is *koinonia*, which implies intimate communion and selfless sharing.

Yet as I travel and meet Christians all over the country, I find that the church today is actually a very lonely place. Many people have experienced a total relationship shutdown. Some have walked through painful church splits, others have been betrayed by friends they trusted, and still others have closed their hearts entirely to avoid being hurt. As a result, *koinonia* becomes a fancy theological word for something they will never experience.

It's as if we forgot how to have true friends. I've even met pastors who've told me they just can't risk building friendships. So they live in isolation. They bear their own burdens. They get no encouragement. Some end up in depression. Something is wrong with this picture!

Recently the Holy Spirit drew me to study the friendship that developed between David and Jonathan during David's early years. It is clear from the biblical record that God put Jonathan in David's life at a crucial time in his journey to the throne. And if it were not for Jonathan's covenant relationship with his friend, David would never have been able to overcome the obstacles he faced during the reign of King Saul.

The same is true for all of us. You will never achieve your maximum spiritual potential without the help of those key relationships God places around you. Yet in order to benefit

from these friendships you must open your heart and take the risk of being a friend.

How can you move from being isolated to developing close friendships? Proverbs 18:24 says: "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (NKJV). You can't wait for a friend to reach out to you. Take the first step and be willing to break the stalemate. British preacher Charles Spurgeon put it this way: "Any man can selfishly desire to have a Jonathan; but he is on the right track who desires to find out a David to whom he can be a Jonathan."

Here are six qualities I see in Jonathan that challenge me to be a better friend:

1. Jonathan nurtured a spiritual bond. After David killed Goliath and moved to Saul's palace, the Bible says "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David" (1 Sam. 18:1). This is the work of the Holy Spirit. All Christians should experience a sense of family connection, but there are certain friends you will feel deeply connected to because God is putting you in each other's lives for a reason. Don't resist this process. Let God knit you to people.

2. Jonathan showed sacrificial love. Jonathan loved David so much that he risked his life to help him fulfill his mission. Jonathan even dodged Saul's spear in his effort to help his friend. He lived in the spirit of Jesus' words about friendship: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). The world says we should only care about our own success. But the best way to become more like Jesus is to help someone else succeed!

3. Jonathan always offered encouragement. When David was fleeing from Saul in the wilderness, Jonathan traveled to Horesh to cheer up his friend (1 Sam. 23:16). There were times in David's life when he had to encourage himself, but in this case Jonathan was God's instrument. We need each other! If you

allow the Holy Spirit to speak life and hope through you, your words can propel your friends into their destiny.

4. Jonathan offered his friend protection. When Jonathan realized his father was plotting to kill David, he not only warned him of danger but he concocted a plan to deliver his friend (1 Sam. 19:1-4). Friends don't let friends get massacred in spiritual warfare. If you see a friend making a foolish mistake, or if you sense the enemy is targeting him, God can use you to avert a disaster. Speak the truth in love.

5. Jonathan kept his friend's pain confidential. David confided in his friend Jonathan, and in some cases he poured out his heart in frustration. At one point he said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity?" (1 Sam. 20:1). When I'm going through a difficult trial, I sometimes just need to vent. And I have loyal friends who let me process my pain ... and they don't run and tell others else about my weakness. This is true friendship.

6. Jonathan harbored no jealousy. At one point in David's journey, Jonathan realized his friend would one day be king of Israel. This was actually Jonathan's inheritance, since he was Saul's son, but he acknowledged that God had chosen David instead. So he gave David his royal robe, his armor and his weapons (see 1 Sam. 18:3-4). This is a beautiful picture of how we are to prefer and honor each other. Jealousy destroys friendship. If we have God's love in our hearts, we will want our friends to surpass us.

If you've been hurt in previous relationships, break out of your isolation and ask God to heal your heart. Then choose to be a Jonathan to someone else.

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