

6 Ways to Become a Better Friend

The church today is a lonely place. People are starving for relationships. 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 again. Even though we are called to model the love of God for the world to see, we are wounded and cold.

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 Saul's reign.

God orchestrates our relationships, and it is He who brings people into our lives to help us. Don't resist this process!

Ruth would never have journeyed to Bethlehem and married Boaz if it had not been for Naomi's coaxing. Moses needed Aaron and Hur to hold up his hands during the battle against the Amalekites. The paralyzed man would not have been healed if his friends had not lowered him through the roof to see Jesus. Timothy would never have become a strong leader if Paul had not adopted him as a spiritual son.

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.

Do you want to become a better friend? Here are six steps you must take:

1. Be willing to go first. Proverbs 18:24a says: "A man who has friends must show himself friendly." Don'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."

2. Learn to discern when God is connecting you with someone. Last week at a conference in Arizona, I was supposed to sit at the speaker's table. But the person in charge of seating didn't recognize me, so I was asked to sit elsewhere. This was a blessing in disguise because I was seated by a pastor from Texas named Scott. As soon as we began talking, we both realized God had connected us for a reason. We became instant friends!

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. 18:1b, NIV). 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. Let God knit you to people.

3. Put your friends before yourself. 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. This reminds me of Jesus' words about friendship: "Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Don't put your own success first. The best way to become more like Jesus is to help someone else succeed.

4. Be an encourager. When David was fleeing from Saul in the wilderness, Jonathan went 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. Look for ways to encourage others—with your words, gifts, cards or hugs.

5. Cover your friend's flaws. David confided in his friend Jonathan, and he poured out his heart in frustration. When I'm going through a difficult trial, I sometimes just need to vent. I also need to confess my weaknesses without fear of judgment. I have loyal friends who allow me process my pain ... and they don't run and tell others else about my junk. You will be a trusted friend if you know how to keep a confidence.

6. Don't allow jealousy to ruin friendships. At one point, Jonathan realized David would one day be king of Israel. Jonathan was supposed to inherit the throne, since he was Saul's son, but he knew God had chosen David instead. He could have gotten angry, but instead he gave David his royal robe, his armor and his weapons (see 1 Sam. 18:3-4). 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.