

# The Marks Of a True Friend.

## INTRODUCTION

During the last school holidays I got into conversation with my daughter. She shared with me a problem she was facing in school, she had several classmates she considered her best friends, but she gravitates towards strong personalities, and her supposed friends were bullying her and she did not know what to do, and did not even enjoy the friendships. As we talked about the problem, I realized several things about the issue -

1. is that I had never given her any handles on how to choose good friends.
2. is that I had not really thought carefully about the mark of a true friend, I just sort of knew what they are but could not name them, and so I could not really give her an answer based on scripture.
3. was the recognition that most of my friendships, and your friendships, are by default. We just sort of pick them along the way as we grow up.

I decided to find out what the Bible says about friendship, and then translate that into simple principles for my daughter, and for me - especially since I want to know what sort of friend should I be to my friends. The most natural place to go to for this - was David's friendship with Jonathan, and Jesus relationship with his disciples.

## TEXT : I Sam 20

So what are the marks of a true friend? Picture with me a warm, firm handshake. A good friendship is like a warm, firm handshake; not a limp cold handshake, and not an uncomfortably painful

handshake - but a warm, firm handshake. It has 5 qualities to it, like the 5 fingers of a hand.

The first characteristic of Jonathan's friendship with David was **HONOUR** (I Sam 18:1 - 4). What is honour? To honour someone is to greatly esteem them, to hold them in high respect. This Jonathan did of David. How? Vs 4 "Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt."

Remember what we said before about the Israelite army, that according to I Sam 13:22, only Jonathan and Saul has a sword or spear. And here we see Jonathan taking his royal robe - a symbol of his privileged position as the King's son; *and even his sword and spear* - a source of great pride, and giving them over to David - it was a very high honour to pay. What Jonathan was doing in starting off this friendship was to humble himself and to honour his friend.

I think Jonathan has something to teach us men here, because, more than anything, I think this is what dogs most male relationships. Deborah Tannen, author of the book "You Just Don't Understand Me", a book on the conversational styles of men and women, says that one of the things that characterises male conversations and relationships, is that they border on competition and contest - trying to see who can tell a better story, or who has control of the conversation, who makes the most significant point, who has the last word. Rarely are they marked by humility and honouring the other person. Jonathan, however, took the initiative.

Can you do this in your friendships - consider the other person better than yourself, and honour them. Can you commend them for

what they do well, instead of trying to compete with them and prove yourself better. Can you play 2<sup>nd</sup> fiddle for a friend, serve him and allow him to receive the glory. A true friend will do this! The point is well illustrated in a little story I heard . . .

Ill - Spoon-feeding : Man in hell & heaven.

It strikes me that this should be one of the marks of marriage, where we are supposed to be developing a life-long friendship with our partner. Do you honour your spouse? In public and in private?

2. The second finger of that firm handshake of a good friend is **LOYALTY** (I Sam 19:1 - 3). What is loyalty? It is faithfulness - sticking with a friend, no matter what the circumstances. Unfortunately, not too many people understand loyalty today - in our world of multiple choice, we have no brand loyalties. In our world of high divorce, we have no marital loyalty, in our world of countless acquaintances, we have no friendship loyalty. Bear with me as I repeat myself on this point, but possibly one of the reasons we find it so difficult to be loyal in our friendships, is because we have few lasting relationships.

Nursery school

Primary school - 3 or 4

Secondary school - 2

Jobs - 3 or 4

With each switch we had new relationships to service, and no extra time, so we ditched all the old ones, and once again struck a death blow to loyalty. Furthermore, as with other spheres of life, we have become too utilitarian in our relationships, seeing them as a means to an end as opposed to an end in themselves. As someone once boastfully said "I have friends I haven't even used yet".

How is loyalty displayed by a true friend?

1. **Looking out for the best interests of the other** : Vs 2 But Jonathan was very fond of David <sup>2</sup> and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Jonathan also displayed loyalty to David in another way. When his father was bent on ruining David's name, in 19:4 we read Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly.
2. **Caring for the things that matter to a friend.** I Sam 20:42 Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, `The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" In this case it was for each others descendants. David made an oath to care for Jonathan's children and family if ever Jonathan was killed. True friendship crosses over generations, and as Prov 27:10 says "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father".

Just yesterday I was in conversation with a friend about someone known to us who recently passed away. At his funeral there was a real show of love by his friends, an expensive coffin, expensive adds in the papers, wreaths and the whole works. But the real test of friendship and loyalty here will not be how expensive a coffin they were able to buy for him, as important as that is; but now that their friend has passed away, who will look after his widow, and educate his children?

3. **Rebuke** : A third area of loyalty in friendship is given us in Prov 27: 5, 6 “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. <sup>6</sup> Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses. . . <sup>9</sup> Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel. Or to put it another way “*The best mirror you'll ever have is an old friend*” A good friend will rebuke you when there is need, but he doesn't slander or gossip about you before others. Remember what we said at the beginning, likening friendship to the fingers wrapped around your hand in a warm, firm handshake. Well there's a proverb (not in the bible) that says . . . “*He whose hand is clasped in friendship cannot throw mud*”.
4. **A friend is there for you when you need them** : Fourthly, Prov 17:17 *A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.* It has been said that “*a false friend is like your shadow. As long as there is sunshine, he sticks close by. But the minute you step into the shade, he disappears*” In David's hour of need, Jonathan stuck with him and sought to help him.
5. **He keeps confidence** : Finally, a fifth quality of loyalty in friendship is that a true friend keeps confidence and does not betray you. Prov 17:9 *He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.*

Now we could say a lot more about loyalty in friendship, but let these suffice for now, with the recognition that loyalty does not on the one hand betray a friend, but on the other it does not also easily abandon a friend, even when they have injured you.

If we go back to my analogy of a true friend being like a firm handshake, then loyalty is like the thumb that wraps around the hand in a handshake, making it firm.

The third finger in the handshake is **SACRIFICE**. I Sam 20:30 <sup>30</sup> Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? <sup>31</sup> As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!" <sup>32</sup> "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. <sup>33</sup> But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him.

Jonathan's relationship with David almost cost him his life! Jesus identified this as one of the marks of a true friend in Jn 15:13. *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* Good, deep, true friendships cost. They may even cost you your life. Often however, it does not infact cost your life, but it does call for sacrifice. The sacrifice of time, and even the sacrifice of money when your friend is in need. The idea of sacrifice is well captured in this little saying “Value a friend who, for you, finds time on his calendar - but cherish the friend who, for you, does not even consult his calendar”

4. A forth quality of a true friendship in a relationship is **TRANSPARENCY**. Once again the thought draws from how Jesus himself defines friendship in Jn 15:14 *You are my friends if you do what I command.* <sup>15</sup> *I no longer call you servants, 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.

I will not say much on this quality as we have looked at it in recent weeks in the life of David and of Daniel, but one aspect of transparency that Jesus brings out in his words here is new, it is that the initiative to be transparent came from him. Many people fear transparency - maybe because they have been betrayed before, or they fear being betrayed; maybe also because they fear that if they disclose themselves they will be ridiculed, laughed at or worse, ignored. And so they lock their real person, their memories and secrets away. Jesus in his friendship with his disciples, took the initiative to disclose himself, to be transparent, as a mark of the fact that these were his true friends. You can see this in Jonathan's and David's relation, they were open, transparent with each other, with David telling Jonathan his fears for his life, and Jonathan disclosing to David what his father was doing and saying at the dinner table.

**5. CELEBRATION** : And finally, a fifth mark of true friendship in Jn 3:29. John, the Baptist was talking with his disciples, and they were jealous that Jesus seemed to be stealing the lime-light, and people were flocking to him, instead of to John. They saw Jesus as competition against John, but when they expressed these sentiments to John, he taught them one other mark of true friendship <sup>26</sup> They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan -- the one you testified about -- well, he is baptizing, and everyone is going to him." <sup>27</sup> To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. <sup>28</sup> You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' <sup>29</sup> The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of

joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

What is the mark here - it is the ability to celebrate your friends achievements, as opposed to envy them or even criticise them. It seems like a small thing, but have you ever noticed how difficult it is to rejoice when something good happens to your friend? When they get a promotion, a company car, a good house, they pass their exams very well, or they win a prize . . . for some reason it leaves us feeling threatened, as though we were the ones that deserved that promotion, or who should have gotten that prize; and when they come, all excited to tell us, our silent response inside our hearts is "Well that not such a big deal . . .", and we trash their achievement, or we tell them of some great achievement on our part, so as to take away some of their glory.

Jonathan did not see David's achievements as a threat to him, if anything he made it even more possible for David to succeed by giving him his sword and spear, they were friends.

## CONCLUSION

Do you long for this sort of friendship? Some of us do have friends who display these qualities in their relationship to us - they honour us, they are loyal, they sacrifice for us, they share their heart with us as us with them and they celebrate our achievements with a pure heart. We need to constantly thank God for these friends, they are a precious gift in life. At the same time all of us need to strive to be these sorts of friends in turn.

For all of us, whether we have these sorts of friends or not, Jesus Christ has reached out his hand, taken the initiative and invited us to be his friend, and he is a true friend like you've never had.

In the matter of **HONOR**, Philippians 2 tells that he . . . being in very nature *God*, Christ did not consider equality with *God* something to be grasped,<sup>7</sup> but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.<sup>8</sup> And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross! To make a true friendship with you possible, like Jonathan, Jesus took off his royal robes, humbled himself and reached out to you.

In the matter of **LOYALTY**, he has promised to always be faithful and never to leave or forsake us.

In the matter of **SACRIFICE**, he willingly laid down his life for you - the ultimate sacrifice of friendship, and took your place on the cross. Now he asks you to lay down your life for him.

In the matter of **TRANSPARENCY**, he has revealed himself and his father to you and I so that we can know them fully. How transparent are you with him?

In the matter of **CELEBRATION**, your achievements, especially your victories over sin, and cause for rejoicing and celebration for him, because his greatest desire is exactly that for you, that you would know joy in abundance, that you would receive his blessings to the full.

Jesus has reached out to be your friend, have you responded? He has gone the full way for this friendship, now it depends on you and how far you are willing to go. What he calls us to do to reciprocate this friendship is to obey . . .<sup>14</sup> *You are my friends if you do what I command.* And that command begins when you believe in him,

and receive him as your Lord and saviour. Then you will have a true friend, for until you do that, even though he has reached out to you, you are holding him away at a distance, rejecting his offer of friendship.

## **Prayer for dedication and salvation.**