

**CLOSER THAN A BROTHER****1 Samuel 17:55-18:5, 1 Samuel 19, 1 Samuel 20**

**Intro:** The United Kingdom has had a Ministry of Loneliness for over six years. In 2018 the UK government announced that Member of Parliament, Tracey Crouch, would be the new Minister for Loneliness. Time Magazine said at the time that her job would be to tackle “the sad reality of modern life” and pointed out that, “countries around the world are increasingly examining, as a public health concern, loneliness, which is typically defined as the feeling of lacking or losing companionship”. Japan and other countries soon followed suit. The UK’s National Health Service stated that “There can be many reasons for our loneliness – and sometimes there is no obvious cause and it’s just how we feel.” And UK’s Mental Health Foundation points out that “one in four adults feel lonely some or all of the time” and that overcoming loneliness is part of being a mentally healthy society.”

Now there are lots of reasons for loneliness. Our ABCers who have lost loved ones over the past year will very quickly confirm their loneliness. That’s a given. Fifty or sixty years of the companionship of a lasting marriage is not something you just overcome.

But society is lonely. The COVID pandemic with its shutdowns and forced isolation which was two years almost to the date **AFTER** the forming of the UK’s Ministry of Loneliness only made it worse – and it has not gotten any better. Part of it is cultural, and some of it is spiritual and a lot of just a need for friendship – and the biggest need is for godly friendship.

We need good friends. “Good” is a key word here. The writer of Proverbs pointed out *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* Proverbs 18:24 (ESV).

David and Jonathan were friends closer than a brother and I want to look at their friendship in the brief time we have here this morning and show how we as Christ Followers need and, need to be, good Christ Following friends. This is true for both men and women, but in a lot of ways it’s more difficult for men, so I’m glad we can look at these two young men and talk about healthy friendship.

**Friendship isn’t inherited – it takes careful attention**

- Jonathan didn’t see a good example in his father, King Saul. He had watched as his father descended into a more and more fragile mental state. Think back to the passage that Chris read to us earlier. David had been in Saul’s court – the king had seen him around. And then this boy had been brought into the king’s presence when David was the only one with the faith to confront Goliath. David had given all his information to Saul at that time – but Saul still didn’t remember David – he had to ask his General of the Army, Abner, to find out who this amazing warrior was. It was only then that David was brought into his army and Saul seemingly noticed him.
- Jonathan was infinitely more attentive than his father and he knew a person of good character when he saw one, and that David was friend material. David saw the same thing in Jonathan – regardless of the way Jonathan’s dad fell short – David saw that Jonathan was friend material.
- David and Jonathan became fast and very deep friends. Each loved the other *as his own soul*. 1 Samuel 18:3b. David was the son of a farmer from Bethlehem and Jonathan that son of the King of Israel and the heir apparent to the throne, but he gave David his princely robe, his armor, and his sword. In a way he was symbolically transferring his right as the next in line to the throne, to his friend who was closer than a brother. There is no evidence Jonathan knew that his father has lost his anointing and that indeed David was anointed in his stead – but it didn’t matter because . . .

**Friends put their friends first**

- As this story unfolds and as we have already seen – Jonathan had sealed the friendship with his princely gifts, David is getting all the glory, and as he does, Saul becomes more and more paranoid and as we read in Chapter 19, he actually conspires to kill David. Saul even tries to get Jonathan to kill him – but instead, Jonathan warns and protects David. He knew his father was failing mentally, and, though he loved his father, his friendship drove him to run interference for David, because friends put friends first.
- Friendship is mutual. It goes both ways. A friendship where one person does all the heavy lifting is lopsided and not much of a friendship. David and Jonathan’s friendship was decidedly not lopsided. Instead it was an example of . . .

## The beauty of Heseḏ

- This is a Hebrew word that appears frequently in the Old Testament to describe God's character and His love for His covenant people. Remember that David and Jonathan had taken a covenant of friendship and the word used for the love they had for one another was "hesed". This exposes the folly of the people who want to say that David and Jonathan's friendship was actually a homosexual affair. In fact it's laughable and evil because their covenant was one of hesed which is often translated as "love" or "mercy" and can also mean "kindness", "faithful love", "everlasting love", or "unfailing love". Heseḏ refers to a covenant love that has been promised and is owed, and can imply loving one's neighbor through acts of service and love. Psalm 23:6, says, *"Surely goodness and mercy (hesed) shall follow me all the days of my life"*. This is the dedicated love of friendship and not the erotic and selfish love that often characterizes homosexual or even heterosexual relationships.
- The friendship David and Jonathan was characterized by a loyal love that actually mirrors in many ways the loyalty of God for us. This is what we are singing about when we sing, ...

*Who am I that You are mindful of me  
That You hear me when I call  
Is it true that You are thinking of me  
How You love me it's amazing  
... I am a friend of God  
I am a friend of God  
I am a friend of God  
He calls me friend*

These friends had a God shaped love. L. H. Brockington writes, "Love and loyalty are the very essence of any relationship based on a personal covenant; in Hebrew these two aspects are bound together in the single word hesed.

- As I studied this word I wondered how closely it was related to the Greek word ἀγάπη. So I dug a little bit and I found this: Agape is the word that is often used for the Hebrew word hesed in Greek translations, but it's not exactly the same thing. Instead agape is, as we know, a Greek word that appears in the New Testament to describe God's identity – like where we read in 1 John 4:7-8. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.* 1 John 4:7-8. **God is agape. God is love.** It's a divine love that's unconditional and exists regardless of changing circumstances. Though it's divine, it's what God expects of us which means we are capable of it. So while it's not quite the same as the Hebrew word, hesed, it's close enough to be a key part of being a good friend.
- Such loyal love is what caused Jonathan to stand up for and actually risk his life for his dear friend David. It's the kind of love that caused David to remember his covenant with his dear friend Jonathan long after Jonathan was dead as he cared for and preserved his good friend's family. Truly the friendship these two men had had elements of every descriptor of the Hebrew word, hesed, There was mercy, there was kindness, there was faithfulness, it was enduring and it was unfailing.
- Jonathan especially lived this out and we can and must learn from it. He risked his life and his family to make sure David was safe from his raging father. He remembered his covenant of love with his great friend David.

**Conclusion:** Do you need the Ministry of Loneliness? If so maybe you need something far better – the ministry of friendship. Think about your friendships: Do you have friends? If not, let's talk. But if you do, ask yourself, "What kind of a friend am I?" Are you allowing your friend to do all the heavy lifting? Are you doing all the heavy lifting?

You can have friendships like David and Jonathan – the kind where souls are knit together so to build one another up and to protect one another. You can have friends closer than a brother or closer than a sister. We can eradicate loneliness with a ministry of friendship. Amen.