



"A true friend is the greatest of all blessings, and that which we take the least care of all to acquire."
—Francois de la Rochefoucauld

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Souls Knit Together (Part One)

Spending the first twenty-four years of my life in the same area in South Georgia, I had quite a few long-time friends and acquaintances. Growing up in a small community did have its advantages. There always seemed to be someone to turn to for help or to borrow a tool from if you did not have it. If word got out that so-and-so needed something, there would be someone who would supply it. If a family's house burned down, the community would normally come to the rescue, offering whatever they could to help them rebuild their lives. If someone lost a job and was in need of food, someone would step forward to lend a hand. When a member of the community died, chances are we probably knew him or her.

By the time I reached high school, my close friends had been narrowed down to a smaller crowd, for the most part those who hung out at the basketball court. One particular friend worked at the same place I did. We both played basketball, roller-skated a lot, and owned old cars that we were always trying to hop up or get a fresh piece of chrome to fit somewhere. We spent so much time together that some people in the neighborhood thought we were brothers. I considered him to be my best friend and knew that, if anything came up, he was always ready to help. We did not have to get prior approval;

we knew that the other would be there. We could tell our secrets to each other and know they were safe and would not be ridiculed. Most of us have had close friends like this. [Proverbs 18:24](#) says, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

This was about the time I began attending God's church, and I was amazed at the outpouring of generosity from people I did not even know. As we traveled with the Y.O.U., many people would open their homes to give us a place to stay, and they would feed us and feed us and feed us. I thought, "These people are different. What makes them this way?" They allowed total strangers to come into their homes, spend the night, eat all their food—and they were happy to do it!

My family was unable to attend our first [Feast of Tabernacles](#), so another family invited me to spend it with them. They treated me just like one of the family! I found out after traveling a bit more that, if any of God's people were there, I would always find a friend. There was always someone to whom I could relate, and the bond that joined us together was strong and unlike anything that I had ever experienced before. This was comforting to know and gave me and my wife a sense of [peace](#) of mind and a feeling of security.

Given what has taken place in the church of [God](#) over the last few decades, how much of this has been lost? How many of our lifelong friendships began in the church? How many still exist? How has the splintering of the church broken the bonds of friendship among the brethren? I made one friend thirty years ago, and I am grateful that the [longsuffering](#) woman is still with me!

The [Old Testament](#) contains several examples of friendship. In Abraham, we find the absolute pinnacle of friendship being called "the friend of God" ([James 2:23](#)). The man's [faith](#) and loyalty to God—even to the point of being willing to sacrifice his own son (Genesis 22)—has been recorded for all of us to emulate. The story of Ruth and Naomi highlights Ruth's unwavering loyalty to her mother-in-law, and this quality is the first thing that Boaz mentions when inquiring about Ruth ([Ruth 2:11](#)).

How about David and the prophet Nathan? Over the years of working together, Nathan grew very close to David, and it appears that the king even

named his third son with Bathsheba after the prophet. God gave Nathan the unenviable task of rebuking David for his [sin](#) with Bathsheba. While this sin was not against him personally, Nathan still had to go before the most powerful man on the earth at the time and tell him his sin! This had to be very difficult, yet Nathan did it perfectly! He did not charge into David's palace, get in his face, and tell him that God was going to punish him because of how bad he was. No! Instead, he told David a story about a lamb, something he knew David would relate to, and the king saw himself and his sin clearly in the story and was crushed (II Samuel 12). Nathan proved his [love](#) for David in his well-conceived, loving confrontation that nevertheless told him the truth. Nathan was a loyal friend.

My new favorite hero of late is another of David's friends, Jonathan son of Saul. The friendship of Jonathan and David is heralded as one of the greatest friendships of the Old Testament, perhaps in all of history. Jonathan demonstrated remarkable capabilities for friendship, selflessness, and loyalty. He was a prince, a mighty soldier, and a successful leader, but at the same time, he did not mind taking a back seat when necessary. His loyalty and integrity stands out in everything he does. How does he do it? What drives Jonathan?

We find the first mention of Jonathan in [I Samuel 13:2](#), where he and his men are stationed at Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin. For centuries, Gibeah was considered a military watch post because of its elevation. At 2,754 feet above sea level, a person could easily see Jerusalem to the south, which was about 4 miles away, as well as all the surrounding countryside.

In the next chapter, Jonathan decides to cross over to the Philistine garrison on the other side of the valley and kick over the hornet's nest. In this story, we see Jonathan's conviction that God is omnipotent and that He would not refuse to help Israel, understanding that it was God's will to save His people from their enemies. He had faith that God would fight for them, saying to his armorbearer, "Let us go. . . . For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few" ([I Samuel 14:6](#)). Jonathan had faith in God!

Jonathan, a very capable leader, was so respected by his men that, when Saul pronounced a curse of death on his son for eating during a fast the king had rashly called, the men came forward and stopped Saul, declaring, "As the L

ORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground" ([I Samuel 14:45](#)). The men make an interesting observation as to why he should be spared: "for he has worked with God this day." These men made a judgment based on Jonathan's fruit, and they were willing to put their own lives on the line and defy the king to save their leader. These men loyally followed Jonathan, a man, as he was loyal to God.

The first time that David and Jonathan met was probably when David killed Goliath in I Samuel 17. Even Saul had to ask Abner who the young champion was (verse 55), so it is likely that David and Jonathan had never crossed paths before this. [I Samuel 18:1](#) comments, "Now when [David] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

Next time, we will see what bound these two men so closely together.

- Ronny H. Graham

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Love and Fellowship](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God has given us a checkpoint against which we can check ourselves in times of despondency and despair, so whether we doubt or fear—whether the problems are moderate or deep—we can go back to see whether we are keeping God's commands and working on developing our fellowship with Him. God has created mankind with the need to face challenges—the need to overcome—or we quickly become subject to boredom or "ennui." Our major responsibility is to govern ourselves scrupulously and conscientiously within the framework of God's Laws, overcoming negative impulses by the knowledge and Spirit of God, seeking a total relationship with Him in thought, emotion, and deed, extending to our relations with our brethren. Fellowship with God is the only antidote to overwhelming feelings of despair, doubt, and self-condemnation.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Godly Friendship: A Priceless Commodity](#)

by David F. Maas

We tend to take our friendships for granted, but they are important parts of our Christian lives. David Maas explains how we should cultivate and appreciate our friendships, for they are a necessary tool in growing in godliness.

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