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Friendship: Committed and Costly

I Samuel 18:1-4 and 20

Hundreds of people we meet all through out our lives make snap judgments on whether or not they like us. They categorize us. Place us into a box with a label of their own choosing, rarely ever stopping to take the time to get underneath the skin of first impressions. Never truly knowing the real you. So many people decide on that first meeting whether or not they ever want to socialize with us again. They decide whether or not they even want to have another meaningful conversation.

Then along comes that one person. That one who is seeking nothing and needing nothing. Along comes that one who wants to truly know us and in turn be known. Along comes that one who is secure enough not to exploit our weaknesses or attack our strengths. Along comes that one who shares similar values, priorities, loves and goals. There is a connection. A link. Ahh! What a gift from God is an intimate friend.

Do you long for such a friend? One with whom you can feel completely safe. One who will take the words you offer without a hint of tension. One with whom you can take off your emotional shoes and put your feet up and let it all hang out to be just you? Ahh the pleasure filled comfort to throw out ideas in reckless abandon without having to carefully measure and weigh each thought before it passes through your lips. Ahh the worn slipper feelings of dumping out your emotions just as they are, the worthless swirled in with the priceless. The chaff along with the meaty morsels. Knowing well that a close intimate friend will sweep up all your feelings safely together and sift out the dirt, keeping what is worthwhile and with a breath of kindness blow the rest away.

Do you have such an intimate friend? A friend for all seasons, no matter how difficult or inconvenient? A friend that is loyal, trusting and worthy of your trust. A true intimate friend. Do you have one? If so, you possess something incredibly valuable worth far more than all the diamonds in Africa. Keep your friendship polished with the soft cloths of love. Do you desire a friend? Then show yourself to be friendly. Be that

committed friend to another whom you would desire to be a friend. Polish into your life these qualities into your life and they shall be the best friends you have ever known.

Please excuse my failure to introduce myself. I am David, Son of Jesse from the little town of Bethlehem. While I was once King of Israel, I now spend most of my time in the presence of the King of Kings. I occasionally commissioned to take field trips down to earth and enjoy telling stories from the ancient days. Though in many ways it seems just like yesterday. Yes, I was placed by God's divine selections to be God's vice-regent or king in place of Himself. I happened to be God's choice. But there was another, my friend, my true friend, whom God could easily have chosen. He was a great and Godly man. Yet, He died while still in his prime, in a battle with the Philistines. When I was still living here on the earth, every year about this time, I would go to the stone near Bethlehem the locals called Ezel. The Ezel Stone, the stone of departure, of change, of choice. It was there I said good-bye to my best friend. We were friends, joined by covenant, but after our good-bye at the Ezel stone, we could never have the long talks and hunts together. I would see Jonathan briefly only one more time before he died bravely in battle, when he was killed with his father, the former king Saul. Ahh, but I am getting ahead of the story. I came to tell not of death, but of life, of friendship...and a more loyal committed friend I had never known before.

I understand that my scribes and other Godly men wrote down these stories preserved by God so you all could learn to live well. You may follow this story, I believe if you turn to the first few verses in chapter 18 of the book entitled I Samuel. The rest of the story you will find in chapter 20 of that same book.

I first met Jonathan as a teen. I had been called to the palace by his father, King Saul, to come and play my harp and soothe his black moods. Jonathan was several years older than I but we enjoyed playing and wrestling. In his rookie year as a soldier he and his armor bearer scaled a cliff and single-handedly attacked and routed a Philistine Garrison of soldiers. Jonathan knew that it was God coursing threw his muscles. He was a tall and very brave man. It was after God had worked through me in overcoming incredible human odds to defeat that giant Goliath. Jonathan could see God's finger was upon my life as well. From

that time on we were inseparable. Both of our souls were welded together. I guess you could call us the original soul brothers. We were so different in many way. He a prince, I a shepherd. He was wealthy, I was relatively poor. He was educated and refined and I was rough and rural. But we were able to overcome those barriers by rubbing our friendship with the fine cloth of shared priorities. Remember this: An intimate friend shares your values, priorities and core life goals. Both of souls were welded together because we were headed the same way. Sure, we came from different backgrounds, experiences, likes and dislikes..but the core of who we were. The master we followed was the same. Both of us were radically committed to following God no matter how risky or what sacrifice. We both knew that the power to pull off our incredible fetes of bravery came not from our own expertise but from the Living God Almighty. Many friends we will have throughout our lives but pick your intimate friend, one who shares your values, priorities and core life goals. If you are a young man or woman and your desire is to be serious about following God, be careful about binding yourself to one who is not headed the same way.

The second cloth you must polish your valuable diamond of a friendship it that of honor. Honor your intimate friend with not only your words but also your actions. After I had slain that big old hairy giant Goliath, King Saul had promised me great wealth and honor and a princess for a bride. The king was quite slow in granting those promises, but Jonathan immediately came down and voluntarily gave me some of his own things that I know meant a lot to him. He took off his royal robe custom made for a prince and draped it around my shoulders. He took off His armor, his sword and his bow and belt. He gave me all the regal robes and weapons that identified him as prince. What an incredible display of lavish honor. I was so humbled by the display of love by my friend. Just imagine me a shepherd exchanging the rough skin clothing for a needle point gold embroidered cloth of a prince. Everywhere I went people saw that I was wearing royal robes. Everyone could see the great honor given to me by my friend. He even made a covenant, bound to loyal love by oath because of his love for me. I could tell how much he loved me by not only his words but also by his actions.

Do you polish your friendships with the soft cloth of honor? It is so very easy to take our closest most intimate friends for granted. I notice that some of your wives here are wearing very nice gold and diamond rings on their fingers. Is that not a way to publicly honor our closest friends. When they first received them, did they not show all their friends to declare their husbands lavish love for them? Now as those rings are growing older on your finger, as they have become scratched and tarnished. Do not let that cause you to forget to honor your friend with your words and the deeds that you clothe them with. It shows all who observe how much you care for your friend. Polish your valuable diamond like friendships. Polish them with shared core values. Polish them with public honor or word and deed.

The third cloth to polish your friendship with is that of commitment. Jonathan and I covenanted to each other before God. We declared our sacrificial commitment to be loyal and true to each other through the good time and the bad. We accepted each other regardless of position, wealth, rank, training and education. No matter what happened we agreed to love. We polished our friendship with commitment. In the chapter 19 of verse 4 the scribes of old write how Jonathan was a loyal defense of me before his father Saul. He stood up for my character when the king, his father was ready to kill me. It was a brave thing to stand up to the king in my defense. Jonathan my friend spoke well of me before the king. An intimate friend is committed. A loyal defense before others. A friend does not talk behind your back in hurtful ways. There will always be someone around who will challenge and question your character and motives. A friend sticks by at all times.

You will polish your friendship with the cloth of commitment by being worthy of that trust and loyalty, by being above reproach. Never force your friend to lie or cover for you. A true friend will speak the truth in love no matter how difficult. Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Later in my life I would be confronted with a terrible sin by my friend the prophet Nathan. A friend is committed to be there in the fair weather and the foul times of life.

A friend who is committed knows about sacrifice but never views that commitment as imposing. You never have to beg a close friend for a favor. It is impossible to impose on a close friend because he never keeps

score. You never get offended when a close friend must say no, because you know that they would help if they possibly could. A true friend does not think inconvenience when asked to help in an emergency. a friend asks "what do you want me to do?"

Chapter 20 in the book called I Samuel describes a very low time in my life. I had lost it emotionally and lost the heaven perspective. I knew that king Saul was after me. He had already tried to killed me on several different occasions. Yet, my best friend Jonathan couldn't see it. Jonathan had confronted his father about his anger toward me and Saul had reassured him that he would not kill me. Saul's word and actions did not match. He continued to send assassins to kill me, even in my own bed. I was forced to flee with my life to Samuel, my spiritual mentor in Ramah. Saul sent three groups after me there too, and God spared my life, but I was on the run and was losing all my resources of security. My position as captain was gone. I could no longer return to Samuel, that area was guarded and cut off. I certainly could not go back to the palace and my wife and now I knew that my closest friendship with Jonathan would probably never be the same as long as Saul were alive.

I sent word that I needed to meet with him and I poured out my heart to Jonathan. This was not a convenient time for him to stick with me, but our relationship had been polished with the soft cloths of shared values, mutual honor, and commitment. Jonathan listened to me, even when I was an emotional wreck, even when the fact he thought to be true didn't add up right then. My friend listened to me. I think the best softest cloth you could polish your friendship with is a listening ear. Even when all the facts don't seem to add up right then. A friend will listen.

Jonathan couldn't believe that his father would hide anything from him. He was his fathers closest confidant, the big or small it seemed to Jonathan he hid nothing from him. Except this, his hatred for me. He knew that Jonathan and I were soul brothers and Saul hid his hatred for me. I knew Saul's evil intentions toward me but Jonathan did not. So, instead of arguing with each other we devised a plan to determine Sauls true heart. That next day was to be the fall harvest Thanksgiving festival celebrating the new moon. As son in law to the king I would be expected to attend. I received permission from prince Jonathan to go to my own families celebration at Bethlehem. It was decided that Jonathan would

not tell of my absence until it was noticed and questioned by the king. If Saul was planning evil against me, he would be upset that I had missed being present at his celebration and missed the opportunity to kill me. If in fact I was wrong and Saul was not planning evil against me then, Saul wouldn't care whether I was gone. I would wait out in the field by the Stone of Ezel. The Secret service men of the king were all around we had to be careful. If we were observed we could both be hanged for treason. Out in the field the plan was for Jonathan to pretend to shoot arrows at a target. If Saul were indeed desiring to kill me, then Jonathan would shoot past the Stone of Ezel, and tell his young arrow fetcher to go further out. That was my clue that I must go further out and hide from Saul in the desert. But if, the arrows were shot close in, then it was a sign to me that things were OK with Saul and I come return to the palace.

The first day of the Thanksgiving feast, everyone sat in their places. Saul took his royal chair as usual with his back to the wall. General Abner sat on one side, Jonathan on the other side. Every chair was filled except the place next to Jonathan. My chair was empty. Saul did not say anything that first day, thinking that it was an accident that possibly I was ceremonially unclean and unable to attend. The second day, he could not pretend to ignore my absence. He had to know. Asking his son Jonathan where I was. Jonathan related the reason for my excused absence having granted my request to be with my family during the holiday's. Saul did not take these words well. Saul ripped off any pretension of being the perfect host and began verbally ripping into my friend Jonathan. He called him all sorts of terrible names. Worthless, son of a perverse and rebellious woman. Full of shame and exposing his mothers nakedness. There were other words but I can't repeat them here this morning. Saul was livid. He publicly dishonored Jonathan saying that his conception and birth were worthless if he kept on protecting me. If Jonathan continued to befriend me, he would lose the kingdom to me. To Saul, the power of the throne was much more important than having a close friend. Jonathan had already decided long ago that his choice for the next king would be God's choice. Jonathan would be obedient to God's selection. While Saul said I want my will. Jonathan said, I want God's will. Sometime when we follow God's will over our parents, or

friends, or mates will. It appears like hate doesn't it. Sometime our love for God is so supreme and incomparable to the other loves in our life, that it looks like hate to that other person. Saul was so angry that he hurled that spear in his hand at his very own son, Jonathan. Saul sure put quite a few holes in that palace. He kept the Royal spackler very busy.

I was a threat to Jonathan. He was the natural heir to the throne, but God for some reason had chosen me and not Jonathan. That took an incredibly strong and godly man not to become proud or self-seeking. He was a huge contrast to his father. Jonathan was a team player. He looked out for my interests. He considered my needs. Polish your relationships with the soft cloth of servanthood. Jonathan was not impressed by his own position. He refused to play the game of competition driven by pride and jealousy. He eagerly grabbed for the pom-poms and could cheer for me when things went well, and could stick by me loyally when things were tough.

I remember that early morning standing by Ezel Stone, the fog had barely lifted. I watched Jonathan and the lad walking down into field. I began to weep. He didn't even have to shoot the arrows. I could tell by the way he was walking. My friend was carrying a heavy load of sadness. After he had shot the arrows long and sent the boy back to the palace, we met at the Ezel stone. The stone of departure of change, we embraced each other and wept. I think I cried even more than Jonathan. Stroke your friendship with the soft cloth of vulnerability and genuineness. Be real. Weep with your friend when they are weeping. Rejoice when they are happy. Be yourself. Be authentic. Take the risk of expressing your love. You never know when you may not be able to ever say those words again to the one you love. Jonathan and I both knew it was good-bye. We would never enjoy the close conversation and friendship we once knew. What is one way you can show your friend that you love them this week? Do not take them for granted. I challenge you to find a way to tell your friend you love them in seven different ways this week. Polish that valuable jewel of your friendship with the soft cloths of shared values, honor, commitment, a listening ear and vulnerability. He who finds a good friend is a wealthy man or woman. He who desires a friend will show himself friendly.

