

Coach House Church BEACONS

FRIENDSHIP

14TH APRIL 2020

In our country today there is an epidemic of loneliness. This was even before we had to stay home to save the NHS. People feel lonely whatever walk of life they're in and however old they are. And this isn't just about being physically isolated. Loneliness is feeling like nobody really sees you or cares about you and that can happen whether you're home alone, or in the middle of a crowd. It can happen whether you have lots of people you associate with, or just a few.

Now God hates this. When He was creating the world, at every stage He said it was good. This was until He saw that man was alone. This was not how He wanted things to be. He designed us to be with other people and have relationship with others as well as with Him. So how do we do this? There isn't a step by step guide we can simply read and follow so we can have really meaningful friendships. For us to have great friends we need to be great friends in first; to build and be able to have the depth of relationship that wipes out loneliness completely.

There are some great examples of friendship in the bible but the one I want to look at today is David and Jonathan. These two met just after David had killed Goliath. Jonathan was the son of the king, Saul. He was meant to be next in line to the throne, but because of how Saul had acted, God had decided David would be the next king. This made Saul angry and he hated David, but Jonathan was the opposite.

When they met Jonathan does something that to us seems strange. Jonathan gives David his tunic, robe, belt, bow and sword. In those days, these things were a sign of status, but more than that they were protection. Jonathan is saying to David, "I'm giving you the power to kill me. I'm laying myself open in front of you."

We need to be vulnerable.

That brings me on to the first thing we need to do to be a great friend. We need to be vulnerable. We need to let people in, to see all of us, otherwise we will never truly feel accepted. Now this doesn't mean go and be vulnerable with everybody. It doesn't mean telling your deepest, darkest secrets to everyone who you even vaguely know. It means finding a few people, or even just one, that you can let in.

A great example of this is Jesus. Jesus was vulnerable. He became a baby and then had human friends. He let them see him at his best but also when he was in the worst pain. He asked a few close friends to pray with him when he was in such emotional agony that he was sweating drops of blood.

I have often found it difficult to open up to people. I have a very physical reaction to letting people in and find it difficult to say the words I want to say because I end up crying. And I hate crying in front of people. I find it hard to admit weaknesses. Even sickness. If I need to take a sick day, I find that really hard. I once had flu and had to take a day off from work and I was in floods of tears telling them that I wouldn't be in.

letting the tears come and showing that to someone

But we have to do what Jonathan did and trust someone to have the power that if they wanted to, they could destroy us. I have had to learn to open up, even if it means letting the tears come and showing that to someone else. If we always keep our walls up and keep people on the outside, a part of us will always feel like no one could ever REALLY love us. If they knew what was inside, they wouldn't love us. But this isn't true. The devil lies to us to keep us isolated and alone. We are all ashamed of something but don't let the devil use your shame to drive you away from your brothers and sisters. We need to have the courage to pull our walls down.

To do this with confidence, we also need to be people that can be trusted. Jonathan trusted David to not hurt him and David was faithful to that. The men made a promise

that they would always be loyal to one another and they kept it. Jonathan, several times, averted his father's plans to kill David, even though that meant he wouldn't be king. After Jonathan's death David kept on being faithful by taking in his crippled son, Mephibosheth.

We need to be people that keep our promises

We need to be people that keep our promises and stick by someone. No matter what they tell us, no matter what they do we need to be faithful, just like God has been with us. Again, Jesus shows us some amazing examples of this.

Two that really stick out are the woman at the well and the woman being stoned for adultery. The woman at the well had been ostracized from society because she'd had so many husbands. Jesus knew this about her and accepted her anyway and this changed her life. The other woman was about to be stoned because she had committed adultery and again Jesus stepped in and saved her. We need to be people that know people's shame and love them anyway.

And this leads onto forgiveness. Jesus had to forgive his disciples over and over again and He does the same for us. Therefore, we need to do the same for others. Jesus tells this story.

Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.'

But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

All friendships at some point or other will require forgiveness. And that's what we need to do for one another. We have been forgiven everything, so we need to forgive others. Friends don't let each other go.

The last key to friendship is sacrifice. Forgiveness always involves an element of sacrifice, but we need to be willing to sacrifice in other ways too. There's a great example of this in Ruth. The book of Ruth begins with the story of Naomi. She was from Bethlehem in Judah, so was a Jew. She moved out of Israel when there was a famine and moved to Moab with her husband and two sons. Her sons married women and they lived in Moab for a while. Then disaster hit. Naomi's husband and sons died, and she decided to rename herself "bitter" and move back to Israel. Her daughters in law tried to come with her but she turned them back. They had no prospects if they stayed with her. One went back to her family, but Ruth clung to Naomi and stayed with

her. She was sacrificing living in a land she knew, to go with her mother in law and be a foreigner.

Jesus showed us the greatest vulnerability, loyalty and sacrifice

This is a beautiful story of friendship. It shows us that true friends sacrifice. Ruth sacrificed everything she had to go with Naomi and stay with her. She gave it all up to be a blessing to her mother in law and showed great friendship. Friendship will always require sacrifice. Whether that's a sacrifice of time or money or even going to another country to be there for someone. And let us not forget that Jesus sacrificed himself for us. He laid down His life for us. And he wants us to show that love for others. In John 15:12-13 He says "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends."

Jesus showed us the greatest vulnerability, loyalty and sacrifice. We need to go do the same for others, to banish loneliness in their lives and to find love and acceptance for who we are.



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