



This morning we conclude our series of messages, *Music From the Heart*. Next week we begin a series of messages titled *The Great Commandments*.

Today's message title is *You're My Best Friend*, and is based on the song of the same name by the band Queen (you can watch and listen to a very creative version of the song at the following link – <https://youtu.be/0X2ee2A2IGU>).

As I mentioned last week, three of the four messages have come from Old Testament texts, because I believe that we sometimes overlook that portion of the Bible, which is full of such great stories, and today's text contains a portion of one of those – the friendship between David and Jonathan. Time doesn't allow me to cover all the background of this story, so I hope you took the time to read the study guide that was emailed on Thursday. If you do not receive email, and would like to receive a printed copy of the study guides, please let us know in the church office.

David became the second king of Israel, following the reign of Saul. David was a very close friend of Jonathan, whose father was Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul had become very jealous of David and sought on more than one occasion to kill him. Jonathan worked to protect his friend David, and in today's Scripture text we read of the time when Jonathan provides a signal to David that the king had once again planned to kill David. This passage tells us of the parting of the two friends, just before David flees for his life.

Follow along with me, please, as I read a portion of that story.

I Samuel 20:35-42 –

35 In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him,

36 and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him.

37 When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?"

38 Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master.

39 (The boy knew nothing about all this; only Jonathan and David knew.)

40 Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town."

41 After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most.

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.’” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

There are so many things we can say about friends, and I will, for the sake of time, limit it to three.

Friends are –

1. Gifts from God.

I have to admit that I am sometimes skeptical about the number of “friends” some people have on social media. Is it really possible to have 3,000 “friends” on Facebook? Maybe I’m jealous, but I sometimes doubt whether it is possible to have that many friends. At the same time, however, I realize that, over the course of our lives, we meet a lot of people, and while they may not all be our close friends, they are acquaintances and they can also have an impact on our lives. Almost every person we meet during the course of our lives has the potential to influence us, to impact us, and to make a difference in our lives, which is a true gift.

Being at church camp two weeks ago I witnessed the amazing bond that the counselors and students have forged through their years of sharing the camp experience. It got me to thinking about my camp friends from many years ago. I remember some of my camp friends very well. You wouldn’t know their names, but people like Rocky Estell, who was a friend from East Liverpool, Ohio. I also remember many of the leaders and counselors – Karl Marshall, Gene Carter, and others. And though I have also forgotten a lot of names, those people still influence my life, and they continue to be gifts of God to me. It’s difficult for me to imagine what my life would be like without their friendship and their influence.

How many of you remember graduation time, when you stood in line before processing in, or after the ceremony concluded, and you said to your friends and classmates, *we’ll stay in touch. We won’t forget one another. We’ll always be friends.* I said that at my high school graduation, and some of those friends I have not seen since that night. But it doesn’t mean that they are absent from my life, because I think of many of them often, and I know they remain influential to my life and I am grateful they were a part of my life, even though it has been years since I have seen some of them. There are college friends, church friends, neighborhood friends, and more that move in and out of our lives. They are with us for a season and then we are separated, maybe to never cross paths again, but that does not diminish the reality of the gift they are to our lives.

Last summer I had the opportunity to meet with my college roommate. Tanya and I met Rick and his wife, Penny, in Harrodsburg, as they were in that area vacationing with their family. I had not seen Rick in over twenty-five years, so it was such a pleasure to sit and talk with him. We talk back and forth on Facebook, but to sit with him and relive our time together in college was a wonderful experience. Rick was, and continues to be, a very important person in my life, and when we greeted one another last summer it was like the years suddenly melted away and we picked up where we had left off.

This story of the parting of David and Jonathan resonates with all of us, because we know what it is to be separated from friends. The parting of David and Jonathan was, obviously, very emotional, but their friendship remained, even though they were separated from one another.

Scripture provides us with other such examples and one comes from Acts 20:36–38, where we read that Paul is preparing to depart from Ephesus – *36 When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.* Paul had

been with his friends in Ephesus for about two years, and as he parts they know they will never see him again. Imagine the emotion of that moment! And yet they knew, as we know, that even when we are apart, our friends are ever with us.

2. *The Hands and Feet of Christ.*

We often use the expression that we are called to be *the hands and feet of Christ*. That is a function of friends. Friends help friends build a home, as we did this weekend working on the Powell family's Habitat home, and in doing so, are the hands and feet of Christ. Friends take off work to come and cut wood, and in doing so are the hands and feet of Christ. Friends give up a Saturday to frame walls and they are happy to do so, and are the hands and feet of Christ. Friends sit with us in hospital rooms and funeral homes, and in doing so are the hands and feet of Christ. They laugh with us, cry with us, comfort us, encourage us, strengthen us, and in doing all this, are the hands and feet of Christ.

I was at the General Assembly in Indianapolis from last Sunday evening until Wednesday evening. The theme of the Assembly was *One*. That was also the title of my second message in this series – *One*. The Assembly featured people of different states, different nations, different ethnicities, different languages, and different points of view, but together are the hands and feet of Christ. What else can unite such a disparate group of people, bringing them together for a common purpose that lifts them above anything that might separate them? Nothing that I know of, except to be the hands and feet of Christ. The church is unique in that it crosses every boundary of humanity – language, ethnicity, nationality, social, economic, educational, class (have I missed any?) – and recognizes God as the supreme authority and ruler over all.

Christ represents all people, and by being a part of the church – the body of Christ – we become his hands and feet in all that we do. In this way, we are become more than friends, we become part of something larger than ourselves; we become family.

3. *Friends Are Family.*

While attending the General Assembly I noticed an interesting practice. When I went to eat, because I was by myself, most restaurants seated me off in a corner. In fact, at one restaurant, I was seated in a section of the restaurant where no one else was seated. Talk about feeling isolated! I was not only isolated, but forgotten. After sitting there for about fifteen minutes, with no server coming to take my order or bring me something to eat, I left. The next restaurant I entered also seated me off in a corner by myself. Now, I have to admit that after surviving a week of church camp with a bunch of middle schoolers I didn't mind a bit of isolation and quiet, but after several times of being seated off by myself I began to wonder if there was something wrong with me!

While we are like – and need – our quiet time, no one wants to be isolated. We *need* friends because we are created as social creatures. And while we all have our families, some families are so dysfunctional and unhealthy that friends become even more important.

Tanya and I celebrated our 33rd anniversary in May. For all of those years we have not lived near any of our family. We are hundreds of miles from our nearest relatives, so the church becomes a surrogate family for us. In each church we have served, we have enjoyed “adopted” families. In Lawrenceburg, Bill and Evelyn Endicott were like second parents to us. Bill and Evelyn owned the hardware store in Lawrenceburg and were well known in the community for their generosity and care to many people, especially to their ministers. They lived up the street from Tanya and me at the time and were like second parents to us. They have both been gone for a number of years but I will never forget how much they cared for us and how they became family for us. I think of Fred and Lennie Taylor, members of our previous church, who took Bill and Evelyn's place as adopted parents to us. I am grateful to all those who were like second parents to us, who became adopted siblings to us, adopted grandparents to our children, and welcomed us into their families.

Friendships binds us together not just as acquaintances, not just as friends, but as family. In fact, we often speak of our church as being our *church family*. We speak of the family of God, which is a very apt description. At the General Assembly the church was often referred to as *the beloved community*. That sounds a lot like a family to me.

David and Jonathan were not just friends; they were family. Imagine how difficult it must have been for Jonathan, whose father sought to kill his friend, David. Imagine the pain of being caught between your father and your best friend! Blood is a bond, certainly, but the bond of friendship can be, sometimes, an even greater bond. It certainly was for David and Jonathan.

I am grateful for you, my friends, my family. You all are a gift of God to me, and I will always be grateful for *The Power of Friendship* that comes into my life because of you.