

Introduction

There are different kinds of love. There's the whole "falling in love" kind of love, and then there is the whole "I love movies" kind of love. There's the love between a mother and her 5 year old daughter, and then there's what Dan Claire means when he says that he loves Settlers of Catan, and when Aaron Damiani says he loves CSpan Radio, or Matthew Mason when he declares his love for British Pop Music (single malt scotch). Sometimes, love is like an emotion, it is something that "comes over us and happens to us, it's an enchantment."¹ But other times, love is something we do, an action, a commitment.

Like I said, there are different types of love. When I say that I love shrimp...it's a totally different kind of love than when I look deep into my wife's eyes and say, "Baby, I love you."

The Romans had 10 words for love. And the Greeks had 4 words...(*Agapeo* – earlier today; *Eros* – later today; *Storge* – affection). Now a days in English, we have only 1 word and there are some advantages to having just the one word, but one disadvantage is that there are some types of love that we have forgotten. For example...friendship. The fourth Greek word for love, *Philia* - Philidelphia, Philly Cheese Steak. In fact, there are some people who have never really thought about friendship as a type of love. And when your friends say, "I love you," for some of you it feels awkward. Which is funny, because the *ancients wrote about friendship love* all the time. One of the earliest Christian leaders, **Gregory of Nazianzus**, said: *"If anyone were to ask me, 'What is the best thing in life?' I would answer, 'Friends.'"*²

Transition: Let's start by looking at three friendships in the Bible.

1. David and Jonathan 1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4; 20:23

Augustine, one of the most influential Christians of all time, lived in the 4th century A.D. He once described his love for a friend who had died as *"sweeter than all the pleasures of life."*³

Most of the time, friendships take time to develop. But on rare occasions, they develop extremely fast. This is so rare, not all of us experience it. But in a room this size, there are surely a few people who have had an experience like David and Jonathan – where you met someone, and sensed immediately a powerful closeness. You were fundamentally similar. Spending time together is deeply satisfying, as you discover that here is another person who has experiences, "just like mine," a person who thinks about things like I do, who loves the things I love, who shares my perspective.

Typically, we marry our opposite: introvert/extrovert. Not all of the time. In contrast, our friendships (at least our closest ones) are usually (again not all of the time) with someone who is very similar to us.

Aristotle, described friendship, the kind of friendship that I am talking about, that deep friendship, he described it as *"a single soul in two bodies."* Now, literally that is not true. But poetically, it speaks volumes. If you have been blessed with a truly deep friendship, then you know what Aristotle is getting at here. There is a joy and peace at having met someone who seems to know and understand your soul.

Notice how the Bible describes the friendship between David and Jonathan: **v1**, *“the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.”* Then again at the end of **v3**, *“because he [that is Jonathan] loved him as his own soul.”*

And years later, when Jonathan dies, David’s grief is incredible. **2 Sam 1:26**, *“I am distressed for you my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women.”* Now those of you who know the Bible well, you know that David was no stranger to the erotic love between a man and a woman. So for David to make this statement about Jonathan is stunning, it’s incredible.

But some of you know just what David is describing, because some of you in this room have had friendships (and I’m not talking about with your husband or wife, but a friendship where there is no erotic attraction at all), friendships that have truly captured your soul. In this kind of friendship, when you talk with your friend it is as comfortable as talking to yourself. You know, the kind of friend with whom you can *“think aloud”* without embarrassment.⁴

You see, friendship love is one of the most profound forms of love that God has given us.

Let me show you another example of friendship love in the Bible...

2. Jesus, Mary, Martha & Lazarus **John 11:1-3, 5**

Earlier today we spoke about Jesus’ love for everyone. But in this story you can’t get around the idea that Jesus did not love Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in the same way that he loved everyone. That’s not the point of this story. The point of this story is exactly the opposite. John, the author of this biography of Jesus is making the point that Jesus had a special love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

Now we are never told exactly why Jesus had such a close friendship love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. We are simply told that he had it. And we are given several stories that show Jesus enjoying their company in a special way. He liked to spend time with them. In fact, in **v11** Jesus calls Lazarus his *“friend.”* This is something that we never hear Jesus call anyone else until he invites his follows to be his friends, 4 chapters later.

When Jesus gets to the tomb of Lazarus, he weeps. His grief is so deep that the people standing around make this comment in **v36**, *“See, how he loved him!”*

3. Jesus and John

When Jesus was walking around this earth, in the flesh, 2000 years ago, there was one other person whom we are told he had a special love for. It was the author of this book, John the Apostle. In fact, on 4 different occasions (John 13:23; 19:26; 21:7, 20) he is described as *“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”* Apparently Jesus and John had a uniquely close relationship. In fact, John alone stood by Jesus when Jesus was being crucified. He didn’t run off like the others. And as some of you know, it was to John that Jesus entrusted his own mother’s care shortly before breathing his last breath on the cross (John 19:26).

When we look at these three different places in the Bible, the story of David and Jonathan, the story of Jesus with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, and the story of Jesus and John...when we look at these three moments in the Bible, then *we see that friendship is one of God's good gifts*. It's nothing to be ashamed of. We should not feel guilty that there are some people that we enjoy being around more than others, some people with whom we feel a unique attraction (again, I'm not talking about an erotic attraction, but the desire friends have to be together). Friendship, let me say it again, is one of God's good gifts to us.

Transition: Now this leads us to an important question. .. *Why is the love between friends so important that God devotes special time in His Scriptures to put a spotlight on it?* I mean, we didn't even scratch the surface of all the verses of Scripture that deal with friendship and we saw

- **the biggest hero** in the Bible – King David involved in a very deep friendship,
- and then we saw **the primary character** of the Bible – King Jesus – involved in a very deep friendship.

So why is friendship love so important that God highlights it so loudly?

1. Friendship is natural

Now what I mean by that is this, the Bible says in Gen 1:26 that humans are made “in the image of God.” This means that there are some very important similarities between us and God. And one of those similarities is this issue of friendship. In his essence, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in intimate friendship. **(Rublev icon)** One of the things that it means for us to be made in God's image is that friendship is natural to us. We were made for it.

But there is more...

2. (Friendship is necessary for me to become who I truly am)

Another thing that it means for me to be made in the image of God, is that...now get this... because it's huge...since humans are made in the image of God...friendship is necessary for you and me to become who we truly are. We don't have time to go into this now, so let me just throw it out there and you can chew on it or discuss in groups...but basically, here's the scoop...Teenagers, you cannot discover the real you, the you that God made you to be, apart from good friends. Friends have a way of helping us identify who we are. And discovering who you are, who you really are is a big part of growing into a healthy person.

Now, let me give you another reason why I think that friendship love is highlighted so boldly in the Bible...

3. Friendship is necessary for me to become godly

I'm not talking about any ol' friendship. No, because if you are not careful, your friendships *“can very quickly become a club of mediocrities.”*⁵ You know, a group of people who engage in flattery and approval, and never get around to courageously helping each other face up to and deal with your own brokenness. That's not the kind of friendship I'm talking about.

I'm talking about the kind of friendship that we find in *Proverbs 27:6*, where it says - *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."* And let's get honest about this, so often the real issue boils down to courage and cowardice. It takes kindness and humility and courage to talk honestly with a friend, to reach out to them in love and have the tough conversation. **If you have a friend with a problem**, maybe you have not spoken to that friend about their issue because the time just isn't right...or maybe it's because you lack courage. **Timing or courage**...you need to know which it is. *Because friendship is a fundamental part of God's plan for us to be shaped into the people he wants us to be.*

Okay, here's one last reason that I think the Bible places such a spotlight on friendship love...

4. Friendship is a foretaste of the New Heavens and the New Earth

The Bible has quite a bit to say about what life will be like when everything is said and done, and Jesus completes his work of making all things new again. And one of the most prevalent ways that the Bible describes life in the New Heavens and the New Earth is through the image of a banquet, or a feast, a wedding celebration, a group of friends having a meal together. In *Matthew 26:29*, *"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* A party...eating...and drinking... Over and over we find this same message in Scripture. Life in the New Heavens and the New Earth will be a wonderful celebration, a feast.

If you can imagine the most complete and perfect and joyous party in this world, then you need to know that that is but a glimpse, a sliver, a shadow, a whiff of what lies ahead and beyond. And it is to this that Jesus is pointing.

The love and commitment, the devotion and inner unity that exists between you and your best friend, that is an initiation, a small foretaste of what you will experience with everyone in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Transition: So, what does all of this have to do with the nitty-gritty of real life in the here and now. After all, we go back to work on Monday.

1. Some: resist isolation (depression)

Some of you struggle on a regular basis with depression and feelings of being all alone in this world. Some of you struggle with this only on the rarest of occasions. When you do find yourself being tempted to crawl up into your house and to not come out, but to just isolate yourself from everyone ...resist. It's in friendship that you

- ❖ discover who you truly are
- ❖ it's in friendship that you are perfected into God's image
- ❖ and it's in friendship that you get a taste of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

I know that there are times in life where the hurt and the pain and the confusion and the questions and the darkness take away every ounce of desire that you have to be around other people. But

Scripture shows us over and over that when you pull away from others (and you can pull away from others but still be physically around them), when you pull away from others you are pulling away from God's way of making you whole again. Don't believe the lies of Satan.

2. Others: give thanks

God has given you good friends. **D. Bonhoeffer** once said, *"Only those who give thanks for little things receive the great things as well."*⁶ After all, **Ps 100:4** teaches us that the way into God's presence is with thanksgiving: *"Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him."* And **Phil 4:6** teaches us to that when we are asking God for things, we should accompany it with thanksgiving: *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."*

3. Others: don't divide life

So often after worship, many of you leave the church building and go to your favorite restaurant or maybe to your house and you eat with friends. When you do that you are participating in one of God's greatest gifts...friendship. When Christian friends eat together...God is there in a special way. After all, if you read the biographies of Jesus closely, you'll see that Jesus virtually ate his way through the gospels. And after he died and rose from the dead, it was in **Luke 24** when he was eating with some friends that they came to understand who he really was.

A pastor by the name of Rob Bell wrote a book with a really catchy title a few years back, *Velvet Elvis*, and in that book he hits the nail on the head about this issue when he writes:

*"the church has nothing to say to the world until it throws better parties...God has given us life, and God's desire is that we live it. It is the job of the church to lead the world in affirming and more important, enjoying the goodness of creation...[So] we need to eat and talk and dance and enjoy each other, and above all else...take our time. What does Jesus do almost as much as he teaches and heals? He eats long meals. As Christians it is our duty to master the art of the long meal."*⁷

4. Others: be careful with who your friends are

If necessary to become who I truly am and to become godly, then need godly friends.

5. Everyone: give yourself more fully to friendship. (practice, work hard)

remember, friendship is natural (you were made for it) and it's necessary for you to be yourself and to be godly. Take time: if working too much for friendship – working too much ...Long meals...A basic requirement for friendship love to thrive...is...honesty – courage to not hide behind all of the walls and subtle deceptions

Let's Pray

- those who do not have good friend, ask God to give them one and to make them into type of person who can be a good friend
- those who do not feel whole and natural and can't be honest because of all the hurt and fear – to be healed in order to experience gift and pleasures of friendship.

¹ Josef Pieper, *Faith, Hope, Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997 [1986]), 163.

² Gregory Nazianzus, cited in Paul O'Callaghan, *The Feast of Friendship*, 2nd ed. (Wichita, KS: Eighth Day Press, 2007), 65.

³ Quoted in O'Callaghan, *Feast of Friendship*, 33.

⁴ Emerson, *Essays*, 1st Series (London, 1903), "Friendship," 151.

⁵ Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 31.

⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, in *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 37.

⁷ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 171.