



## TRUE FRIENDS

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I have to say, I really like the warm weather we've been having. It's so nice that it's finally May. About the only problem I can see with it is that I have to mow the lawn so often (which my neighbors would say isn't quite often enough). Plus my lawn mower is about on its last legs. Every spring when I first get it out of the shed, we go through the same routine. It teases me and starts for a few seconds. Then it sputters to a stop. Then it starts again. Then stops. Then finally, after a few tries it finally stays running so I can actually mow the lawn for a few feet before I have to stop and empty the bag because the grass was so long.

I feel kind of like that mower with this sermon series on the life of King David. I've been teasing you for the past month. We started, then stopped. Started again, then stopped. But this time, we are back at it, and we'll stick with it now for the next several weeks.

To review where we've been so far, we looked at how God first chose David when nobody else saw that much in him. Then we talked about his fight with Goliath, and we said that God is bigger than big and is ready to help us face whatever giants we're up against.

That victory over Goliath was life changing for David. It threw him into the limelight as a national hero. Suddenly this boy from the sticks was the guy everyone was talking about. David was treated like royalty. King Saul took him under his wing and eventually gave him his daughter in marriage. He ate at the King's table. And he became best friends with Saul's son, Jonathan.

There's an old cliché that says you can get to know someone by the company they keep. What can we learn about David by looking at his relationship with Jonathan?

We could say a lot about that friendship, but as I read about them this time, what stood out to me this time was how they were able to be incredibly direct and truthful with each other. That's an exceptional quality in a relationship. Being able to speak straight with somebody in a healthy way is a gift. It's a gift I don't have. That point has been hammered home to me recently, because I have found myself in more and more situations where truth telling is necessary. I don't know about you, but I find the struggle to say what needs to be said is incredibly challenging.

You probably remember the chorus to the Billy Joel song that said “Honesty is such a lonely word.” But it’s the verse to that song that really sums up how I feel.

*If you search for tenderness, it isn't hard to find  
You can have the love you need to live  
But if you look for truthfulness  
You might just as well be blind  
It always seems to be so hard to give.*

Can you relate to that? Is it hard for you, too? Why is that? What makes it so difficult to be truthful?

I think one reason is because we don’t want to be mean people, and we’re not always sure where the line is. There’s a difference between honesty and cruelty. I had a friend in high school who would always just blurt out whatever she was thinking, whether it was kind or not. She’d tell people what she didn’t like about them right to their faces, and sometimes it was just plain mean. We would say, “Claudia – that was rude.” And she’d always respond, “Hey – the truth hurts.”

That’s not quite right. And we don’t want to be like that. So we hold back.

A second reason we don’t always like to tell someone the truth is because we don’t want to be rejected. Forget about it being mean to them – we don’t want it to turn out to be mean to us. We don’t want to lose friends because we said something they didn’t appreciate.

But I think one of the biggest reasons we struggle with truth telling is figuring out how it fits in with what we believe. We know we’re supposed to love people, so we suppress our true opinions in the name of doing the right thing. Auntie Em in the Wizard of Oz said it best. When Almira Gulch came to their house and wanted Toto put to sleep, Auntie Em told her, “For twenty-three years I’ve been dying to tell you what I thought of you! And now... well, being a Christian woman, I can’t say it!”

That’s really what we think sometimes, isn’t it? If I’m a Christian, I can’t say what I really think. I need to be nice. So what happens is that we end up weighed down by polite obligations because we couldn’t bring ourselves to be honest. We wear ourselves out because we’re afraid to tell somebody no. We let hurts pile up under the carpet because we couldn’t confront that person about what they did. Pretty soon, we’re all wrapped with this huge, unnecessary burden. You can see why Jesus said the truth sets us free.

Fortunately, I believe that the idea of holding it all in is a misunderstanding of what it means to be a Christian. We have more freedom than that, or at least we’re supposed to. But do we know HOW to tell the truth? How do we decide when something needs to be said and when we should just keep our mouth shut? The story of Jonathan and David gives us some good handles for telling the truth in a healthy way.

One incident in particular stands out. I said a few minutes ago that David was enjoying a newfound popularity. In fact, he was becoming a little too popular, and King Saul wasn't happy about it. Saul knew that people like their heroes, and they just might want to put David on the throne. The more he thought about it, the more paranoid he got. It eventually reached a point where eventually Saul went after David to kill him, but David escaped.

This has just happened, and David seeks out his friend Jonathan to talk to him about his dad. Here's what David asked Jonathan:

### **1 Samuel 20**

*"What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?"*

*"Never!" Jonathan replied. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!"*

*But David took an oath and said, "Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death."*

*Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you."*

*So David said, "Look, tomorrow is the New Moon festival, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. If your father misses me at all, tell him, 'David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.' If he says, 'Very well,' then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?"*

*"Never!" Jonathan said. "If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn't I tell you?"*

*David asked, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?"*

*"Come," Jonathan said, "let's go out into the field." So they went there together.*

*Then Jonathan said to David: "By the LORD, the God of Israel, I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? But if my father is inclined to harm you, may the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away safely. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. But show me unflinching*

*kindness like that of the LORD as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family-not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth."*

*So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account." And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.*

*Then Jonathan said to David: "Tomorrow is the New Moon festival. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. Then I will send a boy and say, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to him, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,' then come, because, as surely as the LORD lives, you are safe; there is no danger. But if I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then you must go, because the LORD has sent you away. And about the matter you and I discussed -- remember, the LORD is witness between you and me forever."*

This is just the start of the story, but I want to stop here for a moment and make some observations. One of the qualities that I appreciate most about David's friendship with Jonathan is that it is so mutual. They treated each other as equals. Even though Jonathan was the prince in waiting, the author tells us that he loved David as himself. He didn't treat him as a subject.

The same was true in reverse: David didn't view his hero status or the fact that he had been chosen as the real next king as anything that made him better than Jonathan. They put themselves on the same plane with each other. And the truth telling went both ways.

That's so important in relationships. We can't approach someone with the truth as if we have the corner on it. A few weeks ago, an email went out at work to the whole staff, which I thought was directed at me. It made me mad, because I felt like it was a really inappropriate way for this person to tell me they didn't like something I had done. I was pretty indignant, and I decided it had to be dealt with immediately, so I fired an email back to this person, laying out all the reasons I had a problem with their email. Then I got an email back. Turns out that first email had nothing to do with me at all. I felt pretty silly. I had gone in thinking that I was the one with all the truth about the issue, when really I didn't have all my facts.

There needs to be a back and forth quality to truth telling – as much willingness to listen as to talk. On top of that, all the tough things David and Jonathan share with each other in these verses rest on the fact that they genuinely love and respect each other. Caring about the other person is the foundation that allows us to speak directly about hard issues. Paul tells us we are to speak the truth in love. How does that play out?

When truth is spoken in love, it means we won't be seeking revenge in what we say. It's not payback time because somebody else said something harsh to us.

When we speak the truth in love, we won't value our own opinion over the other person's feelings. On my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, my parents took me out to dinner by myself and asked me to tell them anything I wanted them to change. I told my dad his laugh bothered me. They were hoping I'd reveal some truth, but all I had was an opinion, and not a very kind one at that. Truth telling isn't about just airing our opinions and judgments.

When we speak the truth in love, we choose a setting that won't embarrass the other person. When your son or daughter does something you need to address, you don't do it in public – you pull them aside and talk to them one on one. Truth in love isn't a power play that puts someone in a vulnerable spot and leaves them humiliated.

But truth spoken in love doesn't have to tiptoe. It can express hurts and anger and frustration. It waits until the facts are known. It can look very messy (it was emotional for David and Jonathan). It looks for the right time and opportunity as well. One of my Bible professors, Mike Wilkins, met with a family who had lost their young daughter after a long battle with an illness. The family was understandably brokenhearted and grieving. As Dr. Wilkins was leaving their home, another gentleman came toward the house. Dr. Wilkins asked him, "What are you doing here?" The man said, "I've just come to rejoice with the family that their little girl is finally in heaven!" Dr. Wilkins turned that man right around and said, "Now is not the time. That's not the appropriate word for them right now, and you need to let them mourn their loss." It may have been a truth, but it would not have been spoken with love for the parents and sensitivity toward their feelings.

So truth has love as its foundation. For David and Jonathan, there were three different scenarios where they found it critical to tell the whole truth. I think those three same areas are vital for us as well.

It was David's turn first in the section we just read. He had to tell Jonathan what his father was really like. Jonathan didn't want to believe it. "Never!" he said. But David persisted, because he knew that

### **Truth matters when there's a dangerous blind spot.**

Jonathan couldn't bring himself to believe his father would go after David that way without telling him. He wasn't picking up the signals from the King. Maybe he didn't want to see it. He didn't want to have to choose between his father and his best friend. So he had this enormous blind spot that was preventing him from seeing what was really going on. As long as he didn't see it, he didn't have to deal with it.

It's David's life that's on the line, but it's Jonathan's turn to have a crisis here. His world is going to be rocked by David's revelation. He will never think the same about things again.

The truth is powerful stuff. I think that's why Paul told Timothy to work on being able to correctly handle the word of truth, to treat it with great care. Truth changes lives, because it demands response. It won't be ignored.

We all have blind spots like Jonathan. The hard part is that so many of them are self created. They're in place because we don't really WANT to know the truth. I was talking with one pastor friend who had been counseling a young couple before their wedding, and he really felt they should wait to get married and that they weren't ready. But they wouldn't listen to his logic. They didn't want to hear what he had to say – regardless of what was true. So they got married anyway. And the relationship didn't last.

Now when you're the person trying to do the truth telling, that can be very frustrating. You want to be taken seriously. In my own counseling of people, I've come to learn the hard way sometimes how little impact my words seem to have at times. And I have to learn to let that go. It is not our responsibility to manage what the other person does with the truth. We can't force them to accept it or act on it. Our job is simply to be faithful in sharing what we see and letting God be the one to use that truth.

Fortunately for David, Jonathan WANTS to see what's really going on. He's skeptical about David's perspective, but he's open to finding out. So he devises a plan to explore the truth for himself and get to the bottom of the situation, so he'll know once and for all.

That's the kind of bold, risky attitude I want to cultivate in myself. No matter how scary or life-changing the truth may be, I want to be willing to pursue it rather than live in the comfort of my blind spots.

Let's see what happened next.

*So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon festival came, the king sat down to eat. He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty. (Quick side note here about the king's place at the table. I meet Duke at Subway sometimes for lunch, and he always likes to sit with his back to the wall so he can face the door. It's just an old habit. All Duke's years in the military and law enforcement taught him to guard his back so nobody could sneak up on him. Saul sits with his back to the wall, because he is a man who is concerned that people are out to get him. It's just one physical way that shows his mindset toward David.)*

*Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, "Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean -- surely he is unclean." (Another side note: Jewish laws had all kinds of regulations that said if people did certain things or touched certain things, they were basically unsanitary for a 24 hour period. Those laws were God's safeguard for his people, his way of protecting their physical health and hygiene .) But the next day, the second day of the month, David's place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?"*

*Jonathan answered, "David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' That is why he has not come to the king's table."*

*Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"*

*"Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.*

*Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.*

Here the burden of truth telling falls on Jonathan. His father flies into a rage about David. But Jonathan recognizes that the things he's saying are not true. And he realizes that truth doesn't just matter when we have blind spots --

### **Truth also matters when our judgment has become clouded.**

Saul is angry at God. Saul is jealous of David. The Bible tells us he has been in this black, dark mood for a long time. And it has warped his view of reality. His emotions and the sin in his heart have taken over and clouded his judgment.

I've been there before. My own fears and insecurities and jealousies have caused me to reinterpret other people's motives and see what I want to see.

Jonathan shows a tremendous amount of courage in speaking up. He asks 2 questions: "Why should he be put to death? And what has he done?" Very simple and straightforward. Sometimes truth telling comes in the form of questioning the lie someone is living with. It's an excellent strategy, particularly when the situation is emotionally charged.

Author Randy Newman says that often all it takes is the question "Really?" When someone starts talking to you about a mutual friend, and you know what they're saying isn't true, you can stop them in their tracks by just saying, "Really?" Dr. Phil likes to use questions, too. When people talk about their addictions and ways of coping with pain and begin to justify their own behavior, he'll ask, "How's that working for you?" It forces people to stop and examine their own actions, and they discover the truth for themselves.

It didn't do much to help Saul – He wasn't concerned about the truth. His mind was made up. But it did complete Jonathan's quest for the truth. In asking the questions, he got the answers he needed. The story says he got up in fierce anger. He lost his appetite and was deeply grieved by his father's position. In trying to speak truth to his father, Jonathan's eyes were opened and he saw his dad for who he really was.

That's a second unexpected principle of truth telling that we tend to overlook. Often, when we feel compelled to give someone a dose of the truth, we get a dose of it ourselves. We can't help but be affected by truth when we're carrying it. God may want to use us to reach somebody else, but the message he gives us, the truth shapes us as much as the people we're sharing it with.

Several years ago, there was a woman who drove me crazy, and I had to deal with her on a weekly basis. Isn't that always how it works? And I felt like there were some truths someone needed to share with her. But as I wrestled with what I didn't like about her attitude and actions, I began to realize that I had a lot of similar attitudes in myself. The judgmental spirit I noticed in her suddenly became very evident in my own heart. I could see that she had a misplaced focus, but God wanted me to see my own misplaced focus. God used my frustrations with her to work on me and my own character.

Jonathan had seen what he needed to see, and he knew what had to happen next.

*In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. (The boy knew nothing of all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town."*

*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.*

*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.*

This time, truth comes in the form of an arrow, an arrow that points David toward his future. We've said that truth matters when we have blind spots and when our judgment is clouded. **It also matters when we need direction.**

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be David, hiding behind that big rock. His life literally depended on what Jonathan would tell him.

And Jonathan now had additional confirmation of David's situation. He now knew more than David how serious his father was about his threats. And he knew that however comfortable David's spot in the castle may have looked, however much he enjoyed David's company, he was going to need to encourage David to make a major life change. Because it was no longer safe to be where he was.

We don't always like to interfere with people's lives and tell them what they should do. But sometimes, we have information they don't. Maybe we've been where they are, and we can speak from experience to say "You've got to get out of there. You're not in a healthy place."

When we see someone in a dangerous situation, we have the responsibility to signal them, to send some arrows their way. I like how James puts it:

**James 5:19-20**

*My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.*

As David set off to begin a new chapter in his life where he would be on the run, Jonathan swore his commitment to him. He was a friend for life, and if this change meant rough times ahead for David, Jonathan was not going to abandon him. In fact, we know he did just that. Shortly after this conversation, Saul again attempted to kill David.

**1 Samuel 23:15-16**

*While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God.*

Jonathan was a true friend – one who didn't just speak truth to David, but who was willing to live it out with him.

As we seek to speak truth into the lives of those around us, God calls us to walk alongside them. It isn't just about words – it's about being there for them, helping them through the changes that come. Because truth does inevitably bring change.

As we do that, we demonstrate the life of Christ in us. Because Jesus has said two things about himself. First is that he is our friend. He told his disciples they weren't just there to serve him – he brought them up to a different level of relationship. That's what we experience with him ourselves. He loves us the way Jonathan loved David. He couldn't love us any more than he does.

The second thing he said about himself is that he's all about truth telling, because he IS the truth. So we can expect that if he is our friend, he's going to be the straightforward kind who doesn't pull any punches. In his book called "The Transforming Friendship," James Houston says "to be a Christian is to be shocked by Christ." He will always be

revealing new truth to us, showing us our blind spots, pointing out where our judgment has become clouded, giving us direction when we most needed. And like Jonathan, he promises to walk the journey with us, to help us with each step of change we need to make.

Truth brings change. What is Christ asking you to change this morning?

Have I been living with blind spots? Have I willingly avoided the truth because I don't want to deal with it? Am I willing to ask him to show me what those blind spots are?

Is my judgment clouded? Do I need to question my own assumptions? Are their emotions, jealousies or sins that are preventing me from seeing clearly?

Am I needing direction? Do I need to know which way to go from here?

Is there a truth that needs telling? After I've examined my own need for truth, is there something God is prompting me to share with someone else. Can I say it out of genuine concern for that other person, without judging them? It will take courage. It will take commitment, and it could change me as much as someone else. But it is also the chance to see Christ work in new ways.

The truth will set us free. Are we ready?

Truth is not about saying what's hard – it's about saying what's real, whether or not it is hard.