

# Friendship

*Then Jonathan said to David,  
"Go in peace...May the Lord be between you and me, forever."*

**I Samuel 20:42**

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

## Introduction

Friendships come in many shapes and sizes...

- old ones, new ones
- friendships since childhood
- casual ones, work-related ones, neighborly ones

Some friendships require regular maintenance and upkeep

- some are broken and in need of repair
- while others just seem to "click," don't require very much work at all

There are also different types of friendship...

- there's friendship in marriage
- friendship between parents and their adult children
- friendships amongst siblings, relatives, and co-workers
- and casual friendships with neighbors across the street or at the grocery or hardware store

## The Purpose of Friendship

Today we will be considering the *purpose* of friendship.

We will be looking at teachings from the Lord's Word that point out how critical and necessary friendship is in our interaction with others.

We will see how friendship works like an adhesive, a kind of "glue," that holds together other important aspects of a relationship.

This is an important topic to address because there are many people in the world who are lonely, who don't have friends.

- It's a bit like a newborn child being deprived of physical touch.
- We are social beings and as such need to be connected to other human beings
  - when that connection is missing or broken, there can be terrible loneliness, sadness, and pain

It's easy to take our friendships for granted.

But there are people all around us - sometimes in plain sight - who don't have friends and their only connection with other human beings is the brief conversation they have with the teller at the supermarket or with the neighbor across the street.

But we might say...

- Isn't friendship a relatively superficial matter?
- Aren't our friendships just a way of socializing, a way to relax?
- How can friendship be a spiritual issue?
- Besides, aren't there "weightier" matters to focus on than fretting about who we are friends with or who we should be friendly to?

### **Spiritual Friendship**

The teachings of the New Church, being a *revelation* of spiritual things, have a lot to say about the *spiritual* dimension of our friendships here on earth.

The teachings are...

- *exciting*, because we're taught that some of our friendships will go with us to the other side and continue after death
- *inspiring*, because we learn why it's important to put in the time and effort to develop deep and meaningful friendships here on earth
- and we're given a *cautionary tale* about being careful not to get caught up in certain types of friendships

Our text from the first book of *Samuel* shows us what a true, spiritual friendship looks like...

Right there in the letter of the Word, you can read about the friendship between Jonathan (King Saul's son) and the young shepherd boy, David - it's a remarkably mature friendship, especially when considering their age

### **The Friendship of Jonathan and David**

You can hardly be left unmoved, unaffected by the strong friendship between these two young men, especially when you consider the painful series of events surrounding their short friendship.

- Jonathan's friendship began after David's victory over Goliath
- But this is also when King Saul's jealousy toward David began
- As David's popularity climbed, so did King Saul's jealousy
- Yet, amidst Saul's repeated attempts to rid himself of David, Jonathan and David's friendship only grew stronger and more resilient and more trusting in the Lord

In many ways, Jonathan had nothing to gain from this friendship with David and everything to lose.

- he was the first-born son of Saul and heir to the throne but by the time he befriended David it was obvious that he would never succeed his father as king
- also, by protecting his friend David from the wrath of Saul, Jonathan narrowly escaped being killed by his own father
- and ironically, Jonathan was later killed in battle loyally fighting for his father

At least three covenants were made between Jonathan and David, each time further sealing their friendship and loyalty to each other (see I Samuel 18:3,4; 20:14-17; 23:18).

- perhaps the most profound gesture of friendship came when (after David had been secretly anointed king) Jonathan took off his outer robe, armor, sword, bow and belt and handed them all over to David.

- by doing this, Jonathan, the first-born son of a powerful king, humbly and freely transferred his right to the throne to a young man with no royal heritage (see I Samuel 18:4; AC 9825:2).

Jonathan had many noble, admirable qualities...

- he was bold, courageous, selfless in action, loyal
- and he had an unshakable trust in the Lord
- the Lord was at the center of all his military decisions, and the Lord was at the center of his friendship with David which brings us to the last words Jonathan spoke to David:

*"...may the Lord be between you and me, forever."*

What a beautiful invocation: an invitation to bring the Lord, or that which is good, true, noble, and kind, right into the *middle* of a friendship!

In a moment, we'll be considering the "space" that fills the distance between ourselves and others but let's take a look at one more thing about Jonathan

- the meaning of his name..

In the Hebrew (root meaning) "Jonathan" means 'to give' or 'reach out.' This matches what the Writings say about Jonathan, who, as the son of a king, represents the...

- truth that reaches out to "*protect the church*" (see AE 278:10).
- or, you could say, the truth that reaches out to protect and promote all that is good, true, noble and kind

Applied to our friendships, this means...

- seeking to protect the space between ourselves and others with the desire to only fill it with good things
- reaching out to protect and promote the good qualities we see in our friends

## Why Friendship Matters

The teachings of the New Church reveal the hidden reason why our friendships matter. We read:

"The love of friendship ties minds together..." (SE 4524)

"The innermost bond of friendship never ends..." (SE 6110)

"In the next life...when a person is thought of intensely by another, that person is presented to view; hence it is that friends meet there..." (AC 6893).

"Upon arrival in the next life, everyone is recognized by their friends, their relatives, and all who had known them in any way. They speak together and continue to see each other in keeping with the [quality] of their friendship on earth..." (HH 494).

Really, really important implications here:

- some of the friendships we have here on earth will continue in the next life
- this is because true friendship "ties minds together..."
- could be our closest friends, which includes relatives
- one teaching talks about two brother's being reunited in the next life with the recently departed brother reporting that when he met his brother he "*could not keep from crying because it was love itself speaking...*" (SE 3545; cf. HH 238; AC 2304).

We're also cautioned about getting into (or remaining in) friendships where it becomes apparent that the friend is being dishonest or immoral.

- We are cautioned against turning a "blind eye" to them on the basis that they're just fun to be around or that we can't bear the thought of ending our friendship with them (see TC 446).
- Apparently, these types of friendships are very difficult to untangle in the next life because the minds of the two friends have become "fused," and the dishonest and immoral behaviors end up dragging *both* down.

So, on the topic of friendship, we are also given a cautionary tale.



But even this negative scenario demonstrates how powerful the bond of friendship can become!

For example, we learned in our reading today that *"mutual love differs from friendship in that mutual love regards the good in a person while friendship [tends to] regard the person..."* but the teachings goes on to say, *"...but mutual love and friendship become one and the same when we look to the good in the other person..."* (AC 3875).

*"Looking to the good in the other person..."* - this is the key characteristic we've learned about the remarkable friendship Jonathan started with David.

And lastly, we're taught that there's no limit to how deep a friendship can go.

With respect to marriage we're taught,

*"Such friendship and trust rise so far above other types of friendship and trust that, as that love is the greatest of loves, so also that friendship is the greatest of friendships..."* (ML 334).

## The "Space" Between Us

In our reading from Arcana Coelestia or Secrets of Heaven this morning, you also heard the phrase "everyone may indeed be friendly to others, but still, we must be most friendly to what is good..." (AC 4804).

This is perhaps the best way to approach *any* friendship...

- Ask ourselves - with this friend, what do I want to be friendly toward?
- What types of things do I want filling the space between myself and this friend?

This friend could be our spouse, one of our adult children, it could be the next door neighbor, it could be a new friend

We certainly know what we DON'T want filling that space (what doesn't work)

- we don't want to be angry, short-tempered, impatient, unkind, inflexible, untrustworthy, or disloyal

When we permit negative thoughts and feelings to fill the space between ourselves and others, it can only lead to one thing - a strained or broken relationship.

Let us use Jonathan's friendship with David as our model...

Let us take a mental "inventory" of our friendships so that we may gauge the spiritual health of them. What's working, what could we do better?

As a church community, let us raise our level of awareness...

- for friendship, at the deepest level, is an act of charity because it seeks to support and promote all that is good, true, noble and kind

What filled the space between Jonathan and David?

- Jonathan believed in David (he saw the good in him, that the Lord was with him)
- Jonathan brought courage and strength to their friendship (defended David)
- He had integrity (spoke the truth)
- He wasn't selfish (Scriptures say Jonathan loved David more than his own soul)
- He wanted the Lord to be at the center of their friendship

This is what it means to be a friend in the truest sense of the word

- this is what we want filling the "space" between ourselves and others

- we want to be a friend to honesty, to integrity, to hard work, perseverance, and faithfulness - we want to support and promote these noble qualities in others

- we want to be a friend to the joys and success of others, to "feel the joy of another as joy in oneself" - that is the loving thing to do.

In all our friendships, let our prayer, our invocation, be these humble words:

*"May the Lord be between you and me, forever."*

**Amen.**