

FRIENDSHIP

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Reading: I Samuel 17:55-18:5

Today I want to speak to you about friendship. You all know that we cannot go off and always live entirely by ourselves. We must have some friends. There is no one in the world for whom we feel more sorry than the person who does not have even one friend to whom they may go.

You like to know that other children like to come and see you and play with you. You like to go and play with them, too. And you like to have your friends say nice things about you, give you presents, and help you to do the things you want to do. Much of the happiness that we can have in this world depends upon our having friends. And if we think that we have no friends at all, and that no one wants us, we feel very sad. So it is very important that we make and keep friendships.

But it is even more important to know and remember that there are two kinds of friendship. One kind comes from the love of oneself or selfishness, and the other comes from the love of the Lord. It seems that they are very much alike, and for this reason we must try to be sure that we know the real difference between them.

If we love other people and think of them as our friends just because they do what we want them to do, because they always praise us and think that everything we do is right, then we do not really love them, but only ourselves. True friendship comes from love to the Lord. And when we love others, not because they do as we want them to do, or because they praise us, but because the Lord loves us and has commanded us to love others, and because we want to keep His commandments, then we do not think of ourselves in our friendships, but of the other people. Then we are truly loving our friends.

The Lord loves all people. He came into the world and laid down His life so that we all might be saved. And He tells us in His Word that we are to love others as He has loved us. If we think of all that the Lord does for us, and if we wish to show Him that we are grateful by doing what He asks of us, then our friendship will *not* be a selfish love of others, which is given only because we always get what we want from them.

Suppose you are with your friends and you want something they have, but they will not give it to you. Or perhaps they will not agree to do something you want

them to do. They do not give you the praise you think you deserve, or they object to something you have done.

If you are thinking only of yourself, then you will turn away from them in anger because they have done something you do not like. But if you are thinking of the Lord, you will love them because of what they do for the Lord or for others. And if you love them in this way—for the good and useful things they do—you can refuse to get angry, and can go on loving them, trusting them, and refusing to believe evil of them until it is proved.

That is true friendship, in which you forget about yourself and think only of the Lord. You think about how the Lord forgives you for the many things you do that are wrong, and you want to do the same to others, because it is the Lord's commandment that you should do so.

In the story of David and Jonathan, we find an example of this kind of friendship. Jonathan was a prince, and according to the ancient law, he would have become the king of Israel when his father died. At that time David was only a poor shepherd boy who helped to take care of his father's sheep. Yet the Lord, through His prophet Samuel, had chosen David to become the king after Saul died.

Jonathan knew that the Lord wanted David to be king. He knew what sort of a king Israel needed, and he must have known that he himself could have been a good king, because he was brave, strong, and a good man. But because what the Lord said meant more to him than what he himself wanted, and because he thought more of his country's good than he did of himself, he loved David and became his friend.

Knowing that it was the Lord's will, Jonathan gladly gave up his right to the throne. He promised to help David become king, to fight for him and protect him, and to serve him faithfully. As a sign that he would do this, he took off his robe and put it on David. When David was forced to go away and was pursued by his enemies, Jonathan helped him. All the time that David was in the wilderness, hunted by the army of Saul, Jonathan loved him still. And Jonathan was true to his friend right up to the time of his death.

This is the kind of friendship the Lord wants us to have. It is the kind that the angels have. They do not think of themselves when they do anything kind for their friends. They forget themselves and think about the Lord. And in just the same way, we should think about the Lord—about what we can do for Him and for others. And we should love other people who are doing the same thing, even if we do not always like what they do. If we are faithful to our friends because of the good work they are doing, we will have the same kind of friendship as the angels.

It is not easy to begin in this way. It is natural for you to want things for yourselves. But when you are tempted to be selfish in your friendships, think of the way the Lord loves you and of His commandment that we are to love one another. And think of the way Jonathan loved David, even when he knew David was to take away his throne. Then, as you grow older, you will be able to understand more and more what it means to be a real friend.

Amen.