

“PASSING THE LOVE OF WOMEN”

Friendship isn't about what you can get but rather what you can give. Dale Carnegie once said, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming really interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.”

In Queen Victoria's time, a young woman had the good fortune of being escorted to dinner by William Gladstone, who was considered one of the most brilliant statesmen of the 19th century. On the following evening, the same young lady was escorted by Benjamin Disraeli, novelist, statesman and twice prime minister of Great Britain. When asked for her impression of these two great rivals, she replied, “After an evening with Gladstone, I thought he was the most brilliant man I'd ever met. After an evening with Disraeli, I thought myself to be the most fascinating woman in the world!” Obviously Disraeli knew what friendship was all about. If this how you are approaching friendship then your friendships will certainly grow stronger.

We would naturally expect that a man after God's own heart would reveal in his life something of the love and tenderness which dwells in the Father's heart, and there was that in David which inspired strong affection in those who knew him. Even Saul “loved him greatly.” Michal, Saul's daughter, bestowed her affections on him, and of Jonathan, Saul's eldest son, it is written that he loved David as his own soul.

The first time that David and Jonathan are mentioned together was after the return of David from the slaying of Goliath. From that time Saul would no more allow David to return to his home at Jonathan's in Bethlehem, but set him over the men of war. “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant. . . and Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.” 1 Samuel 18:3, 4. This was a covenant of loyalty and regal recognition set in the context of transferring throne rights to David and symbolized by Jonathan giving David his cloak and armor. Despite the political issues that should have interfered with their relationship (with Jonathan, by birth heir to the throne, realizing that David was chosen by God to rule instead), an amazingly close friendship developed between the two. Jonathan, the tender and faithful friend of David, shielded David's life at the peril of his own and gave eloquent witness to the existence and power of

unselfish love. this is not a portrait of homosexual relationship but of friends who rose to the heights of self-abnegation.

There was much in common between the two friends. The same spirit of fearless trust in God which had made David bold to take up the challenge of Goliath was likewise strong in Jonathan. Accompanied only by his armor-bearer he had once attacked a garrison of the Philistines, and the Lord had delivered them into his hand. Saul with six hundred men had not ventured to attack the enemy, but Jonathan said, "It may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." "So the Lord saved Israel that day." 1 Samuel 14:6, 23.

Jonathan's disposition was a noble one. Even when he learned that the throne which should come to him, as Saul's eldest son, was promised to David, it did not lessen his love. The faith, by which he was victorious over the Philistines, proved him a true child of Abraham, and like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he desired a better country, that is, an heavenly. His father sought the honor that cometh from men only; and could not endure to hear the praises of David sounded louder than his own, or the thought that his kingdom was to be given to another better than he; but Jonathan, in generous, self-forgetful love, could strip off his own princely arms and raiment, and put them upon his friend. One who looks for an everlasting dominion, and who knows that God holds for him "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," will not feel hurt and rebellious if others receive a larger portion of earthly honor than falls to himself. It may be that much of the good seen in David's after life was due to the influence of Jonathan's example.

In a book called "Men of Integrity" Stu Weber wrote this: "1967. We were at war with Vietnam. And there I was, at the U.S. Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, Georgia. It was brutal. I can still hear the raspy voice of the sergeant: "We are here to save your lives. We're going to see to it that you overcome all your natural fears. We're going to show you just how much incredible stress the human mind and body can endure. And when we're finished with you, you will be the U.S. Army's best!"

Then, before he dismissed the formation, he announced our first assignment. We'd steeled ourselves for something really tough-like running 10 miles in full battle gear or repelling down a sheer cliff. Instead, he told us to find a buddy. "Find yourself a Ranger buddy," he growled. "You will stick together. You will never leave each other.

You will encourage each other, and, as necessary, you will carry each other.” It was the army’s way of saying, “Difficult assignments require a friend. Together is better.” The same is true for each one of us. “Who’s your ‘Ranger buddy’?” Keep developing these kinds of Christian friendships!

The time soon came when Saul tried to take David’s life, and spoke to his son about it, expecting his cooperation in the attempt but instead Jonathan warned David of the danger and succeeded for awhile in turning Saul from his evil purpose. Jonathan pleaded with his father not to sin against David, “because he hath not sinned against thee. For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?” 1 Samuel 19:4, 5.

Every Bible reader is familiar with the story of the choosing of Saul as king over Israel, and of his fall and sad end. From a modest, gentle youth, who would allow no harm to be done to those who had mocked at his being chosen king, he degenerated into a hard, cruel, vindictive man, who had no scruples as to the means He used to seek to murder one whom he unjustly regarded as his enemy. Not a man can be found to offer any apology for his persistent efforts to take David’s life.

Not only did he seek David’s life, but his causeless hatred of David was so great that He slew those who even unconsciously aided David to escape from him, as well as those who worked in any way connected with them. The spirit of murder possessed him. Eighty-five innocent and defenseless priests, with their families, were slaughtered by Saul at one time, because one of their number had been hospitable to David.

What was the cause of this? What had they done to Saul, that so roused his enmity?—Nothing whatever; he had been Saul’s faithful servant, and Saul had loved him for his good qualities. One little thing led to this train of murders. When Saul and David were returning after David had slain Goliath, the women came out with instruments of music to celebrate the victory, and sang, “Saul hath slain his thousands and David his ten thousands.” 1 Samuel 18:7. That was enough; envy and jealousy took possession of Saul; “and Saul eyed David from that day and forward.”

Hear what he said: “They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands.” 1 Samuel 18:8. Well,

what of it? No fact was altered by what they said. David himself had laid no claim to any honor. If Saul had been more valorous than David, the song of a few women would not affect the fact; and if he had not, then the envy was so much the more causeless.

But self-love is an extremely sensitive plant. We naturally have an exaggerated sense of our own ability or importance. Then we are anxious to have others think better of us than we know ourselves to be; and if they should by any chance estimate us below our real value, that is fatal. How often we see Saul's pettishness duplicated. One person is offended because another is preferred before him. Somebody is given a position which he thinks he ought to occupy. "I'm as good as he is," or, "I'm not treated fairly," is said or thought, and bitter feeling is cherished against the favored one, who may be entirely innocent of any self-seeking.

Now just as surely as Saul sought to kill David, and murdered many innocent people in his mad attempt, just so surely is there murder in every man's heart when he becomes soured because somebody else is honored, and when he has a feeling of envy against one who occupies a place which he thinks he himself ought to have. Hear what the Word says:—

"If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work." James 3:14-16.

There we have the truth of the matter. The individual whose feelings are ruffled because he is named second, or has to accept an inferior place, has in his heart not only murder, but "every evil work." And withal there is some discontent and dissatisfaction that do not cease even when the coveted honor is gained. Only wisdom's ways are pleasantness; and the word of wisdom is, "Be kindly affection to one another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another." Rom. 12:10.

Although quieted for awhile Saul's jealous, unreasoning anger was again raised against David, and this time he concealed his intentions from Jonathan. But David learned of his peril and, meeting Jonathan, told him what Saul was doing. Jonathan would not believe that his father could be so treacherous, and it was not until Saul, in his anger at David's escape, cast his javelin at his son, that Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. He met with his friend for the last time, so far as we have any record, "and they kissed one

another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded." 1 Samuel 20:41.

"And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever." 1 Samuel 20:42. So they parted, Jonathan returning to the city, David going forth to seek a refuge from the hatred of the king.

Scripture tells of Jonathan's death on the battlefield at Gilboa, together with two of his brothers and his father. We may think it sad that Jonathan's life should not have been set in happier times, and that the closing years should have been embittered by his father's enmity against his dearest friend, but we may hope with confidence that he had learned like David the lesson of trust in God. "Commit thy way unto the Lord. Trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass." Ps. 37:5.

Even if the evil seemed to triumph in the life he knew the time was coming when "The meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." Psalm 37:11.

When David learned of the death of Jonathan he mourned greatly, saying, "Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." 2 Samuel 1:23-26.

It reminds me of twenty year old Anne Sullivan arriving in Tuscumia, Alabama to tutor seven year old Hellen Keller. Helen was blind and deaf and could only utter animal-like sounds. At times, Helen would fall into destructive rages. For months, Anne Sullivan tried unsuccessfully to break into Helen's consciousness. Finally, on April 5, 1887, the barrier was broken. Helen was holding a mug under a spout as Anne pumped water into it. Into Helen's other hand, Anne was spelling over and over w-a-t-e-r, w-a-t-e-r. Suddenly, Helen understood. Years later, Helen remarked, "Spark after spark of meaning flew from hand to hand and miraculously, affection was born."

Anne Sullivan gave her life to Helen Keller, in a Jonathan sort of way. By age ten, Helen was writing in French to famous people in Europe. She mastered five languages and went far beyond her teacher in fame and intellect. But Anne Sullivan never lost her loyal devotion to Helen Keller. She sat beside her at Radcliffe, spelling

each lecture in her hand. Just as Jonathan made David into a king, Anne made Helen Keller the queen of her world. Are you a king-maker or a queen-maker to your friends?

Great, however, as was the love of Jonathan for David, it was but a feeble representation of that which Christ bestows on us. So closely has He knit His soul with ours that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He puts upon us His own raiment, "for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." Isaiah 61:10. He equips us with His own weapons and armor, bidding us "put on the whole armor of God," and take "the sword of the Spirit." He is the Son of a King and heir to the throne of the universe, but He left everything and "became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich," and He calls whosoever will to sit down with Him on His throne.

Truly, His love to us is wonderful, passing the love of women. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." Isaiah 49:15. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Jeremiah 31:3. "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you." John 15:9. Indeed to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, is to be filled with all the fullness of God.

Thou didst leave Thy throne and Thy kingly
crown
When Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no
room
For Thy holy nativity.

Thou camest, O Lord, with the living Word,
That should set Thy people free;
But with mocking scorn, and with crown of
thorn,
They bore Thee to Calvary.

Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus!
Thy cross is my only plea;

Oh, come to my heart, Lord Jesus, come!
There, is room in my heart for Thee.

“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever; with my mouth will I make known Thy faithfulness to all generations. For I have said, mercy shall be built up for ever; Thy faithfulness shalt Thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn unto David My servant, Thy Seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations.” Ps. 89:1-4.

Christ is God’s Chosen, in whom His soul delights (Isa. 42:1), and He is the Seed of David. Rom. 1:3. He is “the Root and the Offspring of David.” Rev. 22:16. The tabernacle of David, that is fallen down, is to be built up by the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:14-17), and the throne of David is to be perpetuated to all generations through the resurrection of Christ. Acts 2:29-31. But by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead all who believe are begotten unto a lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. 1 Peter 1:3-5. Therefore the covenant with David, unto which God swore, is the covenant that assures us an inheritance among the saints in light; and so we see that it is identical with the covenant with Abraham, to which God swore by Himself, and which gives us strong consolation and hope of salvation through Jesus Christ. Heb. 6:13, 20.

The Seed of David is the Seed of Abraham, and if we are Christ’s we are a part of this Seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal. 3:29. So we find in the following Scripture the direct promise of eternal life to us: “Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His Seed shall endure for ever, and His throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established for ever as the moon and as a faithful witness in heaven.” As surely as the sun and moon endure, so surely will God give eternal life to every one who trusts Him. His faithfulness is written in the heavens. The sun and moon are witnesses to it.

“When God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself.” Hebrews 6:13. This was not for Abraham’s sake, but for our sake. Abraham did not need the oath for confirmation, because his faith was perfect before the oath was made; but it was given that “we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.” Hebrews 6:18. “God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise

the immutability of His counsel, interposed Himself by an oath.” Heb. 6:17, margin.

Do you realize what is involved in the oath of God? how strong the consolation is? Think of it a moment, and when you have grasped its meaning, you may continue to think of it forever. He promised salvation to every one who would accept it in faith; to all who would simply trust Him to save them. Then He pledged Himself its surety for the fulfillment of the promise. He interposed Himself between us and the possibility of failure, staking His own existence upon the result. When one pledges anything, it is well known that the thing pledged is lost if the price is not paid, or the vow performed. So in swearing by Himself God put Himself in the position where He would forfeit His own existence if His promise should fail.

Let us remember that this promise is to all. “Whosoever will, let him come.” God has chosen the poor of this world. James 2:5. “And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen.” 1 Cor. 1:28. If God’s promise should fail in the case of the poorest or the most insignificant and despised of human beings, that would be a failure just the same as if He should reject the whole world. If one poor soul should come to Him and fail to find forgiveness for a sin confessed, or help in time of need, that would be a failure of God’s promise, to which He swore by Himself, and therefore that very moment God would cease to exist.

Does some one say that it is irreverent to talk about God’s ceasing to exist. It is no more irreverent than it is to talk about His not being able or willing to forgive any sin that is acknowledged, or to provide all the help that any soul needs. Would that all might see that to doubt God’s willingness to forgive is to deny His existence, so that it is the rankest infidelity not to accept pardon, or to doubt that God helps in every time of need.

And now what constant assurance have we before our eyes that God lives, and that therefore His promise is sure?—His faithfulness is written in the very heavens. “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these, that bringeth out their host by number; He calleth them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and for that He is strong in power, not one is lacking.” Isa. 40:26. The whole universe depends on God. If He should cease to exist, everything would that instant cease to exist. God made the sun, moon, and stars “for signs, and for seasons, and days, and years.” That thing of which they exist as a sign is the faithfulness of God. The sun, moon, and stars are

evidences that God still lives, and as surely as He lives, may we come with boldness to the throne of grace, with perfect confidence that we shall obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. “For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations.” Ps. 119:89, 90.

I have a way I size up other men sometimes. Men do that a lot with each other. It’s probably not very godly. Maybe it’s from the kind of neighborhood I grew up in. I’ll ask myself, “Is that a person I’d want back to back with me in a dark alley surrounded by a bunch of thugs?” Most often it’s not the biggest or the strongest person, it’s the most loyal. I know some scrappy women who’d do just fine, too. It all comes down to loyalty.

I think sometimes we look upon fellowship in the church as the sweet frosting on the cake. It’s nice, but not as important as the real business of the church which we see is to go out and change the world through the power of the Gospel. Let me tell you what I have learned firsthand over ‘lo these many years’ of ministry: Friendship is what launches us into mission. It’s the quality of the friendships in our congregation.

People who are bound together by loyal love will take on huge challenges which we would never think of taking on by ourselves. We see this all the time among soldiers in war.

General William Westmoreland was once reviewing a platoon of paratroopers in Vietnam. As he went down the line, he asked each of them a question: “How do you like jumping, son?” “Love it, sir!” was the first answer. “How do you like jumping?” he asked the next. “The greatest experience in my life, sir!” exclaimed the paratrooper. “How do you like jumping?” he asked the third. “I hate it, sir,” he replied. “Then why do you do it?” asked Westmoreland. “Because I love being with these guys who love jumping, sir.” We will sign on for hazardous duty just to be around people we love.

I love being around Jesus and people who love Him, don’t you? I’d sign on for hazardous duty with Him any day because I know Jesus loves me!