

04/03/11

Friend Request #4 – Who's Got Your Back?

- During my sophomore year of high school, I asked my parents if I could transfer to the local Christian high school...and they said yes...
- it turned out to be a great experience for me, and I'll be forever grateful for the way the teachers and students and program impacted my life...
- at the end of our junior year, we had the election for officers and somehow I was elected to be the class president...
- I think it was one of those, no one else would do it kind of things...or perhaps I was standing in line and everyone else took one step backwards...but anyway, that was my office...
- that summer, a couple of weeks before our senior year actually started, a couple of guys from the class asked if they could take me out to lunch...
- I was still kind of a new kid, and they had been at the school a lot longer, and they told me they had been talking to everyone else in the class and they had an idea for our senior trip...
- so we got together, and they informed me that everyone in our class wanted to go to Disney World for our senior trip...and stay several days right there in the park...
 - and then they mentioned that no graduating class from our school had ever been allowed to go on a trip that far, but surely if I would just make an appeal to the school administrator, he would certainly let us go...
- so I set up an appointment with him...and he was a nice enough guy I suppose but somewhat intimidating...
- so I felt like Moses going to talk to Pharaoh asked him to let my people go...only I didn't have a magic staff or a sidekick who was a better public speaker...
- so I explained to the administrator that we wanted to go to Florida on our senior trip and stay several days at one of the resorts and didn't he think that was a marvelous plan?...
- his response was a mixture of laughing, lecturing, teaching, threatening...
- but the sum of it was – no senior class from our school had ever done that...
 - and our class had certainly not stood out as providing exemplary leadership to the rest of the school--in fact we were just a bunch of goof-off's...
 - then he got into the nitty gritty's...
 - he said that we were getting ready to start our all-school candy sale, and he was already concerned because he needed the senior class to lead the effort and he was afraid we were going to drag it down and have a negative impact on the rest of the classes...
 - then he said that the senior class traditionally runs the lunch program for the school which was supposed to fund the senior trip and he was afraid we were going to mess that up...
 - and then he said that we had several seniors in our class who were having a difficult time financially, so even if we figured out a way to pay for the trip that was not a burden on their families...that wouldn't be enough...because the less fortunate kids would also need spending money...
 - then he sat back in his chair and with his body language said – did you have any other questions?...
- I think he almost fell off his chair when I said – how would like to make a deal?
- I still don't know what possessed me to say that, but it certainly got his attention...

- I think his next words were something like, Mr. Viars, I don't generally make deals with students...
- I said...what if the senior class not only shows leadership in the school candy sale, but what if we sell more than any other class in the entire school – that way the school makes more money...
- and what if we run the lunch program so efficiently that we make enough money to pay every last expense for the trip to Florida so it doesn't cost the students, their families, or the school a dime...
- and what if we come up with an optional fundraiser so any student who needs to earn their spending money for the trip...we'll figure out a creative way for them to earn it so they're handed an envelope with cash as soon as they step on the bus?...
- by that time he was laughing at me like I was out of my mind until he realized I was dead serious...then he said – you've got a deal...

- I walked out of there with a feeling I'm often had since – what did I just get myself into?...
- then came time to explain to the senior class what I had just committed us to...
- so one of the first days of school...we had an all class meeting in the gym...I can still picture it...
- and this was back before I learned the art of sweet, non-confrontational leadership...
- so I just laid it for our class...everyone says we want to go to Florida like no other class before us...
- fine, but here's what it going to take...everyone is going to have to work...everyone is going to have to be involved...
- and then, I quoted 2 Thes. 3:10 – if a man won't work, then he can't eat.

- I thought it was a pretty effective speech...until a day or so later one of the girls in our class that I barely knew came up to me and said...Steve, a bunch of people are talking behind your back, they didn't like what you said and they're calling you names, I just thought you should know...

- you know, I've thought a lot about that conversation over the years...
- and I won't get into the details, but let's just say that this particular girl wasn't the most popular girl in school and she certainly could have elevated her social status by jumping into the feeding frenzy about how bad I was...
- but she didn't do that...into today's parlance, we would say it like this...she had my back...she had my back...

- did you know there are examples of that exact same issue in Scripture from both a negative and positive perspective?...
- and this morning I'd like us to look at one of the most powerful ones and ask the question...**Who's Got Your Back?**

- with that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible to 1 Samuel 18...page 216 of the front section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- we're in the middle of a series right now entitled **Friend Request**...what God's Word says about the art of real friendships...
- and this morning we want to deal with the issue of loyalty...how important is it that you're the kind of person who has your friend's back...and how valuable is it when you have friends who treat you that way...
- 1 Samuel 18 is a fascinating place in the Word of God...

- God's chosen people had demanded a king...
- and the Lord made it clear to the prophet Samuel that ultimately the people were not rejecting Samuel as their spiritual leader, they were rejecting God as their source of direction and provision...
- they wanted to be like the other nations, they said...
- so now the people have seen what leadership under Saul looked like...
- they chose him especially because of the way he appeared on the outside – Scripture tells us he was a tall man, and they assumed that would make him a strong leader...
- but then the giant shows up, and you remember that story...where the nation learns very quickly where trusting in human strength and worldly wisdom gets you...
- without trust in the living God, there will always be a bigger nation and a stronger foe...
- then enters young David...who had already been identified by the prophet Samuel as the next king of Israel...
 - and the reason was because of the strength of his character and the purity of His heart...
 - that's where we hear the famous words – man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart...
 - you know the story of David and Goliath...how while big Saul is standing there with David's older brothers and a lot of other men shaking in their oversized boots...
 - David says – I'll go fight this uncircumcised Philistine...
 - who is he to defy the armies of the living God?...
 - I won't get into all the gory details, but suffice it is to say that at the end of chapter 17, David is standing there holding proof that Goliath is no longer among the land of the living...
 - and it's in that setting that a wonderful friendship develops...between David and Saul's son Jonathan...let's listen in...
- read 1 Samuel 18:1-16, 19:1-7, 20:1-42
- we're asking the question, Who's Got Your Back?...and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 characteristics of a loyal friend**.
 - the purpose is three-fold...
 - to ask, are you that kind of friend...are you a loyal person...do your friends know that you have their back?...
 - secondly, to ask...do you have friends like these?...and if so, be thankful, and if not—maybe it's time to pray about and try to find some better friends...
 - lastly, to consider how Jesus Christ chooses to be this kind of friend to each one of His followers, in the three ways we're going to study this morning, and so many more as well...
 - even if nobody else has your back...if you are a follower of Christ, there is no question about the fact that Jesus does...and that is very, very good news...

I. A Loyal Friend Celebrates Your Victories.

- it's very important to think about the theme of the book of 1 Samuel...and also where the story of this friendship fits into the overall context of the book...
- essentially Jonathan has a decision to make...
 - it's nice when you don't have to take sides in a particular situation, but let's face it – frequently you do...

- and was he going to side with his father who approached life with human charisma and worldly wisdom...
- or was he going to side with this young shepherd boy who had an incredible faith in God?...
- and now that David had killed Goliath...was Jonathan going to be jealous, or was Jonathan going to be loyal?

A. Don't forget that Jonathan was in line to be king.

- David's victories could have been a real threat to him...
- but why?...there's no question that what David had just accomplished was of God...
- and David was sure that everybody understood that...
- **1 Samuel 17:45-46 - Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. "This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,**
- so who was it that gave this victory to David?...no question about it at all...
- so as long as Jonathan believed that God was worthy of His trust...then there was no reason for him to question who God used and who he didn't...
- and see, God's people are forever comparing what God has given to other people and being jealous or judgmental instead of simply rejoicing...
- do you remember after the resurrection of Christ in John 21...
 - when Jesus is standing on the shore and the disciples are out fishing and have caught nothing...
 - and Jesus asks them what they've caught – at that point they don't recognize Him, after all, in their minds Jesus had died and that was the end of the story...
 - but then the Lord tells them to cast their nets on the right hand side of the boat...and they do and catch a large number of great fish...
 - the Lord then makes them a great breakfast and restores Peter by allowing him three opportunities to say that he loves Christ to match the three times he denied him earlier...
 - then Jesus tells him that he will have the privilege of feeding his sheep...and he even explains that he will have the privilege of dying for his faith...
 - and then Peter made a colossal mistake...
 - he looked over at John and said – and what about him?...
 - and Jesus said – what is that to you?...
 - if I allow him to remain unto the end – what is that to you?...you just follow me?...
 - and many of us have trouble doing that...
- we're so busy comparing what God has given everyone else...and how they're blessed...and instead of celebrating...we start envying them...here's the principle:
- B. To be a loyal friend, you have to avoid the sin of jealousy.**
 - you have to like it when God blesses one of your friends...even if at this moment, it appears that He's blessing them more than He's blessing you...
 - Paul said it this way – **Romans 12:15 – Rejoice with those who rejoice...**
 - and that's why some people will never be a loyal friend...

- and this is a powerful issue – Scripture says this...**Proverbs 27:4 - Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, But who can stand before jealousy?**
- **James 3:14-16 - But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**
- some of you know that our church along with a number of other organizations and Christian leaders have been working to develop an organization called the Biblical Counseling Coalition...
- and at this point we just have what amounts to a placeholder website, but there is some good information on-line already including our doctrinal and confessional statements...
- but the goal is to find ways strengthen relationships between the different people and organizations involved in using God's Word to help people...
 - believing that God is honored by unity among His people and that together we can accomplish more...
 - so we want to promote one another's ministries and share best practices...
- it has been and continues to be a fascinating journey...
- and some great victories have been won, but I have been reminded again in some very fresh and real ways that many of God's people prefer to live in the world of "I'm the only one..."
 - and they don't to celebrate the victories that God is giving to other people...
 - and instead of loyalty in the family...many times it's the polar opposite...
 - it's not having your friend's back, it's stabbing your supposed friend in the back by finding something to criticize and then present that person's views in the worst possible light...
 - that's exactly what James is talking about – bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in ones heart...and when that exists, there is disorder and every evil thing...
- thankfully Jonathan was not liked that...because he had...
- C. Learn the art of celebrating with people when they succeed.**
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:11 - Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.**
 - in other words, celebrate the good things that God is doing in their hearts and lives...
 - how do you respond when one of your supposed friends is able to buy a new car, or a new house?...
 - do you celebrate, or do you become jealous...
 - if the subject comes up with some of your other friends when that person is not present, do you celebrate for them and with them?...or do you find some reason to criticize them or discredit their success?...
 - and if you say, well—it's not that pretty of a house, PV....or it's really more than they can afford...
 - stop – do you hear what that really is?...bitter jealousy and selfish ambition...
 - learn the art of celebrating when people succeed, and encourage them to their face and behind their back...

D. Jesus is this kind of friend.

- there's no question about this...Jesus was regularly looking for occasions to build others up and point out the good things they were doing...
- there are examples in Scripture everywhere...
- **Luke 21:1-4 - And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."**
- He looks for occasions to celebrate your victories...
- that's true – that's one of the reasons Scripture refers to Christ as **Romans 8:29 – "...the firstborn of many brethren."**
- and when you and I do something that pleases the Heavenly Father, how do you think Jesus responds to that...
 - with jealousy...Oh I wish the Father was only pleased with me...not on your life...
 - it's a whole lot closer to...way to go, bro...
 - He's the firstborn of many brethren...and when one of His followers experiences some victory...that's a win for the team...it's a win for the family...
 - and it doesn't matter right now which member of the family actually hit the home run...
 - the whole team benefits...
- [Ken Elgena, our homiletics professor, a great preacher in his own right, teaching 19-19 year olds how to preach, always had a huge smile on his face encouraging you on like it was the greatest sermon he'd ever heard...you knew he wanted you to succeed too]...
- words like that, and friends like that can have a powerful influence...
- **Proverbs 18:21 - Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.**

- here's a question – are you this kind of friend?...
 - like Jonathan...who celebrated David's victories?...
 - and has that made you a person who's loyal and devoted to your friends...when they're present and when they're not...
 - or have you allowed bitter jealousy and selfish ambition rob you of this opportunity?

II. A Loyal Friend Holds You Accountable.

- did you notice that...

A. David invited this kind of accountability.

- **1 Samuel 20:8 - Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is iniquity in me, put me to death yourself; for why then should you bring me to your father?**
- it's not just a matter of celebrating what's right, it's also a matter of speaking honestly to you...to your face...about ways you might have been wrong...
- a relationship without that component is not a biblical friendship...
 - whether it's a marriage...
 - or a parent-child relationship...
 - or men and women in a church...

- people relating to one another in whatever way you can name...

- if there's not a willingness to invite confrontation when you're wrong...and give confrontation to the other person when you think they might have been wrong...whatever that relationship is – it's not a biblical friendship...

B. This is another example of how two are better than one.

- we saw this verse last week...

- **Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 - Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.**

- well, what kind of fall is envisioned there?...falling in a mud puddle?...

- no, if you've fallen spiritually, you need someone who will be honest with you, and you need to respond in a way that clearly communicates that you invite that kind of input in your life...

- that means...

C. Good friends speak honestly with one another.

- **Proverbs 27:6 - Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.**

- now, do you think...

D. Jesus is this kind of friend.

- is that true?...

- Did Jesus confront His disciples when necessary?...

- **Matthew 16:22-23 - Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid *it*, Lord! This shall never happen to You." But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."**

- does He do that with you and me?...

- absolutely – **John 15:14-16 - You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.**

- I've conducted this conversation on the assumption that there's been a definite time in your life that you've trusted Jesus as your Savior and Lord—that Jesus really is your friend. If you're not in that position, I hope that today you'll trust Him as your Savior. He died for us to make it possible for us to have a dynamic relationship with Him.

III. A Loyal Friend Protects You From Harm.

- that's the bottom line of what happened in this story...

A. Jonathan was willing to sacrifice his safety and reputation to watch out for David.

1 Samuel 20:41-42 - When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David *wept* the more. Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.' " Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city.

- Can I ask you – are you this kind of friend?...
 - do you friends know that you have their back?...that there's no question about your loyalty?
- On our way to Chicago this week, as we passed my home town of Gary, Indiana, Pastor Bob Leffew asked me what motivated me to ask my parents if I could attend Christian school at that point in my life. The reason: among my unsaved friends in my subdivision, whichever friend didn't happen to be there on a given day, that's the guy we ripped on. The next day, we ripped on the next guy who wasn't there that day. (And of course, I started wondering what happened on days I wasn't there.) Around that time, God allowed me to meet some guys from the local Christian school. What I noticed about them was that they really loved God, and didn't have to do bad things to have a good time. What really impressed me was that they were loyal to the people who were there, and to the people who weren't. They had their friends' backs. God used that to draw me to Himself. Are you that kind of a friend?
- For those who are married: Are you that way with your spouse? Often the person who is most disloyal is one's spouse. You should present your partner perfect in public. Work out your problems face-to-face, and if you can't do it yourself, get counsel from somebody at the church. If you're disloyal to your spouse, ripping them down in front of others, shame on you, and you should repent quickly. If you're going to be loyal to anybody, it should be to your honey.

B. Jesus is this kind of friend.

- is there any doubt about this one?...
- we're moving into the time of year when we especially think about how Jesus not only protected us from harm, but He stood in our place and received the harm we were due because of our sin...
- **Romans 5:7-8 - For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**
- Jesus didn't die because we were already His friends---He died so that that someday we could become His friends...that is a significant difference...

And what about now, when we fail?...

- does Jesus exploit our weaknesses?...

- 1 John 2:1-2 - My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for *those of* the whole world.