

Being A Source of Blessing to Your Friends

An excerpt from

The Gift of The Blessing

By Dr. John Trent and Gary Smalley

We constantly meet people who “wish they had a close friend.” Many of those same people would not have to make that comment if they knew how to be a “close friend.” We discovered in studying the blessing in the Scriptures that an important part of becoming a close friend is to apply each element of the blessing in a friendship.

In all the Scriptures, perhaps the most universally acknowledged model of a close friend is Jonathan. His relationship with David is a graduate course in what makes a lasting relationship. These two young men were not a likely pair to strike up a friendship.

Jonathan was the heir apparent to his father’s throne. He was also a mighty warrior in his own right. He led Israel’s armies in battle and even attacked twenty Philistines with only his armor carrier to back him up and defeated them all (1 Sam. 14:6- 14). David and Jonathan first met just after David had slain Goliath. With all the attention David was getting, Jonathan could have looked at David as an arch rival and enemy. Yet we are told in the Scriptures that “the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1).

One reason that their friendship was unique is that it was a friend-to-friend relationship that included, and models for us, every aspect of the blessing. Without the fear that exists today among men of appearing like homosexuals, David and Jonathan demonstrated meaningful touching in their friendship. In their last meeting, Jonathan had to tell David it was no longer safe for him to be around his father, Saul. We read that they “kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so” (1 Sam. 20:41).

While men giving each other a kiss and crying in each other’s arms is almost taboo in our culture, it was not considered strange in ancient Israel nor is it unusual in many foreign countries today. Friends in these cultures demonstrate their love for each other with a kiss or a hug.

A friend today will include meaningful touching in blessing his or her friend. Withholding a hug or even a handshake from a friend can freeze that relationship at a surface level.

In giving us another picture of what it means to be a close friend, Jonathan spoke of his appreciation for David and placed high value on him. Let’s look back on Jonathan’s actions toward David when they first met.

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David certainly stole the spotlight on that day. Yet we are told that “Jonathan took

off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor” (1 Sam. 18:4). A warrior only lays down his weapons in front of someone he considers his better. Jonathan placed such high value on David that he was willing to sacrifice his symbols of authority (his armor and his robes) in order to honor his friend.

Jonathan also made a verbal covenant with David that he would be his close companion for life (1 Sam. 20:13). He said to David, “The LORD be with you as He has been with my father.” No words of blessing were spared in what Jonathan said to David.

The last words Jonathan spoke to David illustrate his active commitment to David and his desire that God bless David in the future. “May the LORD be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever” (1 Sam 20:42). Who are your true friends? Just think a moment about someone in your life who has been an intimate friend. Almost without exception, a close friend will be someone like Jonathan, a man or woman who has demonstrated each aspect of the blessing in his or her relationship with you. A close friend will be someone like Larry, who decided to provide each element of the blessing to his boss, Glenn.

Glenn was not an easy person to befriend. For one thing, Glenn didn't seem to need any friends. He was a tremendously successful businessman who always seemed on top of everything. Also, Glenn had been trained in the old tradition of maintaining professional distance from his employees and competitors. “Don't let anyone get close” was the unspoken motto Glenn lived by, that is, until the day his teenage son was picked up for selling illegal drugs to his classmates.

In order not to be taken advantage of by others, Glenn had built a wall around himself at work and at his church. He was constantly around people, yet he had no close friends. Glenn didn't even know how to be a friend to his wife or children. The rebelliousness of his son and Glenn's total ignorance of his son's drug problem graphically pointed that out to him.

Now, in a time of dire need, Glenn needed the emotional support of a man he could pour his heart out to; and no one was there. No one was there until Larry noticed that something seemed wrong with his boss and decided that Glenn needed a friend, in spite of his non-verbal language that said just the opposite.

Larry was already an accomplished “Jonathan.” He knew the importance of supplying another person with the elements of the blessing, and he had a number of

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close friends. But befriending Glenn was a different matter. He was his boss, and besides, Glenn certainly did not look as if he wanted any company.

Day by day, watching Glenn suffer in silence, Larry became convinced that he needed to befriend him. Their friendship began one Tuesday morning when Larry gathered up his courage, walked into Glenn's office and laid his hand on Glenn's shoulder. "Hey, old buddy," Larry said, "you just don't seem to have been yourself for a while. I may be way out of line, and you can tell me so if you want, but you seem to be really hurting. I just want you to know that if you ever need somebody to talk to, I'm around". Larry expected to be dismissed with a curt rebuff, but instead Glenn didn't say a word. Finally, after a long pause, he looked up at Larry, close to tears, and said, "I'll remember that, Larry. Thanks a lot."

Larry thought that was the end of things when a few days went by without hearing from Glenn. However on Friday, his secretary gave him the message that Glenn wanted to have breakfast with him one day that next week.

During that meeting, Larry listened, and listened, and *listened* to Glenn pour out a heart full of hurt. Larry didn't try to lecture Glenn, nor did Larry try to lessen the emotions that were present by saying, "Well, it's not all that bad" or "You're a Christian, Glenn, just pray about it." When Larry heard Glenn share the heartbreak that only comes when dealing with a rebellious child, he cried with him. The only time Larry remembered saying more than a sentence or two was when he prayed a short prayer with Glenn in his car after their breakfast.

Over the next several months, Larry met every week with Glenn to listen, talk, and pray about Glenn's relationship with his son. Larry couldn't directly relate to Glenn's hurt (Larry's children were just entering grade school), but he could still shake Glenn's hand and let him know that day or night, he had a friend he could turn to. An interesting thing began to happen around the office as a result of Larry and Glenn's meetings. Glenn actually began to soften a little in his strict rule of professional distance. For the first time in years, Glenn had a friend who cared about him, and the result was that he was rediscovering how to be friends with others again.

Through Larry's providing each element of the blessing to his boss-by shaking his hand or patting Glenn on the back (meaningful touch); in speaking encouraging words to Glenn (spoken message); through pointing out the positive character traits that Glenn did have and the way he was trying to make a fresh start with his wife and the other children at home (attaching high value); by providing him with the hope of

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a special future that God could bring to pass regardless of how his son responded (special future); and by committing himself to be available to his friend when he needed someone to talk to (active commitment)-these two men's hearts began to be knitted together.

Things finally did get better with Glenn's son and as a result Glenn had two things to thank the Lord for. One was the new way his son responded to him as he began to become a better friend to him, and the other was an employee named Larry who had taught Glenn about genuine friendship by modeling for him the elements of the blessing.

Understanding the relationship elements of the blessing can communicate parental acceptance to a child, enrich a marriage, and deepen a friendship. But that is not all. The blessing can also provide helpful guidelines for a church family to use in remaining or becoming a place of blessing; both to those outside the church and especially to those within.

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