



**Saint John United Methodist Church**  
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**Message for February 5, 2023**  
**"Health Assessment: Relationships"**  
**Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb**  
**Scripture: Proverbs 17:17, 18:24, 27:17**

## **Speaking to Real Life**

The Book of Proverbs speaks to real life and, as you know, there is nothing more real in life than the relationships we have. There is nothing more gratifying, nor more challenging. Over the next two weeks we will be talking about relationships--friends **and** family. Not surprisingly, the Book of Proverbs has something to say about those relationships as does the rest of scripture.

Hear then these three proverbs:

*"A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity."* (Proverbs 17:17)

*"Some friends play at friendship, but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearer kin."* (Proverbs 18:24)

*"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."* (Proverbs 27:17)

## **My Good Friend David Jones**

David Jones and I were fast friends growing up. We did everything together—sports, spending the night, stuff at school. He was a great athlete. I was along for the ride. I used to catch for him when he practiced his pitching. He was always low and outside and my knees were constantly bruised because of it. Such is the cost of friendship. It was good to have a friend like David.

Things didn't always go swimmingly though when it came to our friendship. Every now and then we'd have the occasional dust-up. I remember one instance when we got into it. I really don't remember what it was about. I do remember the outcome.

As I said, David was quite the pitcher. If he wasn't throwing baseballs, he was throwing ice cubes, particularly when he was upset. I remember standing in the middle of the street with David on his porch—ice in hand. I dared him to throw it, knowing he would never hit me. Let's put it this way, he wasn't low and outside. The ice cube cracked me on the forehead, and I went home holding back the tears.

Such is the way of friendship, every now and then, even with those friendships that are extra close.

## **Blessed by Many Good Friends**

As I said last week, *"We were not created to go it alone."* We were built to be in relationship, and friendships are a big part of that equation.

When it comes to our use of the word, *“friendship,”* we just toss it about and use it lightly. Other times, we use it to refer to those relationships that add value to life. I’ve heard it said, *“You should consider yourself blessed if you have one or two really close friends.”*

Author Susan Hinton coined the phrase when she wrote, *“If you have two friends in your lifetime, you’re lucky. If you have one good friend, you’re more than lucky.”* (S. E. Hinton)

I’ve been blessed down through the years with any number of friends—classmates in school, college buddies, and a whole host of people from the various churches I’ve served. Many of those friendships have endured despite time and distance. Even when we haven’t seen one another for a while we are able to pick up right where we left off. That’s the case with a group of high school buddies I meet with every summer. That’s also the case for a group of guys I meet with from my youth group at my home church. Many of the friendships I have were birthed in the church. There’s just something about a friendship built upon a common faith.

I have a number of close friends in the Annual Conference. Annual Conference serves as a sort of second family to those who move from church to church. Some of those friendships are so close that I will drop whatever I’m doing, whenever they call.

You may remember the Michael W. Smith song where it says, *“And friends are friends forever if the Lord’s the Lord of them.”* I found that to ring true.

### **Relationships Lost**

I have heard it said, *“Friends are like good health; you don’t realize what a gift they are until you lose them.”* Yes, I’ve lost some friends down the line—some by death, some strained by distance, and others where one or the other of us seemed to go in different directions.

I’ve even had a couple of friendships where the other seemed to close the door. That’s hurtful, despite very effort to keep the door open. Sometimes friendships take so much energy to maintain that sometimes the best thing to do is back away.

### **A Good Word from Proverbs**

The proverbs we read just a moment ago speak clearly about the importance of building consistency in the relationships we have. Proverbs 17:17 says that *“a friend always loves; kinsfolk are born to share adversity.”* (Proverbs 17:17) That sort of friend is willing to walk alongside the other, particularly during adversity.

Proverbs 18:24 reads, *“Some friends play at friendships, but a true friend sticks closer than one’s kin.”* (Proverbs 18:24) We are always blessed when friendships do more than scratch the surface.

Proverbs 27:17 puts it this way, *“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”* (Proverbs 27:17) A true friend holds one accountable, is interested in that person’s growth, and wants the very best for his/her friend.

### **Going the Second Mile**

A friend is willing to go the second mile. Again, *“a friend loves at all times.”* (Proverbs 17:17) As we know from experience, going the second mile isn’t always easy.

Back in college I used to give rides to classmates. We would travel from Owensboro to Louisville and back on the weekends. That was during the day when you had to travel Highway 60 the whole way. As you know, Radcliff, Kentucky is about 10 miles south of Highway 60.

I had a friend from Radcliff who often rode with me. He always wanted me to drop him off in Radcliff, instead of having someone meet us on Highway 60. On such occasions I would reply, *“I will go with you the second mile, but I won’t go with you ten.”* How’s that for misrepresenting scripture?

We’d do well to consider the second mile and beyond when it comes to our friendships.

### **Standing Alongside**

A friend is one who stands alongside, despite the twists and turns life may take. A friend stands strong, regardless of what happens. A friend certainly doesn’t *“play at friendship.”* (Proverbs 18:24)

If you are any sort of student of baseball history, you know that Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. Breaking baseball’s color barrier was tough to say the least. Robinson faced the jeers and derision at every stadium he played in.

One afternoon while playing in his home stadium of Brooklyn, Robinson committed an error. The fans ridiculed him mercilessly. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. In the mix of that Louisvillian Pee Wee Reese famously came over and stood next to him. Reese put his arm around Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

### **Ready to Forgive**

A friend is always ready to forgive. Forgiveness offers the sort of resiliency that true friendship demands. Friendship doesn’t mean that everything is going to go swimmingly all the time. It also doesn’t mean you’re going to throw ice cubes either.

Mature, healthy friendships work through things to the place where the friendship is stronger on the other side of a disagreement than before it. *Forgiving and forgetting*” is a hallmark of such relationships.

### **Jonathan and David**

The scripture is filled with stories about relationships—some that have gone south and others that inspire us to this day. One such friendship is the one between Jonathan and David. I Samuel 18:1 shares that *“Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.”* (I Samuel 18:1)

That love was played out on the hard anvil of life. Jonathan was heir to the throne, yet David was clearly God’s chosen in that regard. When Jonathan’s dad, King Saul, sought to kill David in a fit of jealousy, Jonathan did everything in his power to protect his friend, regardless of what it cost him.

Even though Jonathan had a lot to lose, the one thing he wasn’t going to lose was his friendship with David. Jonathan is a real-life example of not *“playing at friendship.”* He went to great lengths to warn David about his father’s intentions. *“Whatever you want me to do, I will do for you,”* Jonathan told David in I Samuel 20:4. By protecting David, Jonathan knew that for all intents and purposes he was abdicating his right to the throne. His friendship with David meant that much.

Again, *“Jonathan loved David as he loved himself.”* That sort of concern should inspire us in every way and challenges us when it comes to the friendships we have.

- Jonathan put the needs of his friend above his own.
- He was willing to go the second mile.
- He was willing to walk alongside.

## **Barnabas and John Mark**

Another great example of friendship is found in the Book of Acts. Barnabas was a great friend to many and highly regarded by all. His name means *“Son of Encouragement,”* and the scripture leaves little doubt that Barnabas was true to that name.

When Paul and Barnabas struck out to preach the gospel to the Gentile world. John Mark went with them. For whatever reason, John Mark decided to leave them once they reached Pamphylia. Later when Paul wanted to strike out again, John Mark wanted to come along. Paul would hear nothing of it.

Barnabas was on the other side of that argument. He stood with his friend, John Mark, which led to a dispute between him and Paul. Paul took Silas with him, while Barnabas took John Mark to Cyprus. The gospel was spread even though they went separate directions.

The point is this: Barnabas stood his ground as a friend. He was a living example of *“sticking closer than one’s nearer kin.”* (Proverbs 18:24)

Jonathan knew that one misstep didn’t necessarily lead to another. Barnabas was willing to give John Mark another chance.

- Friendships are marked by second chances.
- Friends bear with one another.
- Friends stick with one another through thick and thin.
- Friends forgive and move on.

Barnabas is a shining example of doing just that.

## **A Friend in Jesus**

Not to be lost in this discussion is the fact that *“we have a friend in Jesus.”* It was Jesus who said, *“No one has greater love than this, than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”* (John 15:13)

The words of the song, *“What a friend we have in Jesus,”* ring true. Jesus is the very one who went to the cross on our behalf.

- He bears our *“sins and griefs.”*
- Supports those of us *“cumbered with a load of care.”*
- And gives us peace in the mix of the *“needless pain we bear.”*

Jesus says this in John 15:14-15, *“You are my friends, if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from the Father.”* (John 15:14-15) There is no greater gift a friend could give.

## **This Week's Prescription**

Let me encourage you to do a couple of things as a prescription for the friendships you need to nurture.

- Reach out to your friends and let them know what they mean to you.
- Consider starting some new friendships.
- And, of course, be sure to reach out to your friend, Jesus.

## **Friendship with Christ and One Another**

The meal we are about to share awakens us to the abiding relationship we not only have with Christ, but with one another. There is both a vertical and horizontal reality at play here.

As we come to this table and remember all that God has done through his Son, our relationship with him is strengthened. We do not eat alone, but with our friends, and by so doing, we share true communion.