

THE GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP + + +

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Who's got your back? No, like for real, who's got your back? Like if you were to think about, in a dark night of the soul, you could just call them up and you'd actually expect them to show up at your house and it doesn't matter what time of the day it is, who's got your back?

I venture to say that we might think we have folks that would do that, but I wonder what would happen if you actually took stock of the level of that relationship, because I think one of the reasons why there's such a loneliness epidemic here and outside of the church is because we feel like we have a lot of deep relationships, but actually most of our relationships are ridiculously conditional and superficial. They're based off of situations rather than depth, and here's what I mean.

If you want to test how deep your friendship is, if you're a student, wait until you graduate from high school, and you guys go off to different schools. That will test whether that person really has your back or not, and this isn't just for students. You know, as adults, the majority of our friends are going to come from two places, work or whatever sports team our kids play on, because that's where we spend the majority of our time. Test that relationship. Get a new job. See how deep those old relationships were. I think you're going to be disappointedly surprised.

Wait until your kiddo's not quite as good as the other kiddo, and they go to the club AAU team, and you're stuck doing rec league, and see how deep that relationship is. It's just going to be sad and disappointing. So who's got your back? It is absolutely crucial in life, in faith, in Jesus, that you actually can have a person's name that actually fulfills that role for you. Because I tell you what, you have people that are actually gunning for you. They are looking to take you down. They're not looking to build you up. That's why you need to have someone have in your back, and so I'm going to start with a story about what does it look like? Why is it so important for someone to have your back in life and death scenarios? And maybe, just maybe, we can evaluate our relationships based off of that story, and how critical it is to have someone watch our back.

So this story takes place in 1969 in Elephant Valley in Vietnam. One of the most prolific snipers of that time, his name was Carlos, gets dropped behind enemy lines. He and his buddy, John. John's the spotter, Carlos is the sniper. Now they get behind enemy lines, Carlos does exactly what he's supposed to do. He takes out his target. But in the moment of the target being taken out, all those soldiers who were opposing the North Vietnamese, they reacted to the shot. And so they came out to the area where both Carlos and John were hunkered down in their ghillie suits, but they couldn't quite figure out where Carlos and John were located. So they just kind of did a circle around them.

Now keep in mind, they're behind enemy lines. There is no help for them. They only have each other's backs, and that's the only way they have the potential to survive this ordeal. And so they set themselves up where Carlos could lay prone on the ground, and Burke had a shot where he could see just about the whole field of engagement. And what they would do is they would wait till certain soldiers would turn their back. John would tap Carlos, Carlos would shoot and take him out. And they

would wait. John would watch Carlos's back, they would wait for another soldier to turn their back, and Burke would see that that soldier had turned, tap, shoot. And they went through this for days, tap, shoot, tap, shoot, as they slowly but surely actually then made their way back to safety.

Carlos ends up becoming one of the most prolific snipers in the United States military. But he brings himself and his ability to even be alive to have that kind of prolific nature to that experience, where he said, if it wasn't for Burke, if it wasn't for Burke having my back, I wouldn't have survived one day of that gunfire.

All right, so now you see a picture of how important it is for someone to have your back. So when someone asks you that question, you actually have a name that you know has got you. Because all too often, we don't. And we're exposed to so much that's around us. And here's why.

So there's this thing as a shooter, so I'm not military or anything like that. I'm a deer hunter. And what you do as you shoot is generally you start with both eyes open, it's called a stereoscopic view. And you're able to track as the deer comes into your field of vision. But there's a point where you actually take the scope, you occlude your one eye, I'm right eye dominant. So I'm going to close my left eye, and I'm going to put these crosshairs on my target.

Now here's the thing. And this is called the sniper's paradox. By nature of me closing my eye and having incredible focus, downrange, where I could count the antlers on that buck, and I could tell you if it's early season, because I still see some velvet. By the nature of being that laser focused, I can't see three feet to my left. And I can't see three feet to my right. And I certainly can't see anything that's coming behind me. You get what I'm saying? That's the sniper's paradox.

So what that means is you could be focusing on the most godly target possible. And you could be laser focused, and you could be able to see everything coming into play. But the moment that you squint the one eye closed and look all the way downrange is the moment you can't see coming what's to your left, right, or behind you.

And we wonder why so many stumble and fall in Christianity. How come you couldn't see that coming? We often say as we read the story about pastors being attacked, about Christian leaders in prayer warriors falling into temptation, do you want to know why? They were so laser focused on their target. They didn't see the threat that was all around them. And nobody had their back. So where's your target? What are you focusing on? But then also who's got your back?

Because here's the thing, we're going to continue to fail in the same spectacular ways in front of the public if we continue to live the lives that we've always lived. If we continue to live life with nobody watching our six. And if those relationships are as shallow as we think they are, the moment that our life begins to crumble, guess what? You and I, we're going to find ourselves as alone, if not more so, than those who don't even have Jesus. And your life is not meant to be alone.

That's what the sermon series is all about. Last week, we learned from the character of Elijah. Do you remember that? Where he worked for the Lord and he thought he was all alone, but we found that Jesus's presence was there. The Lord's presence was there for Elijah. So he knew he was not alone. But because the Lord's presence was there, he also showed Elijah he had this great community planned out for him, 7,000 faithful people to help support him and move the mission of the Lord forward.

This week, we're going to see what that healthy community actually could be built like. So that throughout the sermon series, you can actually take week by week and rebuild what a healthy, thriving life looks like for you in a community.

Because this week, we're going to start with two, and we're going to see the story of David and Jonathan. Next week, you're going to learn about brothers and sisters have got to be able to protect you and be able to go to battle and war with you. Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. We're going to build that from just being you and the Lord, to you and another trusted spotter in your life, to three now into that community, to make sure that we are built up together in a healthy, good community.

After that, we're going to talk about, oh, there's some bad stuff in our communities. And maybe we should check that by looking at the character of Rehoboam and how he built a terrible community, even though it looked like it was supposed to follow the Lord. Week after that, we're going to say, what then do you build on? We're going to see the character of Josiah, and he's going to talk about what the word of the Lord does to a community as it's thriving and growing in his promises.

And then on the very last week, you're going to see, this is what the whole premise, the whole point of having a good Christian community is about. It's all about, guess what, spoiler alert, Jesus, the good shepherd who gathers those who are scattered. They're going to look at your life, and they're going to look at your community, and they're going to want to have a part of that. And you're going to be able to share Jesus so that they too could live a life that's not alone.

And for this week, we're going to dive into a life with two, with the characters of Jonathan and David. So we're going to start with 1 Samuel chapter 18. We're going to see the spotter and the shooter in Jonathan and David.

So after David had finished talking with Saul, now remember, Saul's the king, David is anointed to become the king, even though in the family life, he's not actually in the line to become the king. Saul anointed him. David's son, Jonathan, should be the next king in line, except he realizes that his good buddy, David, is anointed by the Lord to do so.

So David finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one spirit with David. Think about that. Remember that term, one in spirit? It's very important for today. It's very important for community. And he loved him as himself. From that day, Saul kept David with him and didn't let him return to his father's house.

Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and he gave it to David and he gave him his armor and even his sword. And get this. This is why we work in this idea of like shooters and spotters and stuff. Jonathan was a shooter. Jonathan was an archer and he gave David his bow and his belt. He's giving up all of his weapons because what he's doing is he's saying, David, these weapons are to fight for you. They're for your fight. And my job is to get you back. I don't need a weapon anymore because my job is to look over you.

And that word one in spirit, it's this awesome, rugged word. It has to do with like building. We here became one in spirit with David or some other translations say like to knit together. But actually this word is kashar. It's like mortaring together two giant stones to make a sturdy wall.

And what cool picture could we get for like a spotter and a sniper or two friends walking together to be sturdy and solid together because they've been mortared together, knit together in one spirit so much so that they're going to share their equipment, but they're also going to share knowledge. And that's one of the other aspects of the sniper and the spotter relationship.

So every duo that's going to go out is going to go out with a dope book. Dope. Now I know that most of you know, my first church was in Southern California, not that kind of dope book. Very, very different. Dope in terms of shooting, whether it's military or hunting, whatever it is, it's data on previous engagements.

And so when you shoot, you realize that like different rifles will function in different scenarios. And you actually have to have a lot of that written down so that you know, if you're going to go out and it's dry, your rifle is going to function in one way, but you could take it out. And you could know that over a long shot, if you're trying to shoot through water, even the tiny friction of the bullet spinning through water can actually cause it to drop and go a little bit off course. So you need to write that down and have that data on previous engagements.

It's very minute. In fact, elite shooters can shoot like a half a mile to a mile long and they have to do math as they shoot. They have to account for what's called the Coriolis effect. The rotation of the earth in relationship to the rotation of the bullet over a certain distance causes a certain amount of drop.

All of that data has to be written down and shared between the sniper and the spotter. I've been told I don't golf, but I'm told that like golfers have something like this too, right? Like a yardage booklet. You have to know how, you know, like you can, I don't know how to golf, like use your pitching wedge to putt. I don't know, but you can write all of that down in your dope book or your yardage book so that you know how to use your instruments correctly. It's the same kind of idea.

So here's my question for you with Jonathan and with David, Jonathan had all the dope on David. He had all the data on previous engagements. This is what David shared with him. Who's got your notebook? Who do you trust? That's that close of a friend that you might think something in here is shameful, but you can share it with them because you know, they can watch your back so they can open it up and they can say, I see you're struggling with a porn addiction.

And more often than not, this is the kind of thing that nobody shares with anybody else. And guess what happens? It gets worse, but your buddy can say, I got your back. I know where the pitfalls could be for you. Let's start reading the word together. Let's start being in prayer for one another. Let's start actually forming accountability for you. Let me encourage you. Let's get you some actual like mental health so that you can get up out of this addiction through the word of the Lord.

Or maybe that person who actually is looking out for you and has your back says, Oh, I see it now. The outside, when you come to church, looks like you have a whole lot of smiles and the family looks healthy. But if anybody saw what the van ride looked like on the way, they would know a totally different story. Let's talk about that. How do you become a better dad? How do you become a better mom? How do you become a better husband? How do you become a better wife? It's by actually having somebody that'll call you out on it because they know all of your data on previous engagements

and they won't let you slide because they actually care about you enough and love you enough to know that speaking hard words are actually protective for you.

They care about you enough to see it that like you're too laser focused on what's going on in your life, even if they're good things, to know that just right over here is the addiction that's going to cause it all to stumble and fall. But they'll actually tap your back, shoot it, kill it, take it out because you've actually shared with them your struggles. So what's your dope? What's the data that you would rather not share with anybody and start thinking about somebody that you can share that with so it can be killed and removed from your life? That's the kind of code you need to share with a true friend in the Lord, with your one other person.

This code isn't just something that I'm like, I'm just speaking about. There's actually code in the next story between David and Jonathan.

In 1 Samuel chapter 20, things are starting to go pretty awry in the palace. Saul does not like that David is growing in popularity. And so Jonathan, he's got the dope on his dad's fury and anger, and he's looking out for his friend David. And he says, look, don't come back into the palace yet. I got to collect more data before I know that you're safe. But here's our code. You go out into the field and this time I'll be the sniper and I'll shoot. But you interpret my shots as protection for you.

If I shoot and the arrow goes in front of you, it's safe. You can come back. Things have boiled down and you may return to the palace. But if I pull back and I shoot and it goes over you, you know you got to run because my dad's going to take your life. So David positions himself in hopefully a way that he wouldn't get shot by an arrow, which would be a really weird end to that story. And Jonathan pulls back. Let's go. And that code, that arrow flies right over David's head. And just so that David can't misinterpret shot after shot after shot over and over and over David said, he's saying, look, I got the dope on my dad. I could see the blind spots on the other sides of you. You need to run. You need to get out of here.

That's the code that you need to have with that person. Some kind of code between you where they're looking at you and they can send you a text and they can see where your blind spots are and you're going to get harmed. Because sometimes you got to listen to those who God has placed in your lives so that your life doesn't get as jacked up as it could be.

And so we moved to 1 Samuel chapter 23. David had been away from the palace now for some time. He knew that Saul hated him by this point. And while David was at a place called Horesh in the desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul, who was the king that wanted to take his life, had come out to take his life. And so Saul's son, Jonathan, David's buddy, went to David at that city, Horesh, and helped him find strength in God.

Again, put that term in your head. Just hold on to it for a second.

And then Jonathan comes to David and he says, don't be afraid. My father Saul, he's not going to lay a hand on you. Why? Because Jonathan's like, I got your back. I got you. You'll be king over Israel. I'll be second to you. Even my father knows this. And then the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

What you don't know here is that by this time, David's resolve had begun to fail a little bit. Like, God had promised him many years earlier that he was going to become the king. And here he is just hanging out in the wilderness somewhere in a desert. Doesn't look like he's going to become the king. In fact, it looks like he's going to be murdered. And so he needs somebody to come in and support him.

Shooters know this. The longer you have your gun up, the longer you have your bow pulled back, what happens to your front arm? It begins to shake, right? This idea of him helping find strength, remember what we were supposed to put and just keep that there for a second.

It actually meant that David had his hand shaking and Jonathan placed his hand underneath David's hand so that David could hold on to the promise. And that's what a good spotter is going to do for you. Regardless of the dark night of the soul that you're walking through, your spotter, the person who has your back, is going to be the person who holds you to the promises of the Lord despite the current circumstances.

And that's what you get when you have such close people working together as friends that have each other's back.

Jesus addresses this, and this is going to like move us into this beautiful gospel point. Jesus in John chapter 15 says, greater love has no man than this, to lay down one's life for his friends. And I have called you what? I've called you friends.

But see, Jonathan and David were peers. This is what I think we need to understand here. They were looking out for one another, more so Jonathan looking out for David than the other way, but they were still peers. They were friends looking out for one another.

But what we learn about in the gospel is that Jesus calls us friends when we actually saw him as an enemy. Like while we were still against him, he befriended us.

Think about it this way. Like he was watching our back. He was pursuing us. He was attempting protection and care for us. And yet we like intentionally walk into enemy lines. And we just kind of like willfully toy with sin and treat it like a pet that's not going to take us out.

And we expose ourselves as the targets that we are, and the reticle, the crosshairs are right here. But the gospel of Jesus is that he then steps in front of us. He takes the bullet of wrath for us, for you. So all of the dope that is against you actually was pushed into him. That's the story of the cross. That he would take on our sin and die with it.

But here's what's beautiful about him calling us friends and him actually coming out to you and giving you grace.

Galatians 2:20, Paul says it beautifully in this way, that we're knit together like two stones in this amazing wall of faithful service together. He says, it's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. So the bullet hole that was supposed to be right here, Jesus took it, and now that's where he abides.

And we're knit together in such a way that he has recreated me so that I'm called his friend and you're called his friend, but we're also recreated in a way to actually create a healthy community, to actually have Jonathans in our lives.

Because lone wolf in it isn't healthy and it's tested and it fails every single time. But the Jesus way is to have somebody to watch your back.

Get this Mark chapter six, verse seven, he actually shows you what a Jesus looking friend based community looks like as it's woven together.

He called the 12 to them and then he began to send them out two by two, and he gave them authority over impure spirits.

How wonderful does it look to follow Jesus in that way? Church, isn't this what it's supposed to look like? Think about all of the impure spirits that exist within here. Do you want them driven out? Get somebody to walk with you two by two. It's right there in the scriptures. Jesus gives us a means by which impure spirits get driven out of our lives, shot, killed, and removed. It happens two by two.

And here's the thing. I don't want you to think this is like hypothetical and you know, like, isn't that great to probably have somebody in your life? I want to share with you, like I have a spotter in my life and I cannot tell you how many times this brother has scooped me out of dark nights of the soul.

So my buddy's name is Chris and I'll tell you this, Chris and I don't take selfies. We're just not selfie people together.

So I asked chat, I was like, Hey, can you create an image of two brothers in battle of Chris and Seth?

So I took two pictures from Facebook separately and I put them together with that chat prompt. I want to show you what this looks like. Two brothers in battle. Here we go. Woo.

And apparently, apparently he gets three arms because my life is so messed up apparently that he needs to protect me more than anything else. But here's the reason why I don't have any selfies with Chris is because we spend more time with each other trying to be selfless than selfie based, but we're actually looking at the deep levels of spending life together.

So when my boys were in the hospital, who do you think was the first one to drop off his wife's famous baked ziti? Chris.

When I was struggling with my leadership responsibilities in church, because leading in a church, it's amazing and there's celebration and it's wonderful, but there's also a lot of hard times when people you care about in the congregation pass away. Who do you think could actually come out and sit on my back porch and we can talk and pray about it? Chris.

He was my tandem, my two by two.

And on the other way, when our kids played coach pitch together and Chris was the coach and in the fourth inning of one of our kids games, I got a text that said one of our mutual friends, his life was

failing fast. He was on a ventilator that had to remove part of his skull because he had so much pressure inside of his head and it looked like he was going to pass away.

I was able to walk out to the mound, tell him what's going on in the hospital, grab the ball so he could run to the hospital. And then I beamed like eight kids in a row.

But that's what life looks like when you're actually like a tandem, a duo who's being sent out to care for each other, to love one another, to be a Jonathan for a David.

So if you're here today and I don't know, you've got another one and you're giving God thanks for that. Here's what I'd like you to do.

Test that. Don't just take for granted that your one is at the right level right now. None of this, Hey Dave, what do you think of the Seahawks tonight? I don't know Bob, but the Patriots are looking pretty strong.

None of that. That's what a superficial relationship looks like.

Actually go deep, pray with them, share all your dope. Even if it's embarrassing, even if it makes you vulnerable, you need it. This community needs it. Get that one to walk with you.

If it's your spouse, praise the Lord that you trust them. You walk with them. I need you to find one additional person of your same gender because you're going to need somebody to challenge you to be a better husband and to be a better wife. And that's not the responsibility of your husband or your wife right now. You need somebody that's going to watch your blind spots.

But here's the other side of it. Maybe you don't have one, but you want one. You want a Jonathan. You want somebody to watch your back. You want someone who, when you're so laser focused on what's happening, that they actually are protecting you from all sides and you don't have one so far.

That's okay.

Application to this message right now, spend some time in prayer and fasting, asking Jesus to put the name of one person on your heart and that the Spirit would draw you to actually talk to that person. Someone you can share life with, someone you can share all your targets and your goals with. But most importantly, someone that's never going to leave you alone, that will remind you of the promises of God being knit together as one.

Because life is better two by two and life is better when you're never alone. Amen. Amen.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we thank you for examples like Jonathan and David and some of our hearts here are kind of envious, Lord, that we're in a season of life where we don't have that. And so we're just asking you, give us the name, Lord, whoever that is. Give us the strength to go out. Give us the opportunity to be woven together.

And Lord, for those of us who do have a one, a tandem, a duo, we would ask that you just bless us to go even deeper with that person so that others around us, as they see the way that we can operate in life, they want that, they replicate it, and they begin to live life in a community that's not alone.