

More than a Facebook friend

True friends are essential and priceless – so what does it look like to be one of these?

These days, it doesn't take much to call someone your friend. In fact, with a simple click of <ACCEPT FRIEND REQUEST> I can become your friend. But is that really all that's required to become a friend? What does it mean to be a good friend? This study looks at two examples of friendship: David and Jonathan, who were friends as close as brothers; and Ruth and Naomi, who were relatives as close as friends.



Things to do/ Questions to consider

To begin...

- What's your definition of a friend?
(think about why you call some people 'friends' while others are just 'people you know')
- How many friendships do you think you can sustain at any one time?

1. Jonathan & David

The great friendship between David & Jonathan happened at a time when David was a commanding officer in King Saul's army and Jonathan was King Saul's son. David's popularity was growing rapidly, and this made King Saul very jealous and insecure, because he knew his own position was at stake.

Read:

Jonathan relates to his father Saul who is wanting to kill David: 1Samuel 19:1-7
After initially making peace with David (Son of Jesse), Saul again tries to kill him: 1Samuel 20:30-35, 41-42
Jonathan meets David while he is once again fleeing for his life: 1Samuel 23:15-18

- What are some of the ways Jonathan showed friendship to David?

2. Ruth and Naomi

Naomi and her husband were Israelites who lived in the neighbouring country, Moab. Their two sons married Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah. Tragically all three men died, leaving Naomi, Ruth and Orpah without husbands and without any resources. Naomi decided to return to Israel but freed her daughters-in-law from any obligation to help her or go with her. Naomi had nothing she could offer them. She was resigned to the idea that her life would end in poverty and bitterness.

Read:

After the death of their husbands, Naomi tries to stop her daughters-in-law following her Ruth 1:11-19
Ruth meets Boaz, who let her gather grain with his other workers Ruth 2:10-12
A summary end of the story after Ruth married Boaz Ruth 4:13-17

But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."
Ruth 1:16-17

- What are some of the ways Ruth and Naomi showed friendship to each other?

3. Friendship: good intentions and good actions

These two relationships are good examples of friendship in action: Jonathan warned his friend of danger (1Sam19:1-3) and interceded for him with his enemy (19:4-6). Jonathan put his good friend's well-being and future prospects above his own (20:31), and helped him find strength in God (23:16). For Ruth and Naomi, they both showed willingness to forego their own security and well-being for the sake of the other (Ruth 1:11-18).

Jesus also talked about friendship with his disciples (see text box: John 15:12-15). He linked friendship with love, making it very much an expression of the Good News in action.

- From these Bible passages and any further thoughts you've had, would you make any changes to your definition of a friend?
- What would we miss in life if we didn't have friends?

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

John 15:12-15

Consider the data

- Txt message = 160 characters
- Email = 2 KB data
- Photo/snapchat = 2 MB data
- Video = 1 GB data
- Face to face meeting
(including 1000s of subtle facial gestures, body language shifts, voice tone changes and pauses, scent, & eye contact – all in split second actions and reactions)
= ??? TBs of data

What's the quality of most of the communication you have with your friends?

4. Taking stock of our own world of friends

Given your definition of a friend, consider these questions...

- Jesus says we should 'love our neighbour', but does that mean we should treat everyone with the same level of friendship? If not, then what do you think it does mean?
 - How many close, personal friends do you think you need to function well in life?
 - Social media and other forms of communication have made it easier to stay in touch with people who are not in the same location as you. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being able to stay in contact with friends even when we're in different physical locations?
- Take a few moments to consider these questions on your own, then share your reflections as you feel free to do so:
 - I may know lots of people, but am I a *good* friend to at least a few of them? Who?
 - Do I have any *good* friends that I can rely on? Who?
 - Is there a 'next step' I can take to improve one or some of my friendships?

Thought to finish

"Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family" (Prov 18:24 Message Bible). Ruth & Naomi and David & Jonathan gave us examples of people who were willing to make costly sacrifices for the sake of their friends. Jesus, the 'friend of sinners', also showed us the ultimate sacrificial commitment of love for his friends as he shared with them not just his words and his time, but also his very life. These days, it seems as though the word 'friend' doesn't carry with it the same depth of meaning it used to. But in the Bible, the emphasis is on quality not quantity. Spreading yourself too thinly devalues everything. With this in mind, let's bring some good news to our relating: be a *good* friend for someone today.