SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we take a look at one of the greatest examples of friendship in the Bible—David and Jonathan. Jonathan shows us what it means to be a true friend by being utterly committed to David’s well being, by risking his own welfare for the sake of David, and by strengthening him in faith. The example of Jonathan points forward to the truest and best friend of all—Jesus Christ Himself, who redefines friendship and transforms us into the kind of people who can be true friends to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 18:1-3; 19:1-7; 23:15-18
God’s people need godly friendships.

INTRO/STARTER  5-10 MINUTES

Option 1
Friendship is a strange thing nowadays. Just 20 years ago, it would have been seen as the height of exaggeration (not to mention arrogance) for a person to claim hundreds or thousands of “friends.” But today, this is true of almost anyone with a Facebook account.

We have more friends than ever, don’t we? Well, not really. What kind of “friends” are these? A person may have 4,500 Facebook friends, but that person probably doesn’t really know even half of them, or the other way around.

The problem in our day is not that we lack people around us. We cross paths with people all the time. No, our problem is that we lack true friends. We are overly connected, but those connections are incredibly shallow. Our notion of friendship has shifted to the point that it affects even the few friends we do have, leading to us to settle for shallow relationships everywhere.

• When you were growing up, who would you say was your closest friend? What made your friendship so close?

• As you look toward the future, what kinds of friends do you want to have in your life? How can you work to create deeper friendships?

Option 2
For this option, engage students in discussing the number of Facebook “friends” they have. Ask questions like the following: “If you were required to name only one person as your Facebook best friend, could you do it? What if there were different categories, such as ‘close friends,’ ‘good friends,’ or ‘not really friends, but I know them.’ How many of your original friends would be in each of those categories?”

The purpose of this exercise is to encourage students to understand the different levels of friendship with the intention of helping them discover some of the elements that lead to deeper friendships with other people. Wrap up by saying that in today’s session, they are going to discover what some of those elements are, providing an example to cultivate godly relationships in their own lives.
THE POINT

God's people need godly friendships.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **David** - youngest son of Jesse who was anointed to be king following Saul. David is recognized for a number of things, in terms of both his character—he followed God—and his accomplishments—he defeated Goliath, etc.
- **Jonathan** - son to Saul and close friend to David. Even at great cost to himself, Jonathan supported David's rightful claim to the throne

PLOT

In between the unfolding story of Saul and David's reigns as kings over Israel lies an incredible story of a surprising friendship, one that teaches us not only about true characteristics of a genuine friend, but also a glimpse into the type of friendship we have been granted access to through the gospel.
JONATHAN WAS COMMITTED TO DAVID

We saw in the previous session how David was anointed by Samuel and how he stood up to the greatest warrior in the land—Goliath. David brought the giant down with a single flick of the wrist, and with one little stone, David became the prime example of underdog victories for centuries to come.

After David’s victory, he grew in popularity. He was celebrated as a national hero, so much so that Saul—the reigning king—began to worry. Saul saw David as a threat to his throne. Saul might have been paranoid, but he wasn’t dumb. Perhaps he knew the old proverb: keep your friends close and your enemies closer. So Saul decided to place David where he could keep an eye on him, in the king’s palace itself. While David was under “palace arrest,” he met Saul’s oldest son, Jonathan.

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father’s house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. (1 Sam. 18:1-3)

It doesn’t take much knowledge of royal lineage to figure out that this friendship wasn’t an obvious one. As Saul’s oldest son, Jonathan was the king-to-be. Even though Jonathan was next in line, David was the one who had been anointed, the man whom God declared as the next king.

Shouldn’t David and Jonathan be rivals then? Shouldn’t Jonathan see David as a threat? In most cases, yes. But in this story, David and Jonathan become fast friends—with a covenant commitment based in Jonathan’s loving David as much as he loved himself.

Consider the commitment between a parent and a child. A mother commits to love and care for her child and to put her child’s needs above her own, no matter what happens. Especially during the first few years, the child is unable to reciprocate any love that would even come close to the selfless and sacrificial love of the mother. Yet a mother continues the downpour of love for the child. That kind of unrelenting, “I’m always going to be here for you” love we see modeled by a good parent is the kind of commitment we see here between Jonathan and David. Like siblings who stick together no matter what comes, Jonathan and David are committed to each other’s good. Jonathan loved David like he loved himself—a fulfillment of what Jesus would later command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 22:39).
In your world, the word commitment probably doesn’t paint the same picture as the covenant bond we see between David and Jonathan. How can you create this kind of commitment, or covenant, in your friendships? (p. 28, PSG)

What does it mean to love someone as much as you love yourself? How would your relationships look different if you lived this way? (p. 28, PSG)

**JONATHAN PUT DAVID BEFORE HIMSELF**

Covenants are a beautiful form of commitment, but they always come at a cost. Jonathan’s covenant with David, by human standards, cost him almost everything. That’s what sacrifice means—giving up something and committing to something greater. And this is where we see Jonathan risking his own welfare for the sake of his friend.

And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul’s son, delighted much in David. And Jonathan told David, “Saul my father seeks to kill you. Therefore be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself. And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything I will tell you.” And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you. For he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine, and the Lord worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?” And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, “As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death.” And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before. (1 Sam. 19:1-7)

Jonathan had nothing to gain in his relationship with David, but had everything to lose. He lived out his covenant friendship even when things got difficult. When adversity struck David, Jonathan was there. When death seemed certain, Jonathan was there. When the odds were stacked against David, Jonathan was there.

God knows we need friends who are willing to risk their own reputations, their own comfort, or their own welfare for our sake. It’s one thing to have such friends; it’s another thing to be that kind of friend.
As we fast-forward in the story of David, we find him on the run from King Saul. David flees into the desert and moves from cave to cave, running for his life. The friendship of David and Jonathan takes a backseat to Saul’s high-speed chase after David. But every now and then, the author lets us know what Jonathan was up to. And as it turns out, Jonathan was doing whatever he could to strengthen David’s hand and put him in the best position to survive.

David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul’s son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.” And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. (1 Sam. 23:15-18)

In this passage, we read that Jonathan made sure to meet with David and “encourage him in his faith” or “strengthen his hand.” In other words, Jonathan was intentionally seeking ways to strengthen David.

Intentionality, of course, isn’t everything. In fact, intentionality is pointless if it doesn’t have a purpose. After all, your destination in life isn’t determined by your intentions as much as it is by your direction. This is also true of friendship. The people who point you to God and strengthen you to do His will—those are the ones we need. David would be called a man “after God’s own heart,” yet even he needed someone to encourage him.

Friends who strengthen and encourage our faith in God don’t do so by minimizing the problems in our lives. When Jonathan showed up, David was still on the run. Saul still wanted him dead. The fear was still real. But Jonathan provided hope in the midst of the fear. He pointed to a greater promise—God’s promise that David would be the king. And just as David had hoped in God in days gone by, he could continue to hope in His promised future. Jonathan didn’t present himself as the answer to David’s problems. He presented God’s promises as the answer.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY
Here we see David alone and afraid, far from home. But when Jonathan heard about it, he acted. Historians tell us that the distance Jonathan trekked was about 30 miles. That’s an incredibly long walk to check on a friend. But Jonathan knew that a true friend is one who walks in when everyone else walks out. So he walked.
The story of Jonathan points forward to Jesus. Jonathan may be a wonderful example of friendship, but he is only a shadow of our truest Friend. Jesus would fulfill everything that Jonathan hinted at. Like Jonathan, He would serve us at great personal cost to Himself. Like Jonathan, He would come to us in our need—but instead of walking 30 miles, He crossed the gap between heaven and earth. Jonathan gave up his right to the palace to help David get in; Jesus purchased our place in the palace at the cost of His own blood. He made His cause ours, taking our sins and our sorrows and swallowing death in our place so that we could have life eternal. Here is the friend we’ve always searched for—the only one who risked it all, who always strengthens our hand in God, who commits Himself eternally to our good.

**Edification**

Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church’s preaching and teaching of Scripture (Eph. 4:11), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.
GROUP QUESTIONS

God’s Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- When has someone risked something for your sake? What did their actions communicate about their commitment to you? Answers to this will vary.

- When have you shown intentional and consistent kindness to someone, like Jonathan to David? Answers to this will vary.

- The gospel is the greatest act of friendship in history. How does the gospel provide the best model for true friendship? The gospel gives us the clearest picture of friendship by showing us what it is like for someone to lay his life down for a friend. Because Christ befriended us, we should be willing to befriend others in the same manner.

- How has this story affected your view of friendship? What are some ways you intend to become a better friend to those around you? Answers to this will vary.
YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES

HEAD

We don’t have many covenants these days. The closest we have are contracts, but there’s a world of difference between the two. Contracts are limited. The “I” is always foremost with a contract. But when we see our closest relationships in terms of a contract—with the “I” first and foremost”—it’s a disaster. We start assessing people based on whether they meet our needs. If they don’t, we toss them aside for someone or something else. But covenants are different. Covenants start with the needs of the other person. They start with loving someone as you love yourself.

- **What are the ways you can tell that someone is being a friend to you only for what they can receive?** Answers to this will vary.
- **How can you tell that someone genuinely and selflessly cares about you?** Selflessness is best displayed through one’s actions, being an overflow of his or her commitment to putting others first in life.

HEART

Many of us are afraid to open ourselves up to others for fear that they may see our personal flaws and imperfections and walk away. However, if we remember that Jesus said to us, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16), we can have the confidence that Jesus doesn’t call us “friends” because we were the popular ones, the smart ones, or the righteous ones. He calls us friends because of His mercy. Period. This assurance gives us the ability to be vulnerable. We aren’t afraid to open ourselves up to people, as if their judgment is going to destroy us. We’ve already been exposed to someone far more important, and He responded by declaring us His own.

- **What are some ways we try to fake true authenticity with even those closest to us?**
  
  We expose very little about the things going on in our hearts, we play the actor in having people believe we are something we are really not, etc.

- **Why is it necessary to be transparent with our friends in order to have a genuine connection with them?** Being honest about our weaknesses with others is the path to really connecting with them. You can impress people with your strengths, but you can only connect with people through your weaknesses.

HANDS

The world is filled with “passive friends.” You call them, and they don’t call you back. When someone trashes you in public, they don’t step up to defend you. Sometimes, the passivity of a friend can hurt more than something said by someone who’s your enemy. At least with an enemy you’re expecting trouble. But with a passive friend, you end up under the bus time and time again. However, Jonathan was not a passive friend. He took time, spent energy, and risking his own welfare—all to make sure his friend David was strong.

- **What are some examples of passive friendship?** Answers to this will vary.
- **How can we be more intentional in strengthening a friend’s faith in God?** Answers may include things like: praying with and for them, encouraging them with a promise from God’s word, assuring them of God’s love and purpose for their life, etc.
ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK
For this session, refer students to pack item #5—an artistic poster of a sword being forged. This poster symbolizes the way godly friendship can sharpen and edify one’s life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Check out the following additional resources:

• Leader Training Videos
• One Conversations
• Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPKingsSUM16)
• Circular Timeline Poster
• App (for both leader and student)

Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for free online training on how to lead a group visit MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject