

1 Samuel 23

Jonathan is one of the unsung heroes of the Bible. He's the kind of person we'd all like to have as a close friend. Even though he knew David was anointed by God to be the next king (a position that by human standards should have been his), Jonathan was David's biggest encourager. He courageously stood against his father's jealous rage and spared David's life. He rejoiced when David rejoiced and wept when David wept. He was loyal in adversity and protected confidentiality when it would have been to his personal advantage to disclose the secrets he knew about David. He communicated the truth even when it hurt David to hear it.

First Samuel 23 documents the last recorded meeting between David and Jonathan. David was living as a fugitive, and King Saul had sent out yet another army to find and kill him. "And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. 'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.' The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh" (1 Samuel 23:16-18).

Jonathan had searched out David, even at the risk of his own life. In the darkest moment of David's life, Jonathan encouraged David to be faithful and promised that God was still going to honor him. God's will would prevail. David would become king. A good friend finds some way to encourage in tough times.

Pee Wee Reese, the outstanding shortstop for the Brooklyn Dodgers, became good friends with Jackie Robinson not long after April 15, 1947, when Robinson broke the color barrier in the major leagues. Shortly before he died, I asked Pee Wee, who was a life-long resident of Louisville, Kentucky, about a reported experience between the two of them. He verified that it was true.

Since Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play in the major leagues, he was often the victim of abuse. One day, at home in Brooklyn, Robinson had a bad day and committed a costly error at his second base position and the hometown fans began booing.

During a pitching change the fans booed unmercifully. Some shouted racial slurs and obscenities at Robinson who had no place to hide. He walked over and stood on second base, feeling very much alone and under attack.

A friend in need

But in front of thousands of hostile fans, Pee Wee Reese walked over to second base, stood close beside Jackie Robinson, and put an arm around his shoulder. The boos died down, and Robinson was most grateful for a friend who stood by him in adversity. Robinson later said, "That arm around my shoulder may have saved my career."

A loyal friend is one who encourages you in adversity and rejoices in prosperity. But rather than look for someone who will treat you that way, why not seek to be that kind of friend? Find someone who is under the gun and put an arm around his or her shoulder.

Come to think of it, that's what Jesus did for you. He knew you would be under attack from the world, the flesh, and the devil. He came to your side and took your punishment upon himself on the cross. He promises to stand by you in adversity and never leave you or forsake you. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). ■

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Day by Day With the Bible

Use this guide to read through the Bible in 12 months. Follow Bob Russell's comments on the highlighted text in every issue of THE LOOKOUT.

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What Do You Think?

1. When was the last time someone encouraged you in a time of need?
2. When was the last time you encouraged someone?