



Summer of Lies  
Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

- Week 1: LIE: God uses shame to correct me and change me.  
 Week 2: LIE: God is not concerned with my everyday life, only the things I do for Him.  
 Week 3: LIE: Women are not Created to be Leaders  
 Week 4: LIE: You MUST be Married to Please God

Next Week: JUNE 8th

Summer of Lies Series: When Scripture is misunderstood. When Scripture is used to deceive. When Scripture is not studied.

**Lie: God doesn't speak to people today. It was just for biblical times.**

Join the Wednesday Night Crew along with **Pastor Robin**, Pastor Orleen and Michelle Ingram in the auditorium at 6:30PM to face this lie and find His truth.

**Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.**

**Proverbs 18:1** *Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.*

**Proverbs 18:24** *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

**Proverbs 27:6** *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*

**I. WHAT DOES SCRIPTURE SAY?**

**A. Needing God:**

**Psalm 5:7**

*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you.*

**Jonah 2:2**

*"I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.*

**Psalm 18:1-3**

*I love you, O Lord, my strength.  
<sup>2</sup> The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.  
<sup>3</sup> I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.*

**Psalm 18:31**

*For who is God, but the Lord?  
 And who is a rock, except our God?—*

**Matthew 22:36-38**



<sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”<sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.

[Luke 10:27 ESV](#)

And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...

[Deuteronomy 6:5 ESV](#)

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

## B. Needing Friends:

### **Ecclesiastes 4:7-12**

<sup>7</sup> Again, I saw vanity under the sun: <sup>8</sup> one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes[desire] are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! <sup>11</sup> Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

## II. HAVE WE BEEN DESIGNED FOR COMPANIONSHIP?

### A. Scripture

**Genesis 2:18** = Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone;

- Is marriage the only form of companionship?

Exod 33:11, which describes the manner in which Yhwh communicates with Moses:

“Yhwh would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”

Olyan, S. M. (2017). [Friendship in the Hebrew Bible](#) (J. J. Collins, Ed.; pp. 81–116). Yale University Press.

#### ○ David & Jonathan

**1 Samuel 18:1-3** [Bond of brotherhood]

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. <sup>2</sup> And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. <sup>3</sup> Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.

**2 Samuel 1:26** [Funerary Lament]

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;  
very pleasant have you been to me;  
your love to me was extraordinary,  
surpassing the love of women.

In three of the four texts, **the relationship is clearly cast as a covenant**, though the nature of the treaty differs from text to text, with David in the subordinate role in 20:1–10, 18–22, 24–41, and 21:1; Jonathan the vassal in



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20:11–17, 23, 42, and 23:14–18; and a treaty of unclear nature assumed in 18:1–4. The fourth text, 19:1–7, may also suggest a treaty relationship of some kind between David and Jonathan, though this is not entirely clear. In addition to the presence of treaty language, the relationship is also one of brothers-in-law according to the narrative in 18:27: David marries Saul’s daughter Michal at Saul’s invitation.

Olyan, S. M. (2017). *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (J. J. Collins, Ed.; pp. 81–116). Yale University Press.

Cross the boundary? Would the LORD not react to what scripture prohibits just like He did with Bathsheba and the death of the first born?

#### ○ Ruth & Naomi

**Ruth 1:16-18** [Bond of healthy family, sisterhood, familial love]

*<sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” <sup>18</sup> And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.*

It consists of a series of separate statements that commit Ruth to remain with Naomi for life and even beyond, one of which is a declaration formulated in the style of an adoption that embraces Naomi’s people and her god, and another an oath of loyalty to Naomi sworn by Yhwh. Ruth is clearly determined to remain with Naomi for the rest of her life and uses declarations of intent, including an adoption-like declaration as well as oath-taking, to commit herself unalterably to this course of action. Olyan, S. M. (2017). *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (J. J. Collins, Ed.; pp. 81–116). Yale University Press.

**The verb “to cling to” (*dābaq bē-*)** occurs in 1:14, where it is said that Ruth “clung to” Naomi when Orpa left Naomi to return to her people and her god(s). The same verb occurs three more times in the book with reference to Ruth’s gleaning in Boaz’s field. In 2:8, Boaz instructs Ruth to “cling to” (*dābaq im*) his girls who are harvesting grain, meaning to glean closely behind them as they work; in 2:21, Ruth relates Boaz’s directions to Naomi; and in 2:23, she is said to follow them (*dābaq bē-*). Ruth’s “clinging” to Boaz’s female reapers provides her with security out in the field, as Boaz intends (2:9) and as Naomi notes with approbation (2:22); it also provides her with sustenance (2:9). Yet why, through the repeated use of the verb “to cling to,” does the author so obviously establish a link between Ruth’s ongoing and permanent voluntary affiliation with Naomi, an affiliation characterized by emotional engagement and loyalty, and her temporary association with Boaz’s harvesters, which serves utilitarian purposes? Perhaps the use of the verb “to cling to” in both 1:14 on the one hand and 2:8, 21, and 23 on the other is intended to bring into relief the common physical locus implicit in the verb as well as the concrete benefits such a shared location might bestow. Just as Ruth “clings” by choice to Naomi—which means that she will not be separated from her physically, and, by implication, that the two women will support one another and profit from so doing—so Ruth “clings” physically to Boaz’s harvesters for her protection and sustenance.

But Ruth’s loyal clinging to Naomi also brings to mind the clinging of the exceptional male friend to his friend in Prov 18:24. In that verse, this friend distinguishes himself from other friends. While there are friends “for friendly exchanges,” he “clings more closely than a brother.” Clinging is clearly an activity of both intimate friends and close relatives (e.g., brothers) according to Prov 18:24, and in that context, it may suggest a combination of loyalty, close emotional bonding, and physical proximity. The verb “to cling to” in Ruth 1:14 may be similarly intended to evoke the fidelity, proximity, and emotional engagement of both the ideal relative and the ideal friend, roles that Ruth combines in herself at this turning point in the story. Furthermore, the verb “to cling to” may be intended to function as a bridge between an in-law relationship that has been characterized by Ruth’s exceptional loyalty, something Naomi points out (1:8), and a new, voluntary bond, realized by an exceptional declaration of commitment on Ruth’s part. In short, “to cling to” in 1:14 may suggest continuity of commitment as the relationship between Ruth and Naomi evolves from one in which familial obligation was the primary component to



one in which choice is front and center, given that clinging is characteristic of both the idealized family member and the exceptional friend according to Prov 18:24. Olyan, S. M. (2017). *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (J. J. Collins, Ed.; pp. 81–116). Yale University Press.

○ Elizabeth & Mary

**Luke 1:39-56** [Community for the Mother of Christ]

**Elizabeth and Mary**

**Mary Visits Elizabeth**

*<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, <sup>40</sup> and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>42</sup> and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! <sup>43</sup> And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? <sup>44</sup> For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be<sup>[a]</sup> a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”*

**Mary's Song of Praise: The Magnificat**

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,

*“My soul magnifies the Lord,*

*<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

*<sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.*

*For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;*

*<sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.*

*<sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.*

*<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;*

*<sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate;*

*<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*<sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,*

*<sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”*

*<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and returned to her home.*

**Titus 2:3-5**

*<sup>3</sup> Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,*

*<sup>4</sup> and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,*

*<sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.*

○ Jesus & His 12 Disciples & His inner 3

**Matthew 10:1-3**



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*And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction. <sup>2</sup> The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

### **Mark 9:2-6**

*<sup>2</sup> And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, <sup>3</sup> and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one<sup>et</sup> on earth could bleach them. <sup>4</sup> And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. <sup>5</sup> And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” <sup>6</sup> For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified.*

#### ○ **Augustine –**

Philosopher

Augustine of Hippo, (Saint Augustine)

Theologian & Philosopher of Berber

Bishop of Hippo

Numidia, Roman North Africa.

**Born:** November 13, 354 AD, [Thagaste](#)

**Died:** August 28, 430 AD,

**Full name:** Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis

#### **On Friendship:**

Augustine was the first Christian writer to elaborate a theory of Christian friendship. He transformed the classical concept of friendship: **Agreement on all things human and divine** into a concept of:

**Friendship as grace, a bond effected by the Holy Spirit poured out into the hearts of believers, which adds the notes of attraction and delight to the Christian charity owed to all.**

Lienhard, J. T. (1999). [Friendship, Friends](#). In A. D. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (pp. 372–373). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

*Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*

**Proverbs 27:17**

*Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find?*

**Proverbs 20:6**

*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.*

**Proverbs 17:17**

## **B. Social Science**



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Book: **Friends: Understanding the Power of our Most Important Relationships** by Robin Dunbar

- Study was taken of 300,000 patients (large amount)
- Outcome was not measure by how you felt, etc. but by how LONG YOU LIVED.

**Dunbar:**

“Friendship & Loneliness = Two sides of the same coin, and we lurch through life from one to the other.” Page 7

“Friendship is a two way process that requires both parties to be reasonably accommodating and tolerant of each other, to be willing to spare time for each other.” Page 7

“A study of nearly 4,000 men in Australia carried out for the Movember Foundation in 2014 reported that men with few friends and low social support experienced most psychological distress. The ones that were especially vulnerable were those whose friendships were based on nothing more than a common interest, such as a sports club: as participation in the activity fell away, as members married, had children or moved away, so those who remained lost friends, and these weren’t easily replaced. Loneliness is turning out to be modern killer disease, rapidly replacing all the more usual candidates as the commonest cause of death. Why is this?” Page 7

“Perhaps the most surprising finding to emerge from the medical literature over the past two decades has been the evidence that the more friends we have, the less likely we are to fall prey to diseases, and the longer we will live.” Page7

“The big surprise was that it was the social measures that most influenced your chances of surviving, and especially so after heart attacks and strokes. The best predictors were those that contrasted high versus low frequencies of social support and those that measured how well integrated you were into your social network and your local community. Scoring high on these increased your chances of surviving by as much as 50%. Only giving up smoking had anything like the same effect.” Page 9

- Framingham Heart Study by sociologist Nick Christakis and James Fowler  
Community in Massachusetts of 12,000.  
Over 30 years.  
Names their best friends in the community and their health was followed over the 30 years.

**FOUND:**

- Our chances of becoming happy, depressed or obese in the future, as well as the likelihood that we would give up smoking, were all strongly correlated with similar changes in our closest friend. A smaller but still significant effect due to the behavior of our friends’ friends. Modest still detectable effect of our friends of our friends’ friends. Pg 11

- Happy people cluster together and unhappy people cluster together.  
If people both listed one another as their friend.



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If only one person listed a friendship, the connection was negligible.  
If you had a happy friend that lives within a mile = 25% chance you are likley to become happier. 34% if they live next door! Pg 12

- The presence of a non-depressed friend also significantly reduced our chances of feeling depressed, a depressed friend was six times more likely to make you depressed than a happy friend was to make you happy. Female friends had an especially strong effect on the spread of depression. Pg 12

- It seems that the endorphins triggered by the presence of friends tune the immune system and give us enhanced resistance to the bugs that are responsible for many of the diseases that so discomfort us. Pg 16

- People we feel the most emotionally attached to and see the most are the ones most likely to help us out. Pg17

“Loneliness is actually an evolutionary alarm signal that something is wrong – a prompt that you need to do something about your life, and fast. Even just the perception of being socially isolated can be enough to disrupt your physiology, with adverse consequences for your immune system as well as your psychological well being that, if unchecked, lead to a downward spiral and early death.” Research of John Cacioppo Pg 19

- Immune response to the flu vaccine amongst college freshmen:  
4-12 Friends = significantly poorer responses than  
13-20 Friends. Pg 19

- More Social contacts = lower fibrinogen concentration in our blood = no excessive blood clotting = increased wound healing and tissue repair. Increased repair with inflammation, tissue injury and some cancers. Pg 21

- Being socially isolated > 25% the risk we will die in the next 10 years. Pg 22

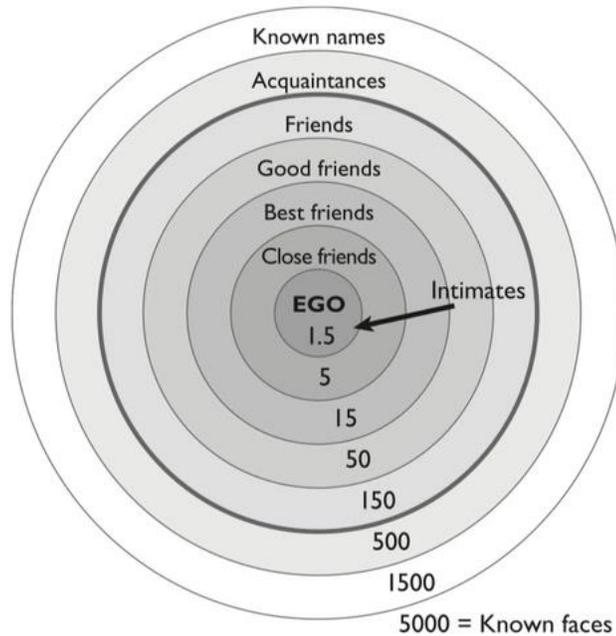
- More socially integrated a child was at age 6 = lower their blood pressure and body mass index..TWO DECADES LATER in their early 30's. Cundiff and Matthews. Pg 23

[Body Keeps the Score]



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<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2021/05/robin-dunbar-explains-circles-friendship-dunbars-number/618931/>

5000 = KNOWN FACES

1500 = KNOWN NAMES

500 = ACQUAINTANCES

150 = FRIENDS.

Number of 'friends' you can have (someone you would go sit and visit with when you see them at an airport. They would immediately know who you are and where you stand in relation to them, and you would know where they stand in relations to you.). FRIENDS IN GENERAL. Those we invite to the wedding.

50. = GOOD FRIENDS

15. = BEST FRIENDS.

Ask a favor of and would try to help them when asked, but now completely go out of your way.

5 = CLOSE FRIENDS.

you like to be with whenever you have the chance and would make an effort to do so. You have been in their house. You know what they do for a living. Go out of your way to help.

1.5 – INTIMATES.

**Goal = Quality relationships.**



Scripture supports and Social Science supports THAT WE ARE CREATED TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY.

What am I doing to create the one I live in?

**Leviticus 19:18**

*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.*

**Proverbs 27:17** *Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.*

**Questions:**

**YES, WE HAVE BEEN DESIGNED FOR COMPANIONSHIP, SO:**

- Does sin bring alienation? Repentance then....
- What is the connection between sharing activities and closeness in relationship?
- Does my view of God the Father affect my attitude towards friendship?
- Do I need to see friendship modeled to understand it?
- Does needing friends equal being needy?
- Does lack of friends mean I find emotional fulfillment/support in other ways? What would those ways be? Do they work?  
 [Medicate through busyness, achievement, \$, alcohol, etc.]
- Do I see 'needing' friends a female thing?
- What do I do to generate, foment, encourage the community around me?

**HOMEWORK:**

How do these categories fit in Dunbar's circles?

- Friendship
- Fellowship
- Camaraderie

Read each verse selection as showing a characteristic of relationship.  
 Write down that characteristic.

- Positive or negative?
- What does it take to develop?
- Do I do this or have this?
- What would it take for me to add this to my life or remove from my life?

Biblical definitions of relationship characteristics:

- #1.) Understand the meaning of all three characteristics.
- #2.) Use those definitions to identify the quality of friendship, camaraderie and fellowships we have in our own lives.



## NoTeS:

**FRIENDSHIP** (ידידות, אהבה, רעות, אהבה): Personal attachment to an individual. The historical books of the Bible furnish several instances of genuine friendship; and the pithy sayings of the Wisdom literature, of Talmud, and of Midrash contain a philosophy of friendship. The Bible endows friendship with a peculiar dignity by making it symbolical of the intimacy that exists between God and man. "And YHWH spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33:11; comp. Num. 12:8). Also the prophet Isaiah makes God speak of Abraham as his friend (Isa. 41:8; comp. 2 Chron. 20:7).

Singer, I., ed. (1901–1906). In *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day. 12 Volumes* (Vol. 5, pp. 520–521). Funk & Wagnalls.

"We enjoyed being together," **Psalm 55:14**

We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng.

Spiritual companions, **Psalm 119:63**

I am a companion of all who fear you, of those who keep your precepts.

### 2 Samuel 1:26

But the lament is not over. David steps out of his role as the chief public mourner for a king and a crown prince to speak in the first person. This is the point in a modern eulogy when the speaker shifts from speaking about the deceased to speaking directly to the deceased, and the audience, in hushed silence, eavesdrops on the final words between the mourner and the beloved departed. David, now more friend than king, arrests our attention with his **intimate thoughts on the passing of Jonathan**. He confesses his emotional distress, calls Jonathan his brother (Saul is not mentioned), and grieves over how "**beloved**" (*n'm* is also used in reference to Saul in 1:23) he was to him. David declares that the love of Jonathan **meant more to him than the love of a woman. This exclamation continues the hyperbolic language (eagles, lions, undivided, and so forth) of this funerary lament** as David compares his love for Jonathan with the **superlative experiences of love in his life** (with two, soon to be three, wives and numerous concubines). When Shakespeare compares his beloved "to a summer's day" (Sonnet 18, line 1), he too chooses a superlative image of beauty for the comparison and then claims that his beloved is "more lovely." Had David declared that he loved Jonathan more than a toothache, or had Shakespeare compared his beloved to an ordinary day, we would question the intensity of their affection. But David's extravagant comparison, consonant with the exaggerated language of this elegy, exposes the heights of his love and the depths of his grief. David's focus on Jonathan comes as no surprise. Had Jonathan not intervened to save his life, David would be dead and Jonathan would be singing a private lament for his fallen friend and ally.

After this brief personal aside David reenters his role as king and president of the public mourning ceremony and sings the refrain again. But this personal aside, which interrupted the structure of the poem, has allowed us a glimpse into David's heart. Another glimpse will come later when David cries out for his dead son Absalom (18:33 and 19:4). It is because of these unexpected moments of self-revelation and untainted honesty that David's character towers over everyone else in the story.<sup>1</sup>

### A Reflection concerning "Two" (4:7–16)

#### Bibliography

Ellermeier, F. *Qohelet IV*. 217–32. Irwin, W. A. "Eccles. 4:13–16." *JNES* 3 (1944) 255–57. Loretz, O. *Qohelet*. 69–72. Ogden, G. S. "Historical Allusion in Qoheleth IV 13–16?" *VT* 30 (1980) 309–15. Schaffer, A. "The Mesopotamian Background of Qohelet 4:9–12." *EJ* 8 (1967) 246–50. ———, "New Light on the 'Three Ply Cord.'" *EJ* 9 (1969) 159–60, 138–39. Schunck, K. D. "Drei Seleukiden im Buche Kohelet?" *VT* 9 (1959) 192–201. Torrey, C. C. "The Problem of Ecclesiastes IV, 13–16." *VT* 2 (1952) 175–77. Wright, A. G. *CBQ* 30 (1968) 313–34.

#### Translation

<sup>7</sup> Again I saw a vanity under the sun: <sup>8</sup> There was a single person, without any companion, either son or brother. There was no end to all his toil, nor did his desire<sup>b</sup> for riches ever cease: "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of good things?" This also is vanity and an evil task.

<sup>9</sup> Two are better than one because they have a good payment for their toil. <sup>10</sup> For if they fall, one can help the other up. But [woe<sup>b</sup> to] a single person who falls, for there is no one to help him up. <sup>11</sup> Also, if two people lie

<sup>1</sup> Morrison, C. E. (2013). *2 Samuel* (J. T. Walsh, Ed.; p. 32). Liturgical Press.



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together they keep warm, but how can a single person keep warm? <sup>12</sup> A single person may be overcome, but two together can resist. A three-ply cord cannot be easily broken.

<sup>13</sup> Better is a youth poor but wise, than a king old but foolish, who can no longer heed a warning. <sup>14</sup> For out of a prison he<sup>a</sup> came forth to reign, although in his<sup>b</sup> kingdom he was born poor. <sup>15</sup> I saw all the living, who move about under the sun, on the side of the second youth who will succeed him. <sup>16</sup> There was no end to all the people, all<sup>a</sup> whom he led. But those to come have no joy in him. This<sup>c</sup> also is a vanity and a chase after wind.

#### Notes

8.a. Literally, “without a companion” is “and not a second”; notice the key word שני.

8.b. It makes no difference whether one reads “his eyes” (ketib), or “his eye” (qere); the organ of vision expresses desire (cf. 2:10).

8.c. The quotation marks are added in v 8b to show that this is a direct statement of the person (“I”).

10.a. Although יפלו is plural and is attested in most of the ancient versions, it is used distributively. The sense must be that only one of two falls (cf. Gen 11:3; Judg 6:29).

10.b. אילו (cf. 10:16) can be read as the conditional “if,” as the Tg. has done (cf. Eccl 6:6). But it is better to understand אי as a later form of איו, “woe” (cf. Isa 6:5). So also LXX, Syr., Vg, and many Hebrew MSS.

12.a. There are some irregularities in this verse. The subject can hardly be האחד; hence it must be indefinite, with האחד the object. The verb has an unusual third person pronominal suffix: יתקפו instead of יתקפו (cf. GKC §60d). Moreover, the suffix anticipates the object; such a construction can be verified elsewhere, as in Exod 2:6; Eccl 2:21 (cf. GKC §131m). The ancient versions (LXX, Syr., Tg., for example) do not reflect the presence of the suffix, but this may be because of the way in which they interpreted the text. The verb is probably an Aramaism, and it means “overpower” (cf. Wagner §329). It is found in Job 14:20; 15:24; cf. also Eccl 6:10. [Aramaism = a characteristic feature of Aramaic occurring in another language.]

14.a.b. The translation of vv 14–16 is uncertain in many respects (see the commentaries). In v 14 the references are vague: the subject of the two verbs, and the person indicated by the suffix in מלכותו. This translation understands the youth as the subject of the verbs, while the suffix pronoun refers back to the old king.

14.c. Another problem is כי גם. This is said to be equivalent to כי גם, “although” (GKC §160b), and is adopted by many translations. The two phrases introduced by כי are merely coordinated in LXX, Syr., and Vg. In Eccl 8:12 כי גם occurs again and can be rendered concessively, but primarily because of the context (cf. D. Michel, *Eigenart*, 211).

14.d. האסורים is to be understood as האסורים, “prisoners”; for the omission of the *aleph*, compare 2 Kgs 8:28 and 2 Chr 22:5 (הרמים), and cf. GKC §35d. This is supported by all the ancient versions except the Tg. which understands האסורים as idol-worshippers. It is the youth, not the king, who comes out of the prison and is born poor.

15.a. The text is supported by all the versions. השני, “the second,” is omitted by many as a gloss, but it seems to be a catch word with what precedes (see A. G. Wright, *NJBC* 31:20, p 492). The second youth is obviously different from the youth mentioned at the beginning in v 13. In fact, he is his successor: תהתיני, to “stand in the place of,” means “to follow in office” (cf. Dan 8:22–23).

16.a. The text is ambiguous. The second לכל is in apposition to the first.

16.b. The subject of היה could be the people (so LXX, Vg, and most of the ancient versions) or the successor(s) to the throne. Similarly לפנייהם can be construed as referring to the rulers, but more likely it refers to the people. Hence either translation is possible: “(the people) who lived before them (kings),” or “(the people) whom he led.” See the helpful discussion in Gordis.

16.c. The introductory כי is affirmative; cf. GKC §155ee.

#### Form/Structure/Setting

This section has been aptly characterized as “the problem of the ‘second’ ” by A. Wright (*CBQ* 30 [1968] 328). The key word is “two,” occurring in six verses (שני, 8, 10, 15; שנים, 9, 11, 12). The reflection about the “second” covers three situations: the absence of an heir (vv 7–8), the advantage of a companion (vv 9–12), and the presence of a successor (vv 13–16). The plight of a single person is described in vv 7–8, and this is followed by four examples (salary, accident, warmth, and attack) in vv 9–12. The saying about the three-ply cord rounds off the unit. There follows in vv 13–16 an example story that is only loosely united to the theme by the appearance of “the second” in v 15. The story itself relates how even a wise king is ultimately the victim of human fickleness. In this case, a “second,” or successor, provides an occasion for the change in loyalty of the subjects. The case is typical and need not refer to any specific historical incident such as during the Seleucid reign (contra K. D. Schunck, *VT* 9 [1959] 192–201). This is another defeat for wisdom (the youth “poor but wise”). In effect, the observation of v 13 has been controverted by the story in vv 14–16.

#### Comment



## Summer of Lies

### Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

7–8 Qoheleth turns his attention to the situation of a person who is totally alone, without companion or progeny. With endless toil (cf. 4:4) he achieves riches, but these merely leave him wanting more (his “eyes” never satisfied; cf. 1:8). And then the inevitable question (cf. Sir 14:3–5), vividly expressed in a direct quotation: for whom all this toil? This stands in only slight contradiction to 2:18–22, where Qoheleth lamented the possibility of his inheritance being handed down to a fool (who might consume it). Now he scores the futility of the laborer who has no inheritor to share with him. There is little sense in toiling for merely personal gain. It should be noted that עמל, “toil,” figures in both passages.

9–12 These verses are in support of the claim in vv 7–8 and consist of a series of examples and a traditional saying. The first case deals with labor: two will achieve for each other more than one worker can attain. The point is less the actual wages that are granted for the labor than the circumstances of the toil—two people can complement each other by working together. v 10 illustrates the idea of mutual support: if one fails, the other can help. The next case does not necessarily refer to a married couple but is a practical instance of how two people can combine for the purpose of warmth (1 Kgs 1:1–2; Luke 17:34). Presumably, their outer garments provide two “blankets” that keep them both warm. The final example (v 12) envisions a physical attack, as from a robber; two are better than one. The examples are topped off by what has the ring of a proverb concerning the three-ply cord (see A. Schaffer, *EI* 9 [1969] 159–60). The number three has no particular significance as opposed to two; the point is plurality.

In these verses we see Qoheleth plying his trade as a sage, providing homely examples and wisdom to prove his point. The whole argument seems quite straightforward and leaves no room for Gordis’ view that vv 10–12 are an ironic comment on v 9. Commentators point to the *Iliad*, 10:224–26 as a parallel to the cases in vv 10–12.

13 Any translation, and hence interpretation, of vv 13–16 is uncertain, because of the vagueness of the text (see the *Notes*). It seems clear that this is an “example story,” a kind of parable, which illustrates the uncertainty of royal popularity and, hence, the vanity of (royal) wisdom. Commentators have sought, in vain, to identify the historical characters behind the story: Joseph and the Pharaoh, Saul and David, Astyages and Cyrus, and others. None of these identifications has won acceptance. It may be that the story is prompted by some historical event, even if this is not recoverable. But the story presents the typical rather than a specific event or historical characters. The occurrence of “the second” in v 15 serves as a catch word that ties vv 13–16 with vv 9–12, in which “two” occurs so frequently.

The story begins with a “better” saying, echoing the form utilized in vv 6, 9. The saying itself can be illustrated by the traditional wisdom emphasis on the role of royal counselors (Prov 24:5–6); it is precisely the mark of the wise man to take counsel (Prov 13:10). The contrast between the youth and the king is in line with the contrast between the intelligent servant and the worthless son in Prov 17:2. Qoheleth’s own assent to the saying is to be judged as limited. It has its truth, but the later events in the life of the wise youth indicate that the whole story is oriented to a judgment of vanity.

14 This verse has caused many commentators to see a reference to Joseph (Gen 39–41), or even to Joseph and David (G. Ogden, *VT* 30 [1980] 309–15). But it is better understood as merely one trait in a “rags to riches” story.

15 Qoheleth begins to consider the aftermath of the youth’s success, in such a way as to lead into his final verdict of vanity. He observed the popular support given to a second youth, the successor of the first one. If one were to delete השני, “the second,” the reference would be to the youth mentioned in vv 13–14. The story would be simpler in that case, for it would portray the case of a wise underprivileged youth who rose to power in place of a foolish king and then, after the wave of popularity among the fickle people (v 16), ends up in the same situation as the foolish king. But as the text stands, “the second” seems to indicate another youth who succeeds to the first one; it cannot be taken to mean merely that the first youth was the second king after the foolish one.

16 The text is ambiguous and translations differ (see the *Notes*). But it is at least clear that Qoheleth is underscoring that a king falls out of favor with succeeding generations. Such is the fickleness of the populace and the fate of royal power: vanity! Since the point of the story is the ephemeral character of popularity, it makes no difference who is identified as the subject of v 16 (the original youth, or the second who succeeded him).

#### **Explanation**

The most tantalizing aspect of 4:7–16 is the contrast between 2:18–22 and the complaint in 4:7–8. One can distinguish two emphases: the possibility that a fool inherits the fruit of one’s toil, and the futility of having no heir or anyone else who might profit from one’s toil. There is no real contradiction; both are instances of vanity. The complaint in 4:7–8 seems to have given cause to report several instances of the advantage that comes from plurality in community (vv 9–12). The example story in vv 13–16 is only distantly related to the topic of vv 7–12.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Murphy, R. (1992). *Ecclesiastes* (Vol. 23A, pp. 40–43). Word, Incorporated.



Summer of Lies  
Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

**Dunbar:**

“Friendship – Loneliness = Two sides of the same coin.”

“Friendship is a two way process that requires both parties to be reasonably accommodating and tolerant of each other, to be willing to spare time for each other.”

“A study of nearly 4,000 men in Australia carried out for the Movember Foundation in 2014 reported that men t with few friends and low social support experienced most psychological distress. The ones that were especially vulnerable were those whose friendships were based on nothing more than a common interest, such as a sports club: as participation in the activity fell away, as members married, had children or moved away, so those who remained lost friends, and these weren’t easily replaced. Loneliness is turning out to be modern killer disease, rapidly replacing all the more usual candidates as the commonest cause of death. Why is this?”

“Perhaps the most surprising finding to emerge from the medical literature over the past two decades has been the evidence that the more friends we have, the less likely we are to fall prey to diseases, and the longer we will live.”

“The big surprise was that it was the social measures that most influenced your chances of surviving, and especially so after heart attacks and strokes. The best predictors were those that contrasted high versus low frequencies of social support and those that measured how well integrated you were into your social network and your local community. Scoring high on these increased your chances of surviving by as much as 50%. Only giving up smoking had anything like the same effect.”

**Goal = Quality relationships.**

**Ecc 4**

**4:9–12 The value of companionship and friendship** is the focus of these verses. **The selfish individual works in competition with others (v. 8).** He misses the reward of cooperation (vv. 9–12). God Himself realized that it was not good for us to be alone (Gen. 2:18; see Loneliness). He made provisions from the beginning for our need of companionship and fellowship with others (see Luke 1, Friendship).

**LONELINESS: NEVER ALONE**

Before God created Eve, He told Adam, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Though not actually alone (for the animals were there), Adam was incomplete without human companionship. Central to God’s purpose for His people are relationships with Him and with others (1 John 1:3, 7). Outside this fellowship is loneliness, a sense of isolation, as Adam and Eve were to discover when they disobeyed God (Gen. 3:22–24).

Loneliness, the result of broken relationships, is not the same as aloneness. In order to have a deeply intimate relationship with Christ, we must withdraw periodically from human companionship in order to meet with Him. Such aloneness with Christ is desirable and quite different from the pain of loneliness. We are never truly alone because of our friend Jesus (Prov. 18:24; John 15:15).

Jesus experienced aloneness when He was tempted in the wilderness (Mark 1:12, 13); when He traveled (Matt. 8:19, 20); and when His disciples forsook Him (Mark 14:50). However, He was only lonely once—when on the cross He was made sin for us (Matt. 27:46).

See also Matt. 25:31–46; notes on Communication (Prov. 15); Friendship (Luke 1); Self-esteem (2 Cor. 10); Singleness (Ps. 62)<sup>3</sup>

**Luke 1**

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible* (Ec 4:9). Thomas Nelson.



## Summer of Lies

### Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

#### Elizabeth

##### *A Spiritual Mentor*

Elizabeth is described by Luke as a woman of integrity and obedience (Luke 1:6). As both the daughter and wife of a priest (v. 5), she lived a righteous life, even though she carried a quiet sorrow because of her childlessness. Then a miracle occurred. Her husband Zacharias, who served in the temple at Jerusalem, was the first person in four hundred years to receive a direct word from God. While he was burning incense, an angel appeared to announce that his wife Elizabeth would have a child who would be named John (v. 13).

Elizabeth was the first to recognize Mary of Nazareth as the mother of the Messiah. When Mary came to visit during Elizabeth's sixth month of pregnancy, John leaped inside Elizabeth's womb when Mary spoke (v. 41). **Elizabeth understood immediately the imminence of the Messiah's birth.** What a joyful time the two expectant mothers must have had as the godly Elizabeth shared hospitality and wise advice with her young cousin. Her interaction with the young Mary clearly distinguishes Elizabeth as an outstanding mentor (see Titus 2:3–5).

<sup>3</sup> *Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,*  
<sup>4</sup> *and so train the young women to love their husbands and children,*  
<sup>5</sup> *to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.*

Mary left after three months, but Elizabeth's joy continued with the birth of her own child (see Luke 1:14, 24, 25). Not only did Elizabeth miraculously conceive a child in her old age, but also God once again came to His people in fulfillment of centuries of eager anticipation. John the Baptist became a powerful preacher of the message of repentance and the forerunner who introduced the Messiah. Jesus said that no one was greater than this son of Elizabeth (Matt. 11:11).

Elizabeth could have faced her old age with a sense of failure and waning faith, but her vibrancy of spirit serves as a reminder that God watches over every woman with loving care. Elizabeth trusted and God rewarded her. She shared herself liberally with Mary, and undoubtedly she trained her son in the Lord while she lived out her faith before him.

See also Luke 1:5–25, 57–66; notes on Aging (Is. 46); Infertility (Gen. 11); Mentoring (2 Kin. 2)<sup>4</sup>

#### FRIENDSHIP: FOREVER FRIENDS

Amidst national unrest and personal tragedy, Ruth and Naomi developed a deep, lasting friendship that embodied God's love. The Hebrew word *chesed* means lovingkindness and describes a relationship bound together by love, loyalty, and commitment. Naomi prayed for God's *chesed* toward her devoted daughter-in-law (Ruth 1:8). Naomi praised God for His *chesed* (Ruth 2:20), and Boaz praised Ruth for her *chesed* (Ruth 3:10).

Friendships that last are built on *chesed*—unconditional love, undying loyalty, and unending commitment. Other examples of devoted friendships are embodied by David and Jonathan in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 18:1–3) and Elizabeth and Mary in the New Testament (Luke 1:39–56). Christian women are called to build lasting friendships that will endure throughout life and extend into eternity. Ruth, whose name means "friendship," became Naomi's *forever friend* (Ruth 1:16, 17).

See also notes on Commitment (Matt. 16); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Eph. 4; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Love (1 John 3); portraits of Naomi (Ruth 1); Ruth (Ruth 2)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Lk 1:59). Thomas Nelson.

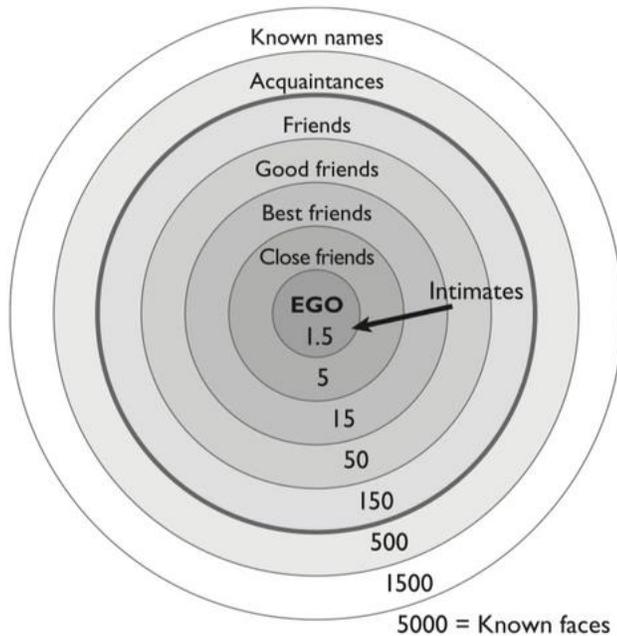


## Summer of Lies

Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

- What makes us nervous over being too close of a friend to our same sex friends?
- Would we ever hold the hand of a same sex friend? (i.e. Japan)
- Have you ever had a conversation over the need for healthy human touch without having to clarify there are no sexual overtones?
- How did we get to a place where there is an accepted confusion over the relationship between David and Jonathon in scripture? Can you be close to the same sex friends in your world without it being romantic?

<https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2021/05/robin-dunbar-explains-circles-friendship-dunbars-number/618931/>



The distribution of the data formed a series of layers, with each outer layer including everybody in the inner layer. Each layer is three times the size of the layer directly preceding it: 5; 15; 50; 150; 500; 1,500; 5,000. The innermost layer of 1.5 is [the most intimate]; clearly that has to do with your romantic relationships. The next layer of five is your shoulders-to-cry-on friendships. They are the ones who will drop everything to support us when our world falls apart. The 15 layer includes the previous five, and your core social partners. They are our main social companions, so they provide the context for having fun times. They also provide the main circle for exchange of child care. We trust them enough to leave our children with them. The next layer up, at 50, is your big-weekend-barbecue people. And the 150 layer is your weddings and funerals group who would come to your once-in-a-lifetime event.

### Lie #7

#### **REAL MEN DON'T NEED CLOSE MALE FRIENDSHIPS.**

I'M OLD ENOUGH to remember the Marlboro Man. He was one of the most famous images ever used in advertising, and he successfully convinced millions of men around the world that they must smoke cigarettes, preferably on the open range, in order to prove their masculinity. The Marlboro Man was ruggedly handsome and was always dressed in jeans, leather chaps, and a cowboy hat. He was sometimes holding the reins of his horse and was often shown looking out over a vast western prairie as he lit up his smoke.



## Summer of Lies

### Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

#### **And he was always, always alone.**

The message coming from this icon was subliminal but compelling: If you want to be a real man, you need to act like this guy. He's burly. He doesn't say much. He doesn't need anyone. He just mounts his steed and rides into the sunset by himself. In most of the ads, a single photo of the broad-shouldered, sun-baked cowboy was usually featured without any text. In a few exceptions a caption read, "Come to where the flavor is."

The Phillip Morris tobacco company invented the Marlboro image in 1954 to sell their line of cigarettes to men. They struck a gold mine. Within a few decades this hard-edged cowboy became one of the most famous fictitious characters of all time. Ironically, three of the models who posed for the advertising campaigns died of lung cancer because they used the product they sold to the gullible public.<sup>5</sup> Tobacco advertising was banned from the airwaves in 1971 in the United States,<sup>6</sup> so after that the Marlboro Man was only seen in magazines. Within a few more years, as the negative effects of smoking became more obvious, Marlboro cigarettes came to be known as "cowboy killers."<sup>7</sup>

The Marlboro man ad campaign was certainly not the first time popular media peddled the notion of the "real man" as a tough, independent loner. He's depicted in everything from comic books and films to classic literature and rock music. For some odd reason, guys are attracted to the idea that we are our best when we are alone—and even better if we are disguised.

I grew up watching a steady stream of these macho men, from the masked Lone Ranger and Zorro characters on television to the tough-talking US Marshall Rooster Cogburn in *True Grit*, played by the ultimate tough guy, John Wayne. Then there was novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby of *The Great Gatsby*, a mysterious millionaire who cashed in on all the prosperity that the Roaring Twenties had to offer but never found true love. Meanwhile the dashing spy character James Bond proved (or so we were led to believe) that you don't have to settle down; you can jet-set around the world, unravel terrorist plots, kill all the bad guys, and have your pick of beautiful women without marrying any of them.

Comic book superheroes especially emphasized the notion that real men are tough on the outside and yet mysteriously lonely. If you study the plotlines of Superman, Spider-man, Iron Man, or Batman, you find average guys who hide behind masks and tight-fitting uniforms. Most of them live alone with torturous secrets, and they rarely if ever reveal their true identities. Most of them have only one weakness. They are known for their façades. Yet they always seem to save the day and impress the women while their superhuman accomplishments are praised in the newspapers.

Through all of these media creations we are taught that manhood is about the exterior. A real man creates a wall around himself, like protective body armor. He uses his muscular strength to create an illusion of power, then he hides behind that force and never lets anyone see who he really is. And these guys don't face their emotions. Batman, for example, either retreated to his bat cave or just climbed on the roof of a skyscraper at night and brooded in silence. Superman did his sulking in an ice cave near the North Pole. And even though the Lone Ranger had a companion, his Native American friend Tonto didn't say much.

I was captivated by this superhero image when I was a boy. Most young guys are. When you are nine years old, you feel skinny and vulnerable in an adult world, so the thought of having Captain America's giant biceps or Superman's height or Spider-man's agility is empowering. When a boy grows into a man and realizes he struggles with flaws and weaknesses, the thought of hiding his secrets behind a mask, long cape, and vinyl body suit is appealing. No one ever has to know the real you.

But there is a huge problem with this concept. Like Batman or the Marlboro Man, the strong, silent superhero is an illusion. In real life, the Marlboro Man had an addiction that created a hacking cough and other serious health problems. He was not as strong as he appeared, and in the end he died in a cancer ward. As far as the superheroes of comic book lore, they are a total fantasy, like Hercules of Greek mythology or the James Bond of modern movies. Guys like that don't exist. Real men don't wear masks or body suits. Real men have to face the world, take responsibility, pay bills, open their hearts, feel other people's pain, and admit their own weaknesses.

Real men are not like the Jedi knights of *Star Wars*, who took a pledge to keep their emotions hidden. Real men love. Real men have to show their feelings.

And real men aren't loners. They have a deep need for relationships. Real men build genuine friendships with each other. Yet if you look around at today's busy culture, even among Christian guys, you find that most men never allow their relationships to go beyond a superficial discussion about sports, weather, or the latest software upgrade.



## Summer of Lies

Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

**David Smith, author of the book *The Friendless American Male*, says this male friendship deficit has reached a crisis point. Speaking to men Smith writes, “Few of us value close, interpersonal relationships, and fewer still seem willing to invest the time and emotional energy necessary for the development of closeness. The fragmentation of community life; corporate pressures; the breakdown of the extended and nuclear family; the drive for success; and the rate of mobility have all taken a tremendous toll on the numbers of intimate friendships we acquire and sustain.”<sup>8</sup>**

### SHALLOW MEN, SAD MEN

While our culture tells us that real men are independent loners, the Bible shows us that the lonely man is actually part of the brokenness of sinful human nature. At the very beginning of Creation, God declared to Adam, “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18). God has always wooed man away from his inclination to be proud and self-sufficient; He calls us into authentic fellowship and deep intimacy.

**But sin always brings alienation. Immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve, when pride and selfishness became the rule, the perfection of the marriage relationship was ruined. The husband and wife were estranged; then, in the next cruel scene in Genesis, brothers turned on each other. Cain killed Abel and then ran away to the land of Nod to become a lonely fugitive. Friendlessness and isolation became a normal part of his existence, and he passed this on to his descendants.**

When God confronted Cain for killing his brother, He pronounced this curse over him in Genesis 4:12: “When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will become a *vagrant* and a *wanderer* on the earth” (emphasis added). The Hebrew words for “vagrant” (*nuwa*) and “wanderer” (*nuwd*) can imply shameful mourning as well as aimless wandering. The words can also mean “shaking,” as in fearful trembling. These terms provide a more accurate picture of the true “Marlboro Man.” Under this tough, manly exterior is a very scared guy.

Cain ran to the wilderness because he was ashamed of his past and couldn’t face his true identity as a cold-blooded, jealous murderer. Sin is a powerful reality; the separation from God that sin causes always cripples a man’s ability to build genuine relationships. It makes him a lonely wanderer. And unless a man allows Jesus Christ to repair his sin-sick condition, he will become emotionally homeless. He will lack the stability of relationships and instead float here and there, pretending to be strong when inside he is seething with pain.

Let’s face it: there’s a little bit of Cain in all of us. It’s why men hide behind their careers and accomplishments; it’s why men go to bars at “happy hour” to drown their sorrows in alcohol; it’s why men pretend to have happy marriages while carrying on illicit affairs. It’s why even some Christian men put on their spiritual bodysuits and act the part of a man of God when they actually are trembling with fear on the inside, afraid someone will discover they aren’t the perfect husbands, fathers, and employees they pretend to be.

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### Let’s Talk About It

1. What cultural influences (movies, TV shows, comic books, or music) shaped your idea of a “real man”?
  2. Why do you think men tend to have a difficult time building authentic friendships?
  3. Be honest: Do you ever feel lonely? If so, is this because you don’t have enough close friends?
- 

Besides this ugly spiritual root of sinful nature, there are many other obvious reasons why men don’t develop close relationships with other guys. Here are the most common:

#### **1. We have a flawed concept of our heavenly Father.**

God made us in His image, and He is an emotional God. He feels intense love, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness, as well as anger and protective jealousy—and He does not bury these emotions. Yet many men grow up imagining that God is an austere old judge with a long white beard; they think God is always frowning and ever ready to zap them with a lightning bolt if they step out of line. But this is not the God of the Bible!

Actually, it was a pagan god—the Greek deity Zeus—who was so judgmental and hot-tempered that he carried an arsenal of thunderbolts to unleash on his subjects. The same could be said of Baal, the fickle god of prosperity and fertility who was sometimes worshiped by the children of Israel when they were in a backslidden state. They were constantly tempted to trade the true God for this angry idol.

One of my favorite verses about the true nature of God is Zephaniah 3:17, which describes the extravagant way He shows His love to us:

The LORD your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.



## Summer of Lies

### Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

Is this how you view God? Do you imagine Him as a strong yet compassionate Father who tenderly caresses His children, sings to them, and bounces them on His knee? Or is your God cold, distant, impossible to please, and always upset? How you see God will directly determine the level of true joy in your life and whether you feel free to express your emotions.

Notice that in this Old Testament description of God, He is both strong (as a warrior) and extravagantly emotional (exulting in joy). There is nothing inconsistent about these two qualities. Strong men can be secure enough to show their true feelings, but if we haven't come to know God in a deeply personal way we will never find this kind of emotional liberation.

#### **2. We did not see emotional freedom modeled by our fathers or other men.**

I grew up in a genteel white culture in Alabama and Georgia, where men were expected to be "Southern gentlemen." When men got together to talk, their discussions usually centered around football, politics, or the weather. When they went to church, they dressed in suits. Life was about rules and traditions.

In this type of religious culture people tend to focus on externals; they live life on the surface. They rarely open up their lives or talk about personal issues. Everything is superficial. They may be hurting inside, but they will never open up. They certainly don't talk about their dark secrets. People's problems never become a part of conversation until they end up in the hospital or die.

When I was young I would sometimes sit with a group of older male relatives and listen to their conversations over big family dinners. They talked about the Great Depression, old-fashioned cars, fishing trips, and one-room schoolhouses they attended in the rural South. Years later I would learn that some of these men struggled with alcoholism, but such things were never talked about openly. Men were expected to wrestle alone with their private demons; family problems were only whispered about.

#### **3. We are too proud to admit we have needs.**

A Jewish leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus to find out if He was really the Messiah, yet the Bible says Nicodemus came to Jesus at night because he was afraid of the other Pharisees (John 3:2). He could not bear to let his peers know he was talking to their rival. The Pharisees were smug in their religious pride and would not admit they needed a Savior. Nicodemus didn't want his colleagues to know that he needed more than his superficial religiosity could provide.

Jesus, of course, explained to Nicodemus that in order for him to find the truth he must be "born again" (John 3:3). He must start life over completely, leaving his old ways behind. Jesus was making it clear that the only way to begin a faith journey with Christ is to take the path of true repentance and conversion. And there is no way we can be born again if we don't humble ourselves, admit our need for salvation, and seek forgiveness from God for the way we have lived apart from Him.

The journey of faith, then, begins with an admission of weakness! No wonder so many men have a difficult time beginning the process.

Many guys suffer from the Nicodemus complex. We care too much about what other guys think to admit we are in need of salvation. Like the Pharisees, who loved to wear their long robes and use fancy religious titles, we pretend we have it all together. Yet Jesus was very blunt when He addressed the prideful Jewish leaders of His day. He rebuked them sternly because they were covered with the thick armor of pride. He even called them "whitewashed tombs" (Matt. 23:27) because they covered their sins and insecurities with prideful self-sufficiency.

What is more masculine: to act tough and independent or to show weakness by repenting openly for your failures? Jesus always honored the honest man who admitted his weakness, no matter how poor he was or how emotional he became in his display of repentance. If you are not quick to repent when the Holy Spirit convicts you or when your sin is challenged by someone else, then your heart has already become dangerously hard.

God loves His sons to be tough when it comes to boldness and fearlessness. But He never called us to be hard, angry, or mean-spirited. That is not the character of Christ. Hardness of heart is a sign that we are out of fellowship with God and that we don't have His presence in our lives. Isaiah 66:1-2 says:

Thus says the LORD, "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, thus all these things came into being," declares the LORD. "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at my Word."

The word *contrite* actually means "ground into a powder." This is the kind of heart God looks for in a man. He wants us to be sensitive to the promptings of His Holy Spirit and to the needs of others. We must be quick to



## Summer of Lies

### Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

repent the moment He convicts us that we have said an unkind word, mistreated a colleague, hurt our spouse, or grieved God with an unclean thought.

Is your heart sensitive and pliable? Or does God have to bang you over the head with a two-by-four to get your attention? Are you humble enough to receive correction from a sermon, a brother's gentle reproof, or your wife's counsel? Or does God have to put you in difficult circumstances in order to speak to you? A real man of God is not hard-hearted or stubborn. If you have been walking in pride, ask God to crush your pride and make you contrite.

#### **4. We prefer to medicate our emotional pain.**

God created us with the capacity for emotional release. He gave us mouths so we could talk openly about our struggles. He gave us tear ducts so we could cry when necessary. He gave us ears so that we could listen to others when they are hurting. He gave us arms and hands to be able to soothe and embrace our brothers when they are dealing with grief or tragedy.

But what happens when we don't use these outlets? What happens when we turn off all our emotional valves so that all our feelings are blocked and buried? The human soul was not created to absorb life's pain year after year like this. Pain must be processed; it cannot be stuffed inside the recesses of our hearts. If a man experiences trauma, grief, relationship breakdown, guilt, unforgiveness, or other forms of emotional hurt, he must be able to talk about his struggles and apply the healing of Christ. If he doesn't do this, his wounds will be internalized, and his pain will spread like a sickness. When a man buries his problems, he must find something to numb the pain.

That's why so many men become addicted to things like alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, illegal drugs, or prescription medicines. These substances offer temporary relief because they alter reality. Nobody smokes a cigarette because they like the smell of toxic smoke. It's filthy! No man drinks vodka because he likes the flavor. It tastes like airplane fuel! He drinks hard liquor because it makes him drunk—and when he is intoxicated he can't feel the weight of his problems. It is a useless attempt to escape life for a few hours.

This is also the reason some men become addicted to pornography. The temporary sexual excitement that porn triggers in the human brain is like a powerful drug. The more hard-core the porn, the more serious the addiction it can cause. Porn can temporarily numb a man's pain, just like alcohol. But the next day always arrives, always with a letdown and a hangover. Porn proves to be a pitiful substitute for real sexual intimacy.

Men medicate their pain for many reasons: financial stress, the loss of a child, divorce, a moral failure, or unresolved family problems. And what happens when they are drunk or high? Often their personalities change. They can become belligerent and even dangerously violent. The emotions they buried suddenly resurface with a vengeance.

The Bible actually acknowledges that alcohol is a deceptive form of medication. Proverbs 31:4–7 says:

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to desire strong drink, for they will drink and forget what is decreed, and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty and remember his trouble no more.

This passage is not endorsing the use of liquor as an emotional sedative. But it implies that a person who does not have access to the love and mercy of God will probably seek solace in a bottle. Life is hard, and if we don't give our brokenness to the Lord, it is difficult to find healing anywhere else.

We really only have one viable option, and that is to take our pain to Christ, who bore our pain in His own body when He was crucified. When Jesus was dying on the cross, the Bible tells us that the Roman guards offered Him some wine that was "mixed with gall" (Matt. 27:34). Yet Jesus refused to drink this mixture. Tradition tells us that condemned prisoners often were given this bitter narcotic substance to help deaden the pain of crucifixion.

Yet Jesus refused to numb His pain. Why? Because He knew He could not run from the cross—He had to endure it for us. He had already surrendered His will completely to His Father when He prayed at the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). Jesus had already chosen to drink the cup of suffering; therefore He refused the cup of bitter wine that had the power to numb His pain temporarily. He refused the quick fix. He rejected the easy way out. He made this difficult choice for you and me so that we could find true healing in our souls.

In light of Christ's suffering for us, how foolish it is for us to try to drown our sorrows and pain in substances that have no real power to help us. No amount of beer, rum, vodka, whiskey, gin, nicotine, cocaine, marijuana, LSD, methamphetamines, glue, Quaaludes, Valium, or any other substance can relieve sin's pain like the blood of Jesus does.



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#### **5. We think it is feminine to show our emotions.**

Some men were taught as boys never to cry or to show affection. Often boys are also ridiculed by classmates if they cry or appear emotionally weak. This teaches a boy that in order to be a man he must put an iron lid on his feelings.

In the 1984 film *Red Dawn*, the United States is invaded by Soviet armies, and World War III begins.<sup>9</sup> A group of teenagers from a small town in Colorado escape the communist takeover and hide in the mountains, but after a few months they venture back into town to check on their families. Two of the boys find their father in a Soviet prison camp, and they talk to him through a barbed-wire fence. Both of the boys begin to cry after they see evidence of torture on their dad's face.

"Don't you dare cry," the father says sternly. "Let it turn to hate."

While *Red Dawn* offered a totally implausible plot, the father's advice accurately reflects the attitude of many American men. If they are tempted to feel grief, sadness, or affection, they slam the lid on their emotions and try to remain stoic. Their idea of a real man is a guy who has successfully disengaged with his feelings by stuffing them so far inside that they will never, ever be discovered.

They also believe that the only acceptable emotion a man can display is anger and hatred. This is a cruel, demonic lie. Satan is the ultimate crime boss, and his kingdom is built on bitterness, resentment, revenge, strife, jealousy, and murder. Meanwhile, God's kingdom is built on mercy, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, gentleness, tenderness, loyalty, and unconditional love. Those are not sissy character qualities—they are the qualities of our heavenly Father.

If you think there is anything manly about anger, violence, or brutality, then your mind has been warped by the devil himself. You must ask the Lord to renew your mind with His Word.

#### **6. We have a fear of being labeled "homosexual."**

In some cultures, men are profusely affectionate with each other, and there are no sexual overtones to their hugging, kissing, or touching. In Italian families, for example, men kiss each other on the cheek, and there is no social stigma attached to this. In Nigeria, where homosexuality is rarely discussed and few people even know a gay person, men are comfortable holding hands as they walk down the street. There is nothing sexual about this; it is simply viewed as a normal display of friendship.

During my first visit to Nigeria several years ago a pastor grabbed my hand as we were walking through the streets of Lagos. He wanted everyone to know I was his friend, and he also wanted me to feel safe in the crowded downtown district. I must admit it felt awkward to me at first. I was sure people were going to laugh at us or label us gay. That didn't happen. Now when I visit Nigeria I am comfortable grabbing my male friends' hands. It makes me feel a deeper sense of brotherly comradeship with them.

Of course, I would not feel comfortable doing this in my own country because our culture has sexualized hand holding. But as I have allowed the Lord to heal my emotions and give me a greater capacity to love, I find it easier to express pure, godly affection to my brothers in Christ. All of us need to discover this freedom.

Jesus was actually very affectionate with His male disciples. This is especially obvious in the writings of John, who referred to himself in his Gospel account as the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). After Jesus washed His disciples' feet—which was an unusual display of humility and affection—He reclined at the Passover table with them, and they shared their last meal together. During the Seder, John was comfortable enough in his friendship with Jesus to lay his head on His teacher's chest. *The Message Bible* says John had "his head on [Jesus'] shoulder."

The deeply affectionate friendship John had with Jesus actually shaped his theology. He says this about the incarnate Son of God:

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life... What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have *fellowship* with us; and indeed our *fellowship* is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

—1 JOHN 1:1, 3, EMPHASIS ADDED

John affirms here that he not only knew Jesus's words but that he actually touched Him. Jesus was not just a concept or an ideology to John. He was a man, in flesh and blood, who embodied the fullness of Deity. John's experience with Christ was not just intellectual or spiritual; he hugged Jesus, laid his head on His chest, and listened to His heartbeat. He and Jesus were intimate friends in the purest sense.



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In John's first epistle he introduces the Greek word *koinonia*, or "fellowship," to describe not only close communion we have with Jesus but also the spiritual bond we can have with each other. *Koinonia* literally means "communion through intimate participation." It implies deep sharing and close personal contact. This is part of our spiritual inheritance as Christians; because we have Christ in our hearts, we feel an unusual sense of closeness to other believers.

As a man of God, you should not be afraid of *koinonia*. You should feel the freedom to express brotherly affection to other men. If you don't, it may be because of fear or pride that you have created emotional walls in your soul. God wants you to be free emotionally so you can show genuine love to others.

You may actually need to be hugged in order to discover this freedom. There have been times when I felt the Lord direct me to hug a brother when I was praying for people at the altar of a church. In some cases these men had fathers who were either abusive or distant, and they struggled to relate to God as Father. When I would hold such men in my arms, often they would begin sobbing for several minutes. They received a powerful emotional healing through a simple embrace.

If we want to give this kind of freedom to other men, we must first receive it. God wants you to be a channel of His love.

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#### Let's Talk About It

1. Would you say that your father was emotionally open or closed? How do you think this affected you?
  2. God is described as a Father. When you think of your relationship with God, do you view Him as an affectionate, loving Father, or more of a rigid, angry disciplinarian? Why do you think you view God in this way?
  3. The Bible says God draws near to the person who is humble and broken. When you examine your life, can you identify any areas of pride or hard-heartedness? Is it easy for you to apologize to others or admit when you have made a mistake?
  4. Is it easy for you to show love to others, either through words or physical affection? Why or why not?
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#### RETURNING TO RELATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

Jesus came into a very sterile religious culture shaped by legalistic Jewish leaders. The rabbis of Jesus's day believed that the only way they could be holy was to stay away from people they considered sinful or spiritually unclean. Their faith was totally focused on externals; they believed they could win God's approval by eating the right foods, following all the laws of the Old Testament (in their own power), and staying away from anything or anyone that might contaminate them.

Rabbis were quite obsessed with physical hygiene. In one scene in Mark 7, the Bible says that they criticized Jesus because His disciples did not wash their hands in the proper ceremonial fashion before eating. These leaders actually believed they could grow closer to God by washing their hands. They didn't understand that they should have been more conscious of the inward condition of their heart.

Rabbis in Jesus's culture had a long list of people they would not touch. They were not affectionate with children because they felt women should be attending to them. They viewed women as unclean, especially during the time of their menstrual cycle. They would never eat near people they considered sinners. They stayed far away from foreigners. And they would never go near a leper or a dead body because they feared disease. Their rule in life was "Don't touch!"

Yet what did Jesus do? He modeled the incarnational love of God by going out of His way to touch the untouchable. He held children in His arms and blessed them. He healed a bleeding woman. He sat down in a public place to speak with a divorced Samaritan woman. He touched lepers and healed them, and He ate with tax collectors and sinners. He allowed a sinful woman, probably a prostitute, to wash His feet with her hair. And He laid His hands on many, many sick people who would have been considered ceremonially unclean by other Jews.

Jesus also rebuked the Pharisees because of their legalistic elitism. When they got upset about His disciples' dirty hands, He said to them:

Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.

—MARK 7:6–8



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The Pharisees had their priorities and values all mixed up. They thought true holiness was found in staying away from “dirty” people. Yet Jesus told them that this religious attitude actually invalidated the real commandment of God—which is to share His love with others!

Jesus showed us that Christianity, in its very essence, requires touch. True faith is not just an intellectual doctrine about God’s existence or His nature. Real Christianity is about a God who loved us so much that He became human flesh and came to Earth to dwell among us (John 1:14). God did not just give us nice words; He did not just write, “I love you,” or “I forgive you,” in the sky. He sent His Son to wrap His arms around us.

When you have been truly touched by the love of God, the message of the gospel will be much more to you than Bible verses or doctrines. Biblical teaching is important, but you will not know God in His fullness if you only know intellectual information about Him. Faith must go beyond your head to touch your heart.

Wherever the message of the gospel goes, it does more than give people an intellectual faith. It imparts true love because God is love. A heart that has been changed by Christ suddenly loves others. And a person who has been transformed by the gospel of Jesus will have the supernatural capacity to demonstrate God’s love in an extravagant way.

The apostle Paul demonstrated this remarkable love in his ministry to the churches he guided in the first century. Although he himself had been a Pharisee before his conversion, and he practiced all the traditions of Jewish legalists (including ritual hand-washing and aloofness from tax collectors and “sinners”), he adopted a radically new method of ministry after he became a minister of the gospel. Saul the stoic Pharisee became Paul the affectionate lover of people.

For example, he compared his love for the Thessalonian church to a mother’s affection. He wrote, “But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her children” (1 Thess. 2:7). He told the Philippians, “I have you in my heart.... I long for you with all the affection of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:7–8). Paul was almost slobbering in his profuse love for his New Testament flock. He urged them to greet each other with a “holy kiss,” and he sometimes wept when he prayed for the churches.

When Paul left Ephesus for Jerusalem, the leaders of that church suspected that they might not see him again. So when Paul prayed for them as they knelt on the beach, the Bible says they wept aloud and embraced Paul “and repeatedly kissed him” (Acts 20:36–38). The most influential leader of New Testament Christianity was comfortable with this type of emotional display. Why? Because a man who has been truly freed by Christ is able to love without emotional reservation.

We also see this affection evident in Paul’s close relationship with his ministry colleague, Timothy. Paul discipled and trained this young convert and eventually called him his “true child in the faith.” Much of the New Testament was written against a backdrop of Paul’s and Timothy’s friendship. While Paul wrote two epistles directly to Timothy, Paul and Timothy together sent the epistles of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

More than one-third of the entire New Testament came from these two men, who shared a unique ministry bond. And Paul’s last words to the church, written from a cold dungeon in the time of Emperor Nero, were addressed to Timothy. It was in that epistle that he told his beloved son, “Make every effort to come to me soon” (2 Tim. 4:9).

We cannot ignore this intense relational aspect of genuine Christianity. The authentic gospel is not just about taking a nice message of hope to people. It is not just about building churches or preaching sermons or hosting big meetings. Real Christianity involves deep, lasting relationships with the people God brings into our lives. He has called us to do ministry together, and the affection we feel for each other is a testimony of the power of Christ’s love.

I heard a man of God say many years ago that every Christian guy needs three kinds of relationships in his life: (1) a Paul, (2) a Barnabas, and (3) a Timothy. What he meant by this was simple. Pauls are mentors and spiritual fathers. Barnabases are peers or close friends who are on our same spiritual maturity level with us. Timothys are younger men who ask us to disciple them.

In recent years I have had the joy of making friends on all three of these levels. These relationships are more valuable to me than riches, and I would not trade them for anything. When it comes to Pauls, I have several older, mature men of God who see me as a spiritual son. They are my role models, but not just from a distance. They spend time with me, pray for me, offer counsel and coaching, and genuinely care about my family and my ministry.



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I also have several Barnabases who are what I would call true bosom friends. I am able to share with them my deepest struggles and concerns. We hold each other accountable regarding our temptations and weaknesses. One of my closest friends knows how to ask me the “hard questions” so that I can keep my life sexually pure. Every man needs a friend who will watch his back!

And in recent years I have been blessed to have several Timothys in my life. Some of them travel with me when I minister in churches or when I go on mission trips to foreign countries. I don’t take these young men along so they can carry my luggage (in fact, I discourage this). Rather, I pull them alongside me and ask them to help me pray with people at the end of a church service. I make them feel they are a valuable part of our ministry team. I want them to see Christ in my life. I pray with them and offer counsel when needed, but I mostly share my life in an authentic way.

Having these kinds of genuine relationships with men has been a great area of fulfillment in my life—and I believe it is part of every Christian man’s spiritual inheritance. God does not want you to be lonely or isolated. He wants to bless you with authentic relationships.

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#### Let’s Talk About It

1. Describe the religion of the Pharisees. Why did Jesus rebuke the Pharisees when they criticized his disciples for not washing their hands?
2. Jesus touched people in an authentic way when the Pharisees never touched people. In what ways can you touch more people for Christ?
3. Paul was a Pharisee at one time, but he changed radically after his conversion. In what ways did Paul the apostle model relational Christianity?
4. Every man should have a Paul, a Barnabas, and a Timothy in his life. Can you list men in your life who fit in these categories?

#### Let’s Pray About It

*Father, I don’t want to live a closed life. I don’t want to be alienated or lonely. Please open my heart so that I can have genuine, authentic relationships—not only with my wife but also with the men around me. Remove any pride, religiosity, or fear that keeps me in emotional bondage. Open my heart so I can show Your love to others. Amen.*

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*I have let my family down, and I regret those transgressions with all of my heart. I have not been true to my values and the behavior my family deserves. I am not without faults, and I am far short of perfect.<sup>1</sup>*

—TIGER WOODS, PROFESSIONAL GOLFER, ADMITTING HIS EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS IN A STATEMENT RELEASED IN DECEMBER 2009, JUST DAYS AFTER HE DENIED THE ALLEGATIONS

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*I want you to listen to me. I’m going to say this again: I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky. I never told anybody to lie, not a single time; never. These allegations are false. And I need to go back to work for the American people. Thank you.<sup>2</sup>*

—PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, JANUARY 26, 1998, NINE DAYS AFTER THE MONICA LEWINSKY SCANDAL BROKE

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*Indeed, I did have a relationship with Ms. Lewinsky that was not appropriate. In fact, it was wrong. It constituted a critical lapse in judgment and a personal failure on my part for which I am solely and completely responsible....Now, this matter is between me, the two people I love most—my*



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*wife and our daughter—and our God. I must put it right,  
and I am prepared to do whatever it takes to do so.*<sup>3</sup>

—PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, AUGUST 17, 1998

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*I have sinned against you, my Lord, and I would ask  
that Your precious blood would wash and cleanse every  
stain until it is in the seas of God's forgiveness.*<sup>4</sup>

—EVANGELIST JIMMY SWAGGART IN A TEARFUL CONFESSION  
AIRD FROM HIS LOUISIANA CHURCH ON FEBRUARY 21, 1988

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*Everyone is like a moon, and has a dark side  
which he never shows to anybody.*<sup>5</sup>

—MARK TWAIN

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*The man who can keep a secret may be wise, but he is  
not half as wise as the man with no secrets to keep.*<sup>6</sup>

—EDGAR WATSON HOWE, NOVELIST<sup>6</sup>

### **“Real men don’t cry.”**

The Old Testament records two defining moments in King David’s youth. The first happened when the prophet Samuel visited the boy’s home looking for the man who would someday be the king of Israel. The youngest son and least likely candidate, David, came in from tending sheep to receive the anointing and then went back to work.

The second moment was when David encountered Goliath in a contest that would determine the outcome of a battle.

It’s the stuff of epic cinematography—hillsides filled with thousands of jostling soldiers, clattering armaments, and everything at stake.

Forerunners of the ancient Greeks, the Philistines were accustomed to deciding battles in an arena—gladiator style—rather than hand-to-hand combat between armies. The Philistine army surely felt confident that day with a massive warrior like Goliath in their ranks. But they didn’t reckon on the young boy who believed that his God was capable of anything. Winding his way through the company of Israel’s soldiers, David’s innocent questions were met with shock and derision. The youth, in turn, was astounded by Israel’s lack of faith.

Even the king was afraid. “Don’t you know who you’re fighting for?” David may have asked Saul. “Where’s your trust in Him?”

The courage David had exhibited as a boy defending his father’s sheep from wild animals would now defend God’s people from a godless thug. And the same confidence in the God of his fathers marked his life in the years that followed. David was a shepherd, a warrior, a hero, and a conquering king, a walking testimony of vigor and faith.

And he was also a poet.

### THE SOFT SIDE OF A TOUGH MAN

Many of the Psalms were penned by David, written during various seasons of his life. There are psalms praising God for deliverance, extolling His majesty, celebrating His faithfulness, and confessing sin against Him. There are also multiple Davidic psalms expressing lament and pain. With passion and tenderness, David poured forth his fears, his anguish, and his tears.

In Psalm 42 we see his dependence on God’s gracious presence.

*As a deer pants for flowing streams,  
so pants my soul for you, O God.*

*My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.*

*When shall I come and appear before God?*

*My tears have been my food day and night. (vv. 1–3)*

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<sup>6</sup> Grady, L. (2011). *10 lies men believe: the truth about women, power, sex and god—and why it matters*. Charisma House.



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This was not a man who kept his emotions in check. He was not shy, reticent, reserved. He was open before God, expressing the depth of his sorrows.

And it was not just for a brief moment that David's eyes grew a bit misty. He did not have a solo rogue tear escape down his ruddy cheek. No, his tears were his "food day and night." He wept, he wailed, he poured out his heart before God, and in composing the psalm allowed untold generations of pilgrims to enter into his journey.

As men, sometimes you and I think we're supposed to suppress our emotions, apologize for them, or hide them from those in our own homes whom we are called to protect. We think such sensitivity exposes our weakness. Not so. The reality is that it's often a demonstration of our weakness that stifles our tears. David, a man's man, did not have that trouble.

#### WHAT DID JESUS DO?

If that's not enough for you and me, consider another Man—David's greater Son, Jesus. The shortest verse in all the Bible still packs a punch. Jesus had returned to his dear friends, Mary and Martha, who were mourning the loss of their brother, Lazarus. And John, in his gospel, tells us simply, elegantly, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

And this would not be the last time Jesus would openly display deep feelings.

On the night in which He was betrayed, Luke tells us,

*And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* (Luke 22:44)

So if Jesus—a man's man, to be sure—expressed His emotions in the midst of excruciating circumstances, does that mean we are better than He when we cover ours up? No it doesn't.

We are not to let our emotions rule over us. But nor are we to suppress them, to will them away. That's not strength; it's dishonesty. We need to remember the words of the first song you may have learned at church: "We are weak, but He is strong."

#### THE TRUTH

**Real men are free to feel and express deep emotions. When we do so, it's actually proof that we are men with a heart like God's.**

**THINK ABOUT IT ...** *Do you sometimes apologize for your tears? In what situations are a grown man's tears a bad idea? When are they good and appropriate?*

***"I don't need close male friends."***

Remember that old playground retort? *Whenever you point a finger at me, you have four more pointing back at you.* As with many playground sayings, there's wisdom in this one.

As I've heard it said, "You are not stuck in traffic; you *are* traffic. You are the other car annoying the people in the other cars!"

Sometimes we go through life wearing blinders, forgetting what it must be like for someone else to do life with us. This is why it's so important to get perspective from others. Without knowing it, our backgrounds and biases color the way we see reality. Like a mirror, true friends can help each other objectively see what they may not be able to see on their own.

#### THE PERILS OF ISOLATION

Early in my business career, after having experienced a year at the helm of a prosperous company, a friend paid me a visit. He had been alerted to a problem in my business and came calling. His opening line was this: "There's something you need to know."

Even though I was sitting in my office chair, I pretended to fasten my seatbelt. Good thing I did. The news was brutal ... and true. What he had to say about my business, my colleagues—and me—was hard to take. But it was exactly what I needed to hear. This man proved himself to be a true friend, and that conversation was a defining moment for me.

The book of Proverbs, the book of wisdom, tells us about a man without friends.

*Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;  
he breaks out against all sound judgment.* (18:1)

At the end of this same chapter in Proverbs, separating casual acquaintances from close friends, Solomon writes,  
*A man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* (18:24)

How good is this?



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The first verse tells us of the peril of isolation. The last teaches us something about how to spot a real friend. Together these give us a clearer picture of why we need friends, what to look for in a friend, and how to be a good friend to other men.

No doubt from personal experience—and how else do we learn such important lessons?—Solomon is encouraging us to not succumb to the temptation of drawing back and living alone. And he's also suggesting that the solution isn't just hanging out in a sports bar with a whole bunch of guys—which can still be a good idea—but making sure we have a close buddy, a confidant ... a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

#### WOUNDS AND KISSES

So why are we sometimes tempted to choose isolation? To live detached from authentic community? Is it pride, thinking we can manage on our own? Is it a fear of accountability?

A friend is someone who is willing to tell us the truth, even when it hurts. Another proverb explains this with a powerful word picture:

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;

profuse are the kisses of an enemy. (27:6)

Solomon turns his phrases brilliantly. We don't typically think of friends wounding us and enemies kissing us. We hate wounds and love kisses, hate enemies and love friends. But in truth, enemies can seek our favor through flattery. Friends are those who are willing to risk our friendship, temporarily hurting us by speaking truth for our well-being.

Imagine a doctor who is always smiling. Imagine every report he gives us is positive. Imagine that he encourages our unhealthy habits. When we are sick, he prescribes ice cream. When we are afraid heading into surgery he tells us that it's fine if we don't want to go ahead with the procedure. That's a crony, not a friend; an enabler, not a trustworthy physician.

The doctor who truly cares for us tells us about our high blood pressure. He warns us about our bad habits. And he even sticks us with needles, and if need be, cuts us open that we might be made well.

So it is with a true friend. His wounds heal. A true friend is like a brother, someone who loves us enough to speak with surgical precision and truth. A man from whom we are even willing to hear his concerns for us. The proverb is not simply saying, "Surround yourself with people who are down on you. It will do you good." Rather, it is telling us that someone who loves us speaks hard truths and offers wisdom. In response, we listen and thank our friend for loving us so well.

Men need not just casual buddies but faithful friends—men who stick closer than a brother ... a good brother. Male friends have a better understanding of the weaknesses of other men, of our patterns of rationalization. And they can speak the kinds of words that will encourage us the most. Men need male friends who come equipped with both courage and wisdom, and a shared commitment to obediently follow in the path of our greatest friend, Jesus.

#### A FRIEND WHO UNDERSTANDS

Speaking of our friend, the Lord Jesus, the author of Hebrews reminds us, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Jesus is our elder brother, the firstborn of the family of God. He always speaks truth to us through His Word. And His end for us, if we are His, is that we would be happy. Blessed.

He is God in the flesh. But He is also a man, just like us, except without sin. And He calls us to not only *have* friends like brothers, but to *be* friends like brothers. Life is tough. Living with integrity and purity are endless battles. And as we both know so well, it's a war out there.

You need friends. I need friends ... friends who not only speak truth but friends who challenge us with the integrity and example of their own lives. We need to love each other well, well enough to dare to hear and speak truth.

Recently Nancy and I had a "triple date" with my two daughters and their husbands (I love these men who call me dad) ... what a sweet time it was. As we were updating each other on our lives, my sons-in-law shared how they have regular contact with male friends for Bible study, prayer, and accountability. At one point, one of them leaned in and said, "Dad, who are the men who are speaking into your life?"

Bam!

Truth be known, when I married Nancy and moved to Michigan, I left my accountability brothers behind. These few men stood by my side when Bobbie was diagnosed and when she stepped into heaven. One of them actually called himself "Robert's wingman."



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But the admonition of my son, who loves me enough to speak honestly, got my attention.

Since that little visit to the “honest planet,” I’ve begun meeting with a new friend—a Christian brother—on a regular basis. How good this feels. Again.

Thank you, to my sons. How blessed I am to have friends like them.

How about you? If I asked you the same question about having a trusted friend who shares your life with you, what would you say?

#### THE TRUTH

**We need godly, male friends—faithful brothers—who love us enough to speak truth. Men whose lives are also open to us so we can speak truth to them.**

**THINK ABOUT IT ...** *Who are your closest male friends? Name two or three. How well do they know you? Do they speak truth? Are they a safe place for you to go?*<sup>7</sup>

**Friendship, Friends** Augustine was the first Christian writer to elaborate a theory of Christian friendship. He transformed the classical concept of friendship as agreement on all things human and divine into a concept of friendship as grace, a bond effected by the Holy Spirit poured out into the hearts of believers, which adds the notes of attraction and delight to the Christian charity owed to all.

Friendship and friends were always important to Augustine. He attributes the theft of the pears to a “friendship too unfriendly” (*conf.* 2.9.17). Grief over the death of his friend in Thagaste forced him to leave for Carthage (4.4.7–4.12.19). Friends surrounded Augustine at Cassiciacum, where they planned the community of philosophers (6.14.24). Augustine gathered friends into his monasteries at Thagaste and in the garden house and the bishop’s house in Hippo.

Greeks and Romans cultivated, admired, and speculated on friendship; see Plato’s *Lysis*; Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, books 8 and 9; and Cicero’s *Laelius, On Friendship*. The pre-Socratic philosophers thought of friendship or attraction (*philia*) as a cosmic principle that ordered the whole universe. Plato makes friendship a metaphysical principle: friends share an attraction to the highest principle, the Good. For Aristotle friendship can be based on the useful, the pleasurable, or the good; only the last is true friendship. Cicero saw friendship as a political virtue, proper to great statesmen, and formulated the definition of friendship that Augustine quotes several times: **“friendship is nothing other than agreement on all things divine and human, along with good will and affection”** (*Laelius* 6.20, cited by Augustine in *c. Acad.* 3.6.13; *ep.* 258.1).

Friendship is not an important category in the Bible. The friendship of David and Jonathan is unparalleled. Luke 12:4 and John 15:13–15 are the principal dominical sayings on friendship. **Most early Christian writers did not speculate on friendship, since Christians considered each other brethren, not friends;** exceptions are Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, and Paulinus of Nola.

Augustine’s teaching on friendship falls into two periods: from Cassiciacum to the *Confessions*, and from the *Confessions* to the end of his life. Friendship always meant the bond that unites two persons in mutual sympathy; Augustine’s understanding of the source of that bond distinguishes the two periods. In the first period he emphasizes human sympathy as the source; in the second he understands that the bond is the gift of the Holy Spirit through grace.

In the earlier period Augustine defines friendship in a purely classical way, often citing Cicero, and writes that Cicero defined friendship “quite rightly and piously” (*c. Acad.* 3.6.13). In the *Soliloquies* Augustine wants his friends to live with him so that they might seek knowledge of their souls and of God and gain wisdom (1.12.20; cf. 1.13.22). Around 393 or 394 Augustine wrote that “friendship is effected by similar traits of character” between souls (*Gn. litt. imp.* 16).

*Epistula* 258 to Marcius begins to show Augustine’s dissatisfaction with the classical notion of friendship. Augustine quotes Cicero’s definition of friendship, but supplements it; **friendship is “agreement on things human and divine ... in Christ Jesus our Lord and our true peace”** (258.4), and Augustine explains Cicero’s “things human

<sup>7</sup> Wolgemuth, R. D., & Morley, P. (2018). *Lies men believe: and the truth that sets them free*. Moody Publishers.



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and divine” by quoting the two great commandments (Mark 12:29–31 par.). Cicero thought of intellectual agreement; Augustine thinks of agreement in will and action.

In the long meditation on friendship in *Confessions* 4.4.7–4.12.19, Augustine proposes his new and distinctly Christian definition of friendship: “There is no true friendship unless you establish it as a bond between souls that cleave to each other through the love ‘poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us’ ” (4.4.7, quoting Rom. 5:5). God causes the friendship, and establishes it as a bond.

After the *Confessions* Augustine writes more often of charity than of friendship. Yet he never simply reduced friendship to charity. In *epistula* 130.6.13 he explains that what friendship adds to Christian charity is an attraction or liking that we experience more eagerly toward some and rather hesitantly toward others. Augustine’s love for friendship never diminished. Near the end of the *City of God* he wrote: “What consoles us in this human society, so full of errors and hardships, except unfeigned faith and the mutual love of good and true friends?” (19.8).

In a few places Augustine writes of “friendship with God,” beginning from biblical passages like Exodus 33:11 and Wisdom 7:27. At first Augustine thought of friendship with God as the product of moral effort (*Gn. adv. Man.* 1.2.4). He later understood that “friends of God” are constituted by grace and expresses the idea that God himself bestows his friendship (s. 335.2). He associates friendship with God with choosing the eternal and rejecting the temporal (s. 299.6) and says elsewhere that human beings become friends of God when God grants them a share in his eternal wisdom (*civ. Dei* 11.4), or that the state of original justice was “friendship with God” (*Gn. litt.* 11.34.46). God-given justice restores the state of friendship (*Trin.* 5.16.17).

Augustine regularly insists that friendship may not be predicated of God, since it is an accident. But in one passage of *On the Trinity* (7.6.11) he allows for the possibility of conceiving of the Holy Spirit as the friendship of Father and Son.

→ Alypius; Possidius

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JOSEPH T. LIENHARD, S.J.<sup>8</sup>

## FRIENDSHIP

Harmful friendship, Deuteronomy 13:6–9.

One in spirit, 1 Samuel 18:1–4.

Loyalty between father, close friend, 1 Samuel 19:1–2.

Friendship at cutting edge, 1 Samuel 20:1–4.

Spiritually-centered friendship, 1 Samuel 20:42.

Marks of true friendship, 2 Samuel 1:23; John 15:13–15.

False friends, 2 Samuel 16:16–23.

Governments on friendly terms, 1 Kings 5:1.

Ministry friendship, 2 Kings 2:2.

Friends became adversaries, Job 2:11–13.

Friend in need, Job 6:14.

Undependable friends, Job 6:15–17.

Misused friendship, Job 6:27 (GNB).

Rejected friendship, Job 17:5.

Alienating friendship, Job 19:13–22.

Friendship betrayal, Psalms 41:9; 55:12–14 (LB).

Lost friendship, Psalm 88:8.

Choosing friends wisely, Psalm 119:63 (CEV).

Good, bad, Proverbs 13:20.

Forgiveness enhances friendship, Proverbs 17:9 (CEV).

Friends in times of need, Proverbs 17:17 (See GNB).

Purchased friendship, Proverbs 19:4.

<sup>8</sup> Lienhard, J. T. (1999). [Friendship, Friends](#). In A. D. Fitzgerald (Ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia* (pp. 372–373). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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Friendship overdone, Proverbs 25:17.  
Wounds of friend, Proverbs 27:6.  
Two better than one, Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 (See CEV).  
Shelter from wind, Isaiah 32:2.  
No help from wrong friends, Jeremiah 2:37.  
Friends, brothers not trusted, Jeremiah 9:4–5.  
Waiting for friend to fail, Jeremiah 20:10.  
Betrayed by friends, Lamentations 1:2, 19.  
Friends of paralytic man, Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26.  
“Salt of friendship,” Mark 9:50 (GNB).  
Friendship of Herod, Pilot, Luke 23:12.  
True meaning of friend, John 15:12–17.  
Barnabas, Saul, Acts 9:26–27.  
Friends of Paul, the prisoner, Acts 27:3.  
Greetings to friends, Romans 16:3–16.  
Consistent friendship, 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 (GNB).  
Conduct of true friend, 2 Timothy 1:16–18.  
Friend forsakes, 2 Timothy 4:10–17.  
Timothy released from prison, Hebrews 13:23.  
Worldly friends, James 4:4.  
*See Camaraderie, Fellowship.*<sup>9</sup>

### **CAMARADERIE**

Wrong kind of camaraderie, Exodus 23:2; Numbers 11:4–10.  
Kindred spirits, Numbers 11:16–17.  
United behind new leader, Joshua 1:16–18.  
In-law camaraderie, Ruth 1:16–19.  
Unity, heart and soul, 1 Samuel 14:7.  
Working diligently together, Nehemiah 4:6.  
Abandoned by friend in time of trouble, Job 6:14–17.  
Sharing with deserving friends, Proverbs 3:27–28.  
Enduring camaraderie, Proverbs 17:17.  
Two better than one, Ecclesiastes 4:8–12.  
Lover, beloved, Song of Songs 2:3–6.  
Weeping, rejoicing together, Isaiah 66:10.  
Walking in agreement, Amos 3:3.  
Divine camaraderie, Zechariah 1:3.  
Mutual justice, mercy, compassion, Zechariah 7:8–10.  
The Lord’s own family, Mark 3:32–35.  
At peace with each other, Mark 9:50.  
Three-month guest, Luke 1:56.  
Like teacher, like student, Luke 6:40.  
United followers, Luke 8:1–3.  
Sharing common goal, Luke 10:1–2.  
Measure of friendship, Luke 11:5–8.  
“My friend,” Romans 2:1–2 (GNB).  
Gentle motherly spirit, 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8.  
No place for arguments, 2 Timothy 2:24–26.  
*See Brotherhood, Fellowship, Support, Unanimity.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Anderson, K. (1996). *Where to Find It in the Bible*. T. Nelson Publishers.

<sup>10</sup> Anderson, K. (1996). *Where to Find It in the Bible*. T. Nelson Publishers.



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## FELLOWSHIP

Divine promise of fellowship, Leviticus 26:1–13.  
Food, fellowship, Deuteronomy 14:23 (See CEV); 15:20.  
Fellowship offerings, 1 Samuel 11:15.  
Becoming one in spirit, 1 Samuel 18:1–4.  
Friendship centered in the Lord, 1 Samuel 20:42.  
Companions in danger, 1 Samuel 22:23.  
Painful silence, Job 2:13.  
Undependable friends, Job 6:15–17.  
Cowardly fellowship, Job 6:21 (AB).  
Godless fellowship, Job 15:34.  
World’s greatest fellowship, Psalm 16:3 (GNB).  
Glorifying God together, Psalm 34:3.  
Disrupted fellowship, Psalm 55:12–21 (LB, GNB).  
Rich spiritual feast, Psalm 63:5 (NRSV).  
Kindred hearts, Psalm 119:63.  
Live together in unity, Psalm 133:1–3 (RSV).  
Worthwhile conversation, Proverbs 20:5.  
Avoid evil fellowship, Proverbs 24:1.  
Two better than one, Ecclesiastes 4:9–12.  
Shelter from wind, Isaiah 32:2.  
Messiah left alone, Isaiah 63:5.  
Agreement requisite to fellowship, Amos 3:3.  
Neighbors enjoy fellowship, Zechariah 3:10.  
Stewardship, fellowship, Matthew 5:23–24.  
Jesus fellowshiped with “sinners,” Mark 2:15–17.  
Fellowship, witness, Mark 5:18–20.  
People at peace, Mark 9:50.  
Fellowship singing, Mark 14:26.  
Varying styles of ministry, Luke 9:1–62.  
The Lord who is always at hand, Acts 2:25–28.  
Experiencing fellowship, Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 2:1; 1 John 1:3–7.  
Sharing Scripture insights, Acts 18:24–26.  
Fellowship of leader, followers, Acts 20:36–38.  
One-week visit, Acts 21:3–4.  
Fellowship of prayer, Romans 1:8–10; Ephesians 1:11–23; Philippians 1:3–6; Colossians 1:3–14.  
Mutual encouragement, Romans 1:11–12.  
Honor others above yourself, Romans 12:10.  
Fellowship of joy and sorrow, Romans 12:15.  
Fellowship of unbelievers, Romans 13:13 (LB).  
Those weak in faith, Romans 14:1.  
Accepting one another, Romans 15:7.  
Enjoyable company, Romans 15:24.  
Refreshed together, Romans 15:32 (LB).  
Greetings to friends, Romans 16:3–16.  
Believers in agreement, 1 Corinthians 1:10–17.  
Men, women in ministry, 1 Corinthians 11:11.  
Imbalance in food, fellowship, 1 Corinthians 11:20–22.  
Different gifts, service, 1 Corinthians 12:4–11.  
Fellowship in worship, 1 Corinthians 14:26.  
Greet with holy kiss, 1 Corinthians 16:20.



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Sharing both suffering, comfort, 2 Corinthians 1:7.  
Fellowship of bad feelings, 2 Corinthians 2:2 (CEV).  
Need for ministry fellowship, 2 Corinthians 2:12–13.  
Freedom in Spirit, 2 Corinthians 3:17.  
Hearts open wide, 2 Corinthians 6:11–13.  
Make place in hearts, 2 Corinthians 7:2 (CEV).  
Paul's visit with Peter, Galatians 1:18.  
Right hand of fellowship, Galatians 2:9–10.  
Do good to all, especially believers, Galatians 6:10.  
Members of God's family, Ephesians 2:19–22.  
Imitators of God expressing love to others, Ephesians 5:1–2.  
Keeping in touch, Ephesians 6:21–22.  
Channel of much blessing, Philippians 1:25–26.  
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Thanking God for fellowship, Colossians 1:3–6.  
Concern for development of followers, Colossians 2:1–5.  
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Built of Living Stone, 1 Peter 2:4–8.  
Kiss, greeting, 1 Peter 5:14.  
Ministry-based fellowship, 1 John 1:1–3.  
Darkness of hatred, 1 John 2:9–11.  
Love one another, 1 John 4:7–11.  
Love in truth, 3 John 1.  
Conversation better than correspondence, 3 John 13–14.  
Brothers, companions, Revelation 1:9.  
Fellowship with the Lord Himself, Revelation 3:20.



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When God comes to live with men, Revelation 21:1–4.  
See *Companionship, Camaraderie, Rapport, Unanimity*.<sup>11</sup>

REFLECTIONS  
*Quotations to Stir Heart and Mind*  
Friendship

CHRIST DID **not lay down his life for us as enemies so that we should remain enemies, but so that he could make us friends.**

THOMAS AQUINAS, *Lectures on the Gospel of John*

SHOULD I **say of friendship what John, the friend of Jesus, says of true love [1 John 4:16]: that God is friendship? That would be unusual and does not carry the authority of Scripture. Still, what is true of true love I do not really doubt can be said of friendship, since those who abide in friendship abide in God, and God in them.**

AELRED OF RIEVAULX,  
*Spiritual Friendship*

GOD IS **our chief friend.**

THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*

TO SPEAK **of friendship with God can sound so cozy and consoling, as if we are all snuggling up to God; however, there is no riskier vulnerability than to live in friendship with God, because every friendship changes us, because friends have expectations of each other, and because friends are said to be committed to the same things.... Any friend of God is called to faithfully embody the ways of God in the world, even to the point of suffering on account of them. There may be grace and glory in being a friend of God, but there is also clearly a cost.**

PAUL J. WADELL, *BECOMING FRIENDS*

IN EVERY **generation [Wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets.**

WISDOM OF SOLOMON 7:27B

FRIENDSHIP **with God introduces us into God's universal friendship, in which we are commanded to love every person as our neighbor.**

LIZ CARMICHAEL, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*

LET US LOVE **men for then we shall be the friends of Jesus who is a friend to men.**

PACHOMIUS, quoted in Carolinne White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century*

I SPEAK **a word. My friend speaks back. Then I again, then he, and thus we make a bridge of words so each may fetch across the ditch that lies between what's in his heart.**

FREDERICK BUECHNER, *Godric*

LOVE YOUR **friend as yourself.**

LEVITICUS 19:18 (from Latin Vulgate)

WITHOUT **friendships no one would choose to live, even if they had all other good things in life.**

ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*

FRIENDSHIP IS **realized by sharing a table, and it comprises those who suffer under injustice.**

ELISABETH MOLTMANN-WENDEL, *Rediscovering Friendship*

AN ENEMY **is a friend waiting to be made; that is the only hope for this conflict-ridden world.**

ARCHBISHOP DESMOND TUTU, Ash Wednesday sermon

*Compiled by Richard A. Kauffman<sup>12</sup>*

**FRIEND, FRIENDSHIP** Close trusting relationship between two people. Nowhere does the Bible present a concise definition of "friend" or "friendship." Instead, both the OT and NT present friendship in its different facets.

Two Hebrew root words, *r'h* and *'hb*, are used to describe friendship. *R'h* denotes an associate or companion, while *'hb* connotes the object of one's affection or devotion—a friend. Consequently, friendship may be simple association (Gen. 38:12; 2 Sam. 15:37) or loving companionship, the most recognizable example being that between David and Saul's son, Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1, 3; 20:17; 2 Sam. 1:26).

<sup>11</sup> Anderson, K. (1996). *Where to Find It in the Bible*. T. Nelson Publishers.

<sup>12</sup> Kauffman, R. A. (2005). [Reflections: Friendship](#). *Christianity Today*, 49(9), 94.



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Friendship, however, was not limited to earthly associates. The OT also affirms friendship between God and human persons. The relationship between God and Moses (Exod. 33:11) is likened to friendship because they conversed face-to-face. Both 2 Chron. 20:7 and Isa. 41:8 characterize Abraham as the friend of God. Friendship between God and His people is alluded to in Isa. 5:1–7, the song of the vineyard. Proverbs features the most references to friendship, nearly all of them cautioning against dubious friendships or extolling the virtues of a true friend (14:20; 17:17–18; 18:24; 19:4, 6; 22:11, 24; 27:6, 10, 14).

In the NT, the predominant word for friend is *philos*. A derivative, *philia*, is often used for friendship. Jesus is described as the “friend of ... sinners” (Matt. 11:19 HCSB). He called His disciples “friends” (Luke 12:4; John 15:13–15). The NT highlights the connection between friends and joy (Luke 15:6, 9, 29), as well as warning of the possibility of friends proving false (Luke 21:16). Echoing the OT, James pointed to Abraham, the friend of God, as one whose example of active faith is to be followed (James 2:23). James also warned against friendship with the world (James 4:4).

Only in 3 John 14 is “friend” a self-designation for Christians. As a means of describing the relations between church members, friendship was overshadowed by the model of family relations, brotherhood and sisterhood (1 Tim. 5:1–3; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17). See *Body of Christ; David; Jonathan; Love; Neighbor*.

*William J. Ireland, Jr.*<sup>13</sup>

**FRIENDSHIP** (ידידות, אהבה, רעות, אהבה): Personal attachment to an individual. The historical books of the Bible furnish several instances of genuine friendship; and the pithy sayings of the Wisdom literature, of Talmud, and of Midrash contain a philosophy of friendship. The Bible endows friendship with a peculiar dignity by making it symbolical of the intimacy that exists between God and man. “And YHWH spoke unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Ex. 33:11; comp. Num. 12:8). Also the prophet Isaiah makes God speak of Abraham as his friend (Isa. 41:8; comp. 2 Chron. 20:7).

The essential characteristic of genuine friendship is disinterestedness. The service one renders his friend must be prompted by the sole desire to be of use to him, and not for the sake of furthering one’s own interests. Selfishness destroys friendship. This is tersely expressed in Ab. v. 16: “Friendship dictated by a selfish motive comes to an end together with its speculations; but friendship which is not based on any selfish motive comes never to an end.”

Friendship of the selfish type is often referred to in Bible and Talmud; e.g., “Every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts” (Prov. 19:6b; comp. *ib.* 19:4); “Ye would ... make merchandise of your friend” (Job 6:27b); “At the door of the rich all are friends; at the door of the poor there are none” (Shab. 32a); “A friend loveth at all times” (Prov. 17:17); “A friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (*ib.* 18:24b).

#### Historical Examples

As historical examples of friendship have high value in determining the characteristics of the national soul, the following may be cited from Jewish history: The relations between Jonathan and David have become typical of true friendship. Jonathan’s friendship for David is put to a severe test. Against his friendship there are arrayed filial duty and the personal interests of a prince; but friendship conquers (1 Sam. 18:3, 19:2–7, 23:17–18). David is kind to the unfortunate Mephibosheth, a scion of the house of Saul, whom he be-friends on account of Jonathan, his friend (2 Sam. 9). Barzillai’s disinterested kindness for David is another instance (2 Sam. 19:31–39).

Because friends, owing to their intimate relation, influence each other, the utmost care should be exercised in the choice of a friend. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 17:17; comp. *ib.* 28:7); “Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger” (*ib.* 22:24a).

The Talmud furnishes many beautiful examples of friendship. An illustration of friendship as an ideal of spiritual fellowship is found in the relation between rabbis Johanan bar Nappaha and Simeon ben Lakish (Yer. Bezah v. 63d; Yer. Ta’an. 5a; see, also, Horodezky, “Ha-Goren,” p. 22, on מדרש”ל and רמ”א).

The value set on friendship is shown by the following observations:

“It is easy to make an enemy; it is difficult to make a friend” (Yalk., Deut. 845); “If thou wouldst get a friend prove him first, and be not hasty to credit him” (Ecclus. [Sirach] 6:7). “For some man is a friend for his own occasion, and will not abide in the day of thy trouble. And there is a friend who, being turned to enmity and strife, will discover thy reproach. Again, some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thine

<sup>13</sup> Ireland, W. J., Jr. (2003). [Friend, Friendship](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, E. R. Clendenen, & T. C. Butler (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 602). Holman Bible Publishers.



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affliction. But in thy prosperity he will be as thyself... If thou be brought low he will be against thee and will hide himself from thy face" (*ib.* verses 8–12). "A faithful friend is a strong defense: And he that hath found such a one hath found a treasure" (*ib.* verse 14; comp. verses 15–18).

That misplaced confidence gives cause for sorrow may be learned from many Biblical quotations. "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Ps. 41:9). "All her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies" (Lam. 1:2a). "And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds between thine arms? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zech. 13:6, R. V.).

Not to forsake one's friend, but to aid and to assist him in every possible way, is the tenor of many sayings. "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not" (Prov. 27:10). "Change not a friend for any good, by no means" (Ecclus. [Sirach] 7:18), "Do good unto thy friend before thou diest, and according to thy ability stretch out thy hand, and give to him" (*ib.* 14:13).

The highest office of friendship, the most thorough test of its genuineness, is justly reckoned to be the desire of friends to improve the moral and intellectual conditions of each other by frankness of reproof and counsel. "Thou shalt warn thy neighbor" (Lev. 19:17a). "Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are profuse" (Prov. 27:5–6). "Love him who corrects thee, and hate him who flatters thee" (Ab. R. N. ch. xxix.).

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Braunschweiger, *Die Lehrer der Mischnah*; Lazarus, *Die Ethik des Judenthums*, note 49.

E. C.

A. G.<sup>14</sup>

#### REFLECTIONS

##### *Quotations to Stir Heart and Mind*

##### Friendship

[W]E ALL NEED FRIENDS with whom we can speak of our deepest concerns, and who do not fear to speak the truth in love to us.

*Margaret Guenther, Holy Listening:  
The Art of Spiritual Direction*

ONE OF THE GREATEST human longings is to be close to someone.

*Kathleen R. Fischer and Thomas N. Hart,  
Promises to Keep*

ALL LOVE that has not friendship for its base, / Is like a mansion built upon the sand.

*Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Upon the Sand*

I AWOKE THIS MORNING with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new. Shall I not call God the Beautiful, who daily showeth himself so to me in his gifts?... My friends have come to me unsought. The great God gave them to me.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Friends," in Emerson's Essays*

HERE WE ARE, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst.... For what more sublime can be said of friendship, what more true, what more profitable, than that it ought to, and is proved to, begin in Christ, continue in Christ, and be perfected in Christ?

*Aelred of Rievaulx, Spiritual Friendship*

THE HOLY PASSION of friendship is of so sweet and steady and loyal and enduring a nature that it will last through a whole lifetime, if not asked to lend money.

*Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson*

TRY TO AVOID making mistakes in friendship and we will have no friends at all.

*Gilbert C. Meilaender, Friendship:*

*A Study in Theological Ethics*

A FRIENDSHIP which can cease to be was never true friendship.

*Jerome, Letters, 3:6*

IT IS MORE SHAMEFUL to distrust one's friends than to be deceived by them.

<sup>14</sup> Singer, I., ed. (1901–1906). In *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, 12 Volumes* (Vol. 5, pp. 520–521). Funk & Wagnalls.



Summer of Lies  
Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

*Duc de La Rochefoucauld, Maxims*

THE MOST FATAL DISEASE of friendship is gradual decay.

*Samuel Johnson, "Essays from the 'Rambler,' 'Adventurer,' and 'Idler' "*

DO NOT ABANDON OLD FRIENDS, for new ones cannot equal them. A new friend is like new wine; when it has aged, you can drink it with pleasure.

*Sirach 9:10 (NRSV)*

IT IS EASY ENOUGH to be friendly to one's friends. But to befriend the one who regards himself as your enemy is the quintessence of true religion. The other is mere business.

*Mohandas K. Gandhi,*

*Nonviolence in Peace and War*

Compiled by Richard A. Kauffman<sup>15</sup>

## Friendship in the Hebrew Bible

SAUL M. OLYAN

Yale UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2016943626

ISBN: 978-0-300-18268-2 (hardcover : alk. paper)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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*John J. Collins*

General Editor

*For Lorne Sabsay, my oldest friend*

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Acknowledgments

It is a great pleasure to acknowledge the contributions of friends, colleagues, and institutions to the development of this book. I am indebted to David Konstan and Nathaniel Levto for reading individual chapters and providing valuable critical and bibliographic suggestions. I also thank Michael Satlow, Matthew Rutz, Jacob L. Wright, and Susan Harvey for providing additional bibliographic references, and John Huehnergard, Zackary Wainer, and Nathaniel DesRosiers for suggestions regarding aspects of the book's content or argument. I am grateful to John J. Collins for the helpful suggestions he made while editing the manuscript for Yale University Press. This is a better book as a result of his efforts. In addition to the contributions made by these individuals, I have also benefited from the feedback of the press's anonymous referees. Needless to say, all errors of fact or judgment that remain are my responsibility alone.

<sup>15</sup> Twain, M., Meilaender, G. C., & Gandhi, M. K. with Guenther, M., Fischer, K. R., Hart, T. N., Wilcox, E. W., & Emerson, R. W., Aelred of Rievaulx. (2001). [Reflections](#). *Christianity Today*, 45(7), 85.



## Summer of Lies

### Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

Brown University awarded me a fellowship at the Cogut Center for the Humanities during the spring semester of 2014, during which I was able to write several chapters of the book. I am grateful to the university for this opportunity, as well as for sabbatical time during the fall semester of 2010 when I began to work in earnest on this project. Some of the content in Chapter 1 appeared in a different form in my essay “The Roles of Kin and Fictive Kin in Biblical Representations of Death Ritual,” in *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies* (ed. Rainer Albertz et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 251–63. I thank James Eisenbraun for permission to reproduce this material in this volume. Finally, I am immensely grateful to my husband, Frederik Schockaert, for his unwavering support at every stage of the writing of this book.

| Abbreviations    |  |
|------------------|--|
| AnBib            | Analecta biblica   |
| AYB              | Anchor Yale Bible  |
| b.               | Babylonian   |
| BASOR            | <i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>   |
| BDB              | <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1906.  |
| Beentjes         | <i>The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew: A Text Edition of All Extant Hebrew Manuscripts and a Synopsis of All Parallel Hebrew Ben Sira Texts</i> . Pancratius C. Beentjes. VTSup 68. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006. |
| BJS              | Brown Judaic Studies   |
| BKAT             | Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament   |
| BO               | <i>Bibliotheca orientalis</i>  |
| BWL              | <i>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</i> . W. G. Lambert. Oxford: Clarendon, 1960.  |
| BZAW             | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft  |
| CAT              | <i>The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places</i> (KTU: second, enlarged edition). Edited by Manfred Dietrich, Otto Loretz, and Joaquín Sanmartín. Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995.                |
| CBQ              | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>   |
| EA               | <i>El Amarna</i> . According to the numbering of the Amarna letters in <i>Die el-Amarna-Tafeln: Mit Einleitung und Erläuterungen</i> . J. A. Knudtzon. Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915.  |
| FAT              | Forschungen zum Alten Testament  |
| GKC              | <i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> . Edited and enlarged by E. Kautzsch. Second English edition by A. E. Cowley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.   |
| HALOT            | <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000. |
| Hi               | Hiphil   |
| HIT              | Hitpa'el   |
| HSM              | Harvard Semitic Monographs   |
| JASup            | <i>Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements</i>  |
| JBL              | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>  |
| Jouion           | <i>Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique</i> . Paul Jouion. Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1923.   |
| KAI              | <i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> . H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1966–1969.  |
| LXX              | Septuagint   |
| LXX <sup>e</sup> | Codex Vaticanus  |
| MT               | Masoretic Text   |
| NI               | Niphal   |
| NIDOTTE          | <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.  |
| NJPS             | <i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text</i> . New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1985.   |
| NRSV             | New Revised Standard Version   |
| OCD              | <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> . Edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.   |
| OTL              | Old Testament Library  |
| Pi               | Piel   |
| RSV              | Revised Standard Version   |
| TDOT             | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromily, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.     |
| TLOT             | <i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by Ernst Jenni with assistance from Claus Westermann. Translated by Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997.   |
| Vg.              | Vulgate  |
| VT               | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>   |
| VTSup            | <i>Vetus Testamentum Supplements</i>   |
| Williams         | <i>Hebrew Syntax: An Outline</i> . Ronald J. Williams. 2nd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976.   |
| W.-O.            | <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> . Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.  |
| y.               | Jerusalem  |

## Introduction

What is friendship? At first blush, the answer seems obvious: Friendship is a voluntary association between people who enjoy one another's company and care, at least to some degree, about one another's welfare. But this definition, which would probably elicit few objections from most present-day Europeans and North Americans, does not address a number of contested issues in contemporary Western friendship. For example, is it possible for men and women to be friends? Must friends be peers in every respect, or is there room for age differences, or inequality of income, social status, or power? Can parents and children be friends? Might sexual relations play a role in friendship? Does friendship necessarily involve emotional intimacy? Are there contrasting male and female, gay and straight, working-class and middle-class friendship patterns? Each of these questions would very likely stimulate debate among the people I know, and the answers would probably depend on some combination of the generation, gender, sexual orientation, class, and cultural background of the respondent. Apart from agreeing that friends associate voluntarily, like one another, and take an interest in one another's well-being, there might not be much consensus among my friends, neighbors, colleagues, students, and family members about the contested aspects of friendship that I have mentioned. Were we to go beyond speculation about the views of the people I encounter in my life, and conduct research on the beliefs about friendship held by a larger population of contemporary North Americans or other Westerners, I would expect to find even less agreement about what constitutes friendship. In short, friendship as we know it in contemporary Europe and North America is shaped by a variety of socio-cultural influences and is understood differently by different people. If I cannot assume that my own preferred configuration of what constitutes friendship is normative for everyone in my own community or society, let alone Western cultures, then I certainly cannot presuppose much about friendship in ancient societies, given their cultural, linguistic, and chronological distance from us. **Thus, I begin this study of friendship in the Hebrew Bible without presuming that the Hebrew Bible's authors necessarily share many (or any) of our ideas about what might constitute a friendship.**



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**What is important is that the texts be permitted to speak and that we strive to understand their explicit and implicit communication critically and contextually, allowing our contemporary perspective to formulate the questions we ask but not to presuppose any answers. As a result, friendship configurations in the Hebrew Bible will gradually come into focus, permitting comparison with patterns of friendship in other contexts, ancient and modern.**

Friendship is a topic that has mainly been ignored by scholars of the Hebrew Bible, possibly on account of its complexity and elusiveness. The vocabulary of biblical friendship is frequently ambiguous; only a few texts represent particular friendships in any kind of depth (e.g., that of Jonathan and David, or Job and his three comforters), and these are literary creations that may or may not have any basis in the lives of historical people. Perhaps it is not a surprise, then, that no monograph on friendship in the Hebrew Bible has been published, and aside from a number of dictionary articles and brief review essays, the scholarly literature is quite limited and often topic-specific (e.g., the friendship of Jonathan and David, or friendship in wisdom literature). Yet friendship in the Hebrew Bible warrants the kind of thorough, detailed exploration that friendship has received or is presently receiving from specialists in related areas such as classics and New Testament studies and in any number of other fields (e.g., contemporary legal studies, sociology, social anthropology, developmental psychology, philosophy, medicine, and public health). The data of the Hebrew Bible, though often a challenge to interpret, are nonetheless rich and intriguing, raising many questions about the nature of biblical friendship, some not unlike the questions about contemporary European and North American friendship I mentioned above, and some quite different. Among the questions that I explore in this book are the following: What are the basic expectations of friendship, or put differently, what are the characteristics of the ideal friend? What exactly is the relationship between friends and family members, given that biblical texts often classify friends with relatives implicitly and compare friends to family members both implicitly and explicitly? Are there differences between the set of obligations owed to family members and those owed to friends? Must friendship necessarily have a formal, contractual dimension as it sometimes appears to have (e.g., as indicated by the treaty language in the David/Jonathan narratives), or can it be thoroughly informal? Can relatives also be friends? Must friends be peers in every respect? Can women be friends with one another and with men? Might friendships have an erotic dimension, or are they by definition nonsexual, as in the classical world? What might cause the failure of a friendship? And finally, is there evidence in biblical texts—either explicit or implicit—for the classification of friendship into different types or gradations (cf. Aristotle's three types of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.3–4)?

In order to explore these questions, I begin with a detailed examination of the vocabulary and idioms of friendship in the Hebrew Bible. Then I consider the following topics in succeeding chapters: **(1)** the link between friends and family members (e.g., shared classification, common obligations of kin and friends, differing expectations); **(2)** failed friendship, including the topos of the disloyal friend in the psalms of individual complaint; and **(3)** friendships in narrative such as those of Ruth and Naomi and Jonathan and David, including the relationship of friendship and covenant. In the final chapter, I compare the configurations of friendship evidenced in Ben Sira, a second-century BCE Hebrew wisdom composition likely influenced to some degree by Greek notions of friendship, with representations of friendship in earlier texts of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, in my conclusion, I compare the representation of friendship in different types of biblical literature, explore the evidence suggesting an emotional component to biblical friendship, consider the relationship of friendship and covenant, compare women's friendships with those of men, reflect upon why extant evidence does not bear witness to friendships between men and women, explore the axes of equality and inequality evidenced in biblical representations of friendship, entertain what a diachronic dimension can contribute to our understanding of biblical friendship, and consider the friend as a distinct social actor. I also reflect upon what this study might contribute to the larger, incipient, cross-disciplinary theorization of friendship in the contemporary academy as well as what it might contribute to cross-cultural theorizing of friendship from the perspective of a single discipline.

A few caveats: The focus of this study is friendship as it is represented in biblical texts. I make no claim to reconstruct particular historical friendships that once existed in specific settings, a task that is unhappily beyond our ability given the state and nature of the extant evidence. Because the data are scattered broadly throughout the Hebrew Bible and the dating of many texts relevant to this study is contested, one cannot avoid a significant synchronic emphasis. Nonetheless, comparison of the representation of friendship in earlier materials with that of friendship in demonstrably later sources such as Ben Sira will provide a welcome diachronic dimension to the discussion, and comparison of friendship in pre-Hellenistic wisdom sources such as Proverbs and Job to its



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representations in prose narrative, prophetic texts, the psalms of individual complaint, and other materials will give added depth to the study. I devote most of the remainder of this introduction to the vocabulary of biblical friendship, the study of which provides an initial glimpse into biblical presuppositions about friendship and allows me to develop a preliminary working definition of the phenomenon. I end with a brief consideration of the range of biblical literature in which material relevant to this study is evidenced.

The Hebrew Bible's vocabulary and idioms of friendship are complex and often challenging and require careful analysis in order to set the stage for the larger project I am undertaking here. **Although the biblical text has no word for "friendship," there are a number of words for "friend."** Most common is *rēa'* and related nouns such as *rē'ā*, *ra'yā*, *rē'eh*, and *mērēa'*, each apparently derived either from a root *r'h* or a root *r'*, both meaning something like "to associate with" or "to affiliate with," suggesting a voluntary dimension to friendship. Other words and expressions for "friend" include *'ōhēb*, literally "one who loves" or "lover"; *'allûp*, which may be related to an adjective of the same form meaning "gentle" (BDB) (Jer 11:19); *'iš/ēnōš šālôm* or *šōlēm*, probably best rendered "one with whom I enjoy good relations"; *mēyuddā'*, "one who is known (to me)"; and likely *yōdēa'*, "one who knows (me)." Occasionally, two words meaning "friend" are apparently combined in a hendiadys construction intended to communicate a single, complex notion: *'ōhābay wērē'ay*, "my loving friends" (Ps 38:12; cf. 88:19), and *'allûpî ûmēyuddā'î*, "my gentle intimate" (Ps 55:14), are but two examples.

In addition to these words and expressions, **a variety of verbal forms and idioms are associated with the friend**, and these provide us with additional insight into biblical presuppositions about friendship: *dbq*, **"to cling (to),"** an idiom of loyalty used of the friend in Prov 18:24 and Ruth 1:14; *bḥ*, **"to trust,"** associated with friendship in Ps 41:10 (cf. Mic 7:5; Jer 9:3); *šlm* (Pi), *šym*, or *gml ṭōb/ṭōbâ*, **"to pay back that which is good"** instead of what is evil, a norm of friendship by implication in Ps 7:5; 35:12; 38:21 (by implication because the actual, extant idiom is *šlm* [Pi], *šym*, or *gml rā'ā/ra' [taḥat ṭōbâ]*, "to pay back that which is evil [instead of what is good]"); and *himtîq sōd*, literally **"make sweet fellowship"** (Ps 55:15), interpreted by Koehler and Baumgartner to mean **"to keep close company"** or **"conduct confidential business,"** in either case an idiom of intimacy. Deuteronomy 13:7, characterizing the particularly intimate friend, refers to him as **"your friend who is as yourself"** (*rē'ākā 'āšer kēnapšēkā*); 1 Sam 18:1 speaks of the "self" or "life" (*nepeš*) of Jonathan **"bound" (nikšērâ) to the "self" or "life"** of David, another idiom for intimate personal connection, as Gen 44:30, regarding the close attachment of Jacob to his youngest son Benjamin, makes clear. The potential intimacy of friendship as expressed through communication is articulated in **Exod 33:11, which describes the manner in which Yhwh communicates with Moses: "Yhwh would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."** In addition, the friend is described in Ps 41:10 as *'ōkēl laḥmî*, "one who eats my food," suggesting a role for hospitality, including commensality, as a component of friendship. In Ps 35:27, a context of adversity, friends are characterized as "they who delight in my vindication" (*ḥāpēšē šidaqî*). Finally, one's friends, in contrast to one's enemies, are expected to pursue one's well-being (lit. "pursue what is good" [*rdp ṭōb*], Ps 38:21).

**On the basis of only a survey of biblical nouns often rendered "friend," we can say that ideally friendship is a relationship between people who choose to associate or affiliate with one another and that it involves positive feelings described by texts as "love."**<sup>23</sup> A degree of personal knowledge of the other is assumed, as is mutual goodwill. Gentleness (of interaction?) may also be characteristic of friendship if our understanding of the meaning of the noun *'allûp* is correct. Verbal forms and other idioms add to this composite portrait. **The friend is loyal, a quality prized especially in times of adversity: she "clings" (dbq) to her friend; he desires justice for his friend; he does not abandon his friend or his father's friend (Prov 27:10).** The friend is **hospitable**, offering table fellowship; he is **trustworthy**; and he might be on particularly intimate terms with one (e.g., "your friend who is as yourself," Deut 13:7; "there is a friend who clings more closely than a brother," Prov 18:24). Friendship is assumed to be reciprocal: friends share personal knowledge (*mēyuddā'*, **"one who is known [to me]";** likely also *yōdēa'*, **"one who knows [me]"),** and the friend is expected to repay beneficence with comparable treatment (see, explicitly, Ps 35:13–14, where the petitioner details his previous benevolent acts on behalf of his now disloyal friends). The latter example also suggests **that friendship is a social relationship not without obligations.** Needless to say, this composite, synchronic characterization is oversimplified, ignoring the diachronic perspective and potential differences due to literary type or authorial preference. It is also idealized, for biblical texts themselves acknowledge and even bring into relief the failings of friends. Finally, it does not address a number of important questions about biblical friendship (e.g., can relatives be friends? must friends be peers in all respects?). Nonetheless, this composite portrait provides me with a starting point for my analysis; it will be subject to complication and gain nuance as the study proceeds.



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The vocabulary of biblical friendship, for all its richness, is not unproblematic. **First** and foremost, there is the challenge of ambiguity. Simply put, a number of the Hebrew words for “friend” can mean other things as well, and **therefore we must depend upon their contextual usage to help us determine their meaning.** A primary example is the noun *rēaʿ*, the most common word for “friend” in the Hebrew Bible. Though *rēaʿ* appears to mean “friend” in passages such as Prov 17:17 (“At all times the friend loves”) or Prov 27:10 (“Do not abandon your friend or your father’s friend”), its meaning in other contexts evidently includes “neighbor” (Deut 19:14, “You shall not move your neighbor’s landmark”); “peer” or “fellow” who belongs to the same subgroup (1 Kgs 20:35 [a fellow prophet]; Zech 3:8 [fellow priests]; 2 Sam 2:16 [a fellow soldier]); “peer who is a rival” (1 Sam 15:28; 28:17; 2 Sam 12:11, all concerning rivals for the throne); or simply “another person,” “someone other than you” (Gen 11:3). Another word, *mērēaʿ*, clearly means “friend” in some contexts, as in Prov 19:7, which states that the friends of the poor man reject him. Yet it can also evidently mean something like “assigned companion” as in Judg 14:11, 20; 15:2, 6, where it is used of male strangers chosen by Samson’s Philistine hosts to keep Samson company. To further complicate matters, the rhetoric of friendship—including the words *’ōhēb*, *rēaʿ*, and *mērēaʿ*—is used of political relations, as in 1 Sam 30:26; 2 Sam 3:8; Isa 41:8; and Lam 1:2, as are idioms of kinship such as “brother” and “father,” yet treaty partners neither are kin nor are likely to be personal friends.

Thus, each occurrence of an ambiguous word such as *rēaʿ* or *mērēaʿ* must be examined carefully in its context to determine its relevance to this study. In a text such as Exod 33:11, which describes Yhwh speaking to Moses face to face “as a man speaks to his friend,” it is evident from the comparison that *rēaʿ* must mean “friend” rather than “neighbor,” “peer” or “fellow,” or “another,” given the text’s emphasis on intimacy and singularity of communication between two individuals. Translations of the Hebrew Bible often ignore this problem, with the result that passages pertinent to the study of friendship are sometimes unintentionally obscured, while other texts are rendered in a manner that suggests a relevance that they do not really have. An example of the former tendency is the NJPS translation of Exod 33:11, the text mentioned above: “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to another” (*rē’ēhū*). The idea the text is trying to communicate is the singularity and intimacy of Moses’s encounter with Yhwh, and the phrase “as one speaks to another” does not capture that sense of singularity and intimacy in the way that “as a man speaks to his friend” does. An example of the latter tendency is the RSV translation of Zech 3:8: “Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men of good omen.” In this case, the context suggests that the meaning of *rēaʿ* is not “friend,” as the RSV renders it, but rather “colleague” (NRSV), “peer,” or “fellow” (see NJPS), as the people with Joshua are fellow priests. In contrast to Exod 33:11, a text that is relevant to a study of friendship, Zech 3:8 is not.

Another manifestation of the ambiguity of the vocabulary of friendship is its extensive overlap with the terminology of **covenanting**. Words such as *’ōhēb* (“lover” or “friend”), *rēaʿ* (“friend”), *tōb/tōbā* (“that which is good”), and *’iš/’ēnōš šālôm* (“one with whom I enjoy good relations”), all associated with friendship, occur as technical terms in treaty settings, carry political overtones when used in such contexts, and may or may not tell us anything at all about the personal dispositions of the parties involved in treaty-making. Familial terms, such as “brother” and “father,” also frequently used of treaty partners, have similar political nuances in a covenantal setting.<sup>35</sup> Thus, parties to a treaty may have no genuine affection or concern for one another in the manner of friends or family members. The rhetoric of friendship and family relations is likely marshaled in treaty contexts in order to emphasize expectations of loyalty to treaty stipulations. **So when we read that Hiram king of Tyre “had always been a lover [or “friend,” *’ōhēb*] of David” (1 Kgs 5:15), we ought to understand the statement in its treaty context: that Hiram had always been loyal to his parity treaty with David.** The claim in 1 Sam 18:16, that “all Israel and Judah loved David for he led them in battle” ought to be understood similarly: the army was loyal to their successful commander. This is rather different in meaning from the statement of Prov 17:17 mentioned earlier, that “at all times the friend loves [*’ōhēb*].” All three statements may presuppose loyalty as a component of loving, but otherwise their assumptions probably differ. Where Prov 17:17 seems to presume an emotional bond, there is no evidence that 1 Kgs 5:15 and 1 Sam 18:16 share this assumption. In fact, covenant love, in contrast to emotional love, “can be commanded,” in the words of William L. Moran, as in Deut 6:5: “You shall love Yhwh your god with all your heart, with all your self, and with all your might.” Thus, each occurrence of a term associated both with friendship and with covenanting must be assessed carefully to determine its potential resonances. A term such as “lover” (*’ōhēb*) or “friend” (*rēaʿ*), when used in a treaty setting, likely does not presuppose the existence of an emotional bond, affection, or personal concern between the parties (e.g., 1 Sam 18:16; 1 Kgs 5:15); however, outside of a context of covenant, it seems likely that such a term does (e.g., Prov 17:17).



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Given these complexities, interpretation becomes particularly challenging when a friendship is structured unambiguously as a treaty as in 1 Sam 18:1–4. On the one hand, demonstrably nontreaty idioms of emotional intimacy are used of Jonathan’s relationship to David in that text, suggesting a friendship with emotional dimensions (e.g., his “self” or “life” was “bound” to David’s “self” or “life,” an idiom of emotional intimacy without evident treaty associations, as I have discussed). On the other hand, typical covenant rhetoric is used in the passage: **Jonathan loved David as himself (*kěnapšô*), and they cut a covenant (*běřît*) together. Thus, a text such as 1 Sam 18:1–4 suggests that it is possible to formalize an emotionally intimate friendship with treaty rites and stipulations, at least in the world of the text. Psalm 55:14–15, 21 is likely a second example of a friendship formalized through covenantal rites, as I shall discuss in Chapter 3.**

The use of friendship vocabulary for sexual intimates further complicates our attempt to understand the phenomenon of friendship in the Hebrew Bible. Though *’allûp* is appropriately translated “friend” in a text such as Mic 7:5 or Ps 55:14, its use for a woman’s husband in Prov 2:17 and for Yhwh as Israel’s husband in Jer 3:4 (with *’āb*, “father”) suggests a different kind of relationship than friendship as conceived in a text such as Ps 55:14 and Mic 7:5. The same is true of the use of *rēa’* in a text such as Song 5:16 in reference to the male lover: “This is my beloved, this is my friend.” Jeremiah 3:20 compares Israel’s deceiving (*bgd*) of Yhwh to an adulterous wife’s treachery (*bgd*) against her “friend” (*rēa’*), obviously a reference to her husband. Furthermore, the term *ra’yâ* (“companion”) is used frequently in the Song of Songs of the female lover, though, like *rēa’* and *’allûp*, it appears also to have nonsexual connotations elsewhere (Judg 11:37, *kětib*, used of Jephthah’s daughter’s female companions). The use of friendship vocabulary for sexual intimates raises interesting questions. Could it be that biblical constructions of friendship might potentially include a sexual dimension? Or is the friendship language used of husbands, wives, and lovers to be understood simply as metaphorical, intended to enrich the poetic imagery of the text in some way? A point in favor of the metaphorical interpretation is the fact that familial language is also marshaled in the rhetoric of the Song of Songs to describe the lovers. Not only is the female lover a “beloved,” a “bride,” and a “companion” (*ra’yâ*); she is also described as the male lover’s “sister” in a number of contexts (Song 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1, 2). A comparable simile is used of the male lover in Song 8:1: “Would that you were like a brother to me, one who sucks at the breast of my mother.” Given this simile, it seems likely that the sibling language used of the female lover is not intended to be taken literally, but functions rather as a metaphor intended to enrich the text’s poetic rhetoric by adding yet another axis of emotional intimacy to the portrait of the relationship. If I am correct about the metaphorical nature of the familial rhetoric, the same is likely true of the vocabulary of friendship when used of sexual intimates. It makes the portrayal of the relationship between the lovers more emotionally complex without suggesting anything about the nature of friendship per se. Thus, one ought not to assume that biblical constructions of friendship include the possibility of sexual relations between friends without clearer and more cogent evidence. The strongest case that can be made for the possibility of eroticized friendship in biblical materials is to be found not in the Song of Songs, but in 2 Sam 1:26, a verse of David’s Lament over Saul and Jonathan, a text that I address in Chapter 3.

Some comments about the types of biblical literature that evidence the vocabulary and idioms of friendship and bear witness to its literary representation round out this introduction. A variety of texts are relevant to the study of biblical friendship. These include prose narratives such as the stories of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and Job and his three comforters; prophetic texts such as Jer 9:3 or Mic 7:5–6; legal materials (e.g., Deut 13:7); a number of the psalms, including psalms of individual complaint; nonpsalmic lyrical texts, such as David’s Lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19–27); pre-Hellenistic wisdom collections—both traditional and skeptical—such as Proverbs and the poetic dialogues of the book of Job; and the Hellenistic-era wisdom book Ben Sira. Some of these materials are poetic in nature, and others are prose. Some are precisely dated (e.g., Ben Sira), but most are not easily datable. In some texts the friends in question are complex and richly evoked (e.g., David, Naomi, or Jonadab [2 Sam 13]); in others they are less individuated and more idealized and predictable (Ruth, Job’s three comforters in the Job prologue); in still others they are at best flat, one-dimensional types without individuality who display stereotypical behaviors (e.g., the nameless, unfaithful friends of the psalms of individual complaint and the Job dialogues). At various points throughout this study, I compare the representation of friendship and friendship’s idioms and technical vocabulary in two or more literary types, and in Chapter 4, I compare Ben Sira’s usages to those of earlier wisdom and nonwisdom texts.

#### 1 Friends and Family

After considering the vocabulary of friendship and its complexities, I move on now to an exploration of the relationship between friends and family members as it is represented in biblical texts. Friends and family are an



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appropriate place to begin a detailed investigation of friendship in the Hebrew Bible, as biblical texts compare friends and relatives and even suggest implicitly that they enjoy a common classification as intimates. Such comparison suggests that friends and family members share, or ought to share, certain characteristics, behaviors, and obligations in common. I query these not infrequent comparisons and shared taxonomies in order to ask what specific expectations family members and friends are assumed to have in common by our sources and how differing obligations set friends and family members apart as distinct social actors. I also compare the idioms of familial intimacy to those used of friends and consider the evidence for gradations of friendship, how such gradations compare to gradations of familial intimacy, and whether familial gradations of intimacy might have served as a model for such gradations in friendship. I begin with a consideration of family members as intimates par excellence in order to set the stage for comparison of friends to them.

#### *Family Members as Paradigmatic Intimates*

Biblical texts and other West Asian materials typically represent primary familial relationships as paradigmatically close, at least in theory if not in practice. Idealized ties between parents and children and brothers and sisters, characterized by intimacy, harmony, loyalty, support (particularly in times of need), and respect for hierarchy, serve as a model for relationships, both voluntary and involuntary, that extend beyond the immediate family circle and the larger kin group. Ties between a deity and his or her worshipers, a king and his people, human treaty partners, members of professional classes, and friends are all shaped, at least in part, by the rhetoric and/or presuppositions of idealized familial relations according to our texts. Yhwh, a father to Israel his firstborn son (Exod 4:22–23), ought to be honored as a father is honored by his son (Mal 1:6). As king, Saul is David’s “father,” and each party in their relationship is expected to treat the other appropriately (*gāmal haṭṭôbâ*, “pay back that which is good”) (1 Sam 24:17–18; cf. 26:17). Political allies describe their relations as loving and address one another as “brother” (1 Kgs 5:15; 9:13; Amos 1:9). The leader of a professional group (e.g., of prophets) is a “father” to its members (1 Sam 10:12), who are often described as “sons of the prophets” (e.g., 2 Kgs 9:1). Friends, though rarely if ever described using familial terminology, are often compared to intimate kin, implicitly and explicitly, as I shall demonstrate (e.g., Prov 17:17; 18:24). Thus, I begin this chapter with an exploration of gradations of familial intimacy, its idioms, and the expectations of family members before going on to consider the relationship of friends and family.

#### *Gradations of Familial Intimacy*

A hierarchy of family relationships may be discerned from extant texts, and these suggest gradations of intimacy and responsibility within familial circles. Leviticus 21:1–4 concerns the family members for whom a priest may defile himself through corpse contact. These relatives include his mother, father, son, daughter, and brothers, each of whom is characterized as “his flesh, the one who is close to him [*šē’ērô haqqārôb ’elāyw*].” His virgin sister, also described as “the one who is close to him [*haqqērôbâ ’elāyw*],” is included in this group because she has no husband. But his wife is explicitly excluded, and uncles, aunts, and cousins go unmentioned, suggesting their omission as well. Thus, according to Lev 21:1–4, the priest’s obligation to bury familial dead extends only to certain blood relations, whom we might characterize as his closest family members; it does not extend to the spouse, who is not a blood relation, nor to other family members, whom the text classifies implicitly as more distant by not including them among those characterized as “his flesh” and/or “close to him.” The law regarding the high priest in Lev 21:11 supplies additional information about familial hierarchies of intimacy and obligation. In this text, the high priest, in contrast to the priest, may not pollute himself for anyone in his family, “even for his father or mother.” The mention only of parents here suggests a level of intimacy and obligation incumbent upon a child that goes beyond that which a man might have for his own children or brothers or unmarried sisters. Thus, even within the group of family members characterized as “close” in Lev 21:2–3, 21:11 suggests that there is a hierarchy of obligation and intimacy.

**Other texts support the idea that a man’s closest relations are his parents, children, and siblings.** Numbers 27:8–11 provides an order of inheritance from most intimate family members to less close relations. According to this text, when a man dies, his landed property goes to his son; if he has no son, it goes to his daughter; if he lacks a daughter, it is inherited by his brothers; if he has no brothers, it goes to his paternal uncles; and if there are no paternal uncles, the patrimony is to be given to “his flesh, the one who is close to him from his clan,” an expression similar to that of Lev 21:2 but here a designation for more distant relations (e.g., cousins). If Ruth 3:12 is any indication, there is a hierarchical order of closeness among these more distant relations as well. Presumably, Num 27:8–11 assumes that the parents of the dead man have predeceased him, leaving only children and siblings among his closest relatives. But he, too, is a parent, and his children are his primary potential heirs, suggesting the closeness of parents to children and vice versa. It is notable that in Num 27:8, the man’s daughter inherits before his brothers



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do, suggesting that being a child of the dead man trumps gender status in this one case, even though gender is the primary organizing principle of such a patrilineal system of inheritance. At all events, Num 27:8–11 assumes a hierarchy of familial intimacy not much different from that of Lev 21:1–4, 11, though it does not include unmarried sisters in the order of inheritance and speaks explicitly of paternal uncles and other, more distant male relations of the clan. Leviticus 25:48, concerning the redemption of indentured kin, is similar, mentioning brothers, paternal uncles, uncles' sons, and more distant relations of the clan as potential redeemers, presumably in a hierarchy of obligation.

**Where do wives fit in this schema?** Although texts such as Lev 21:2–4; 25:48 and Num 27:8–11 suggest either explicitly or by their silence that wives do not share the same status (they are not “flesh” or “close”), obligations (e.g., redemption), or privileges (e.g., inheritance) as blood relatives, not a few texts speak of the relationship between husband and wife in intimate terms. The most notable of such passages is probably Gen 2:24: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings [*dābaq*] to his wife and they become one flesh [*bāšār eḥād*].” Becoming “one flesh” through marriage is not exactly the same as being a man’s “flesh, the one who is close to him” (Lev 21:2), a birth-ascribed status, though the two idioms are similar and both of them communicate intimacy of some kind. Other idioms of intimacy used of close relatives are also used of spouses, as in Prov 31:11, where the “woman of strength” is said to be trusted by her husband (cf. Jer 9:3, which implies that trust is an expectation of brothers). Given the evidence, the wife appears to be understood as an emotional and sexual intimate (“one flesh”) in contrast to close relatives, whose intimacy is of an entirely different order: it is nonsexual and its emotional component probably overlaps with that of the husband and wife only partially. In addition, the obligations and privileges of the wife both differ from and overlap with those of intimate blood relations. Overlapping obligations appear to include such qualities as loyalty and trust, as we shall see, while among differing obligations one might mention the wife’s exemption from the requirements of redemption. As I shall show, the friend, like the wife, shares some obligations and privileges with close family members while being exempt from or excluded from others. In contrast to the wife, however, the friend’s intimacy overlaps to some degree with that of the close relative, in that it is generally represented as nonsexual. I shall have more to say about these configurations at the end of this chapter.

#### *Expectations of Kin*

I now turn to the behaviors and attitudes that characterize ideal familial relations, many of which are brought into relief through an examination of particular idioms of intimacy extant in the Hebrew Bible. Some of the behaviors and attitudes expected of kin are also expected of wives, treaty partners, and, as we shall see, friends, according to biblical texts. I begin with love, a basic expectation of familial relations that may have both emotional and behavioral resonances in the setting of the family and is expressed through several idioms, including the verb “to love” (*’āhēb*) and its derivatives. According to Gen 22:2, Abraham is ordered to sacrifice Isaac, his “only son” whom he loves, as a burnt offering to Yhwh. A father’s love for his son is also mentioned in Gen 25:28, where Isaac is said to love Esau, and in Gen 37:3–4, where Israel/Jacob is said to love Joseph more than all his (other) sons, who are offended by Joseph’s favored status and privileges (e.g., his special garment). A mother’s love for her son is a theme of Gen 25:28, where Rebecca is said to love Jacob; she favors him in the story that follows, just as Isaac favors Esau. Many other texts speak of the love of parents for children using idioms other than the verb “to love” and its derivatives. Perhaps most interesting is Gen 44:30–31, in which the “self” or “life” (*nepeš*) of Jacob is said to be “bound” to the “self” or “life” of Benjamin, his youngest son; were Benjamin to die, says his brother Judah, his father Jacob would die of grief. The binding together of two selves or lives in this context is clearly an emotion-laden idiom of parental love, as the claim that Jacob would die of grief were Benjamin to die suggests. A comparable idiom of love, *kmr* (Ni) *raḥāmîm ’al-*, with a meaning something like “to be overcome with emotion toward,” is used once of a mother with respect to her infant child under mortal threat (1 Kgs 3:26).

In these examples, parental love, whether expressed through the verb “to love” and its derivatives or through another, unrelated idiom, appears to be an emotional state of close attachment not infrequently characterized by behavioral dimensions of some kind, as in the stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph, each of whom is favored in concrete ways by a parent who is said to love him. Narratives describing the reactions of inconsolable parents to the death—or assumed death—of a child bring this emotional resonance into relief (e.g., Gen 37:35; 2 Sam 19:1, 5). Oddly, love idioms are rarely used of a child’s disposition toward parents, though Ruth 4:15 speaks of Ruth’s love for Naomi, her mother-in-law. The love of Joseph for his younger brother Benjamin is expressed through the use of the idiom “to be overcome with emotion toward [*kmr* (Ni) *raḥāmîm ’el-*]” in Gen 43:30, suggesting that brotherly love



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might be emotionally intense. At all events, it is likely that reciprocal love was expected between close family members, even if surviving texts say little about this, given the emphasis on familial reciprocity evidenced through the examination of other idioms of familial intimacy, as we shall see. Hatred of the relative, the antitype of familial love, is cast as undesirable: “Do not hate your brother in your heart” (Lev 19:17). Its potential emotional resonance is well captured by the reactions of Joseph’s brothers to his dreams of domination and to their father’s favoritism: “When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not say anything positive to him.”

In contrast to the use of the verb “to love” in the family context, which has both emotional and behavioral components according to biblical texts, the same verb and its derivatives have what appears to be a primarily or exclusively behavioral meaning in settings of treaty-making or covenant. Here, love means conformity to treaty stipulations and its antitype, hate, means nonconformity, as in Exod 20:5–6; Deut 5:9–10; 6:5–9; and 2 Sam 19:6–7. In the latter text, David’s feelings toward his loyal army are clearly not in question when his nephew and commander Joab accuses him of “loving those who hate you and hating those who love you”; rather, it is David’s behavior that is at issue, for he has treated his faithful soldiers disloyally, shaming them and seemingly rejecting them.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the hatred or love of Yhwh mentioned in the Ten Commandments is behavioral: Those who serve other gods are “haters” of Yhwh while those who keep his commandments are his “lovers” (Exod 20:5–6; Deut 5:9–10). That love in treaty contexts is assumed to be reciprocal is well illustrated by Joab’s castigating words to David in 2 Sam 19:6–7: Even a suzerain must love his vassals. A third type of love is also evidenced in biblical sources, a love that we might refer to as sexual-emotional in character (e.g., Gen 34:3; 2 Sam 13:1, 4, 15; 1 Kgs 11:1–2). This love is not infrequently portrayed as volatile and intense. Its antitype, too, is hatred, described in highly charged emotional terms, as in 2 Sam 13:15, where the hatred of Amnon for Tamar, his half sister, is said to be greater than the love with which he had loved her before he raped her. Clearly, these are three different types of love, each with its own distinct resonances. The love of family members for one another may be distinguished from the love of treaty partners for one another as well as from the love of one who is sexually/emotionally attracted to another person.

Like love, **loyalty** (*hesed*) characterizes ideal familial relations. Loyalty is owed to a father by a son (Gen 47:29), by brothers to brothers (Job 6:14–15), by a wife to her husband (Gen 20:13; Ruth 1:8), and by a wife to her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:8). What constitutes such loyalty within the family circle according to these texts? In Job 6:14–15, it is reliability and not acting with the intent to deceive; according to Gen 47:29, it is keeping an oath to one’s father; in Gen 20:13, it is speaking in a misleading way to protect a husband from harm (see Gen 20:12). In each of these contexts, loyalty seems to mean acting reliably and in the best interests of the family member. Loyalty (*hesed*), like love, is also a term native to treaty discourse; in covenant contexts, it means conformity to treaty stipulations, as in Exod 20:6; Deut 5:10; Jer 2:2; and numerous other texts, and is conceived as reciprocal (e.g., 2 Sam 10:2; Ps 32:10). It has been suggested that the use of the term “loyalty” (*hesed*) in covenant contexts is a secondary development from its familial usage, which may well be the case. In any event, it is likely that in the family context, loyalty is thought to be reciprocal, just as it is in treaty contexts.

Another idiom used to express loyalty in family settings is the verb ***dābaq***, literally “to cling to,” and its derivatives, one of which is used to characterize the loyalty of brothers to one another in Prov 18:24. Like the noun “loyalty” (*hesed*), the “clinging” idiom is not uncommon in treaty contexts, and its use in such settings may also be a secondary development. The root describes the loyalty of the people of Judah to David at a time of rebellion against him (2 Sam 20:2) and the loyalty expected of Israelites to their divine suzerain Yhwh (e.g., Deut 4:4; 11:22; Josh 22:5). Other usages of the verb “to cling to” that have a clear physical connotation (e.g., Ruth 2:8, 21, 23) suggest that a sense of physical proximity as well as loyalty may be implied in a passage such as Prov 18:24. A third, sexual-emotional meaning for the verb “to cling to” that is not unlike the sexual-emotional meaning of the verb “to love” is attested in texts such as Gen 2:24; 34:3; and 1 Kgs 11:2. As with the verb “to love,” it is important to be clear about the range of the verb “to cling to” and its derivatives and understand that each type of “clinging” has its own distinct features. While “clinging” in a treaty setting is very likely wholly or mainly behavioral (conformity to stipulations) and “clinging” in a marriage or analogous contexts is sexual-emotional as well as behavioral (staying physically close), “clinging” among family members is likely both behavioral (remaining in close proximity) and emotional but not sexual.

Several texts speak of support for family members as an obligation incumbent on kin. Psalm 38:12 castigates family members (*qērōbay*) who keep their distance from a relation who is in trouble, as does Job 19:13–15, which mentions both relatives and brothers (*qērōbay* and *‘ahay*). By stating that these relatives “stood at a distance from,”



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“were far away from,” or “forgot” the sufferer, the texts suggest that the ideal is the opposite: to offer support by not abandoning kin and staying physically close to them when they are suffering.<sup>19</sup> That such appropriately loyal behavior constitutes at least part of what texts call “good things” (*ṭōbôt*) is suggested by Jer 12:6, which condemns the deceitful behavior of brothers and other kin, though their words are appropriate: “Do not believe them, though they say good things [*ṭōbôt*] to you.” Psalm 38:21, which likely refers to disloyal relatives as well as disloyal friends, suggests that family members are expected actively to pursue the welfare of their relatives, “to pay back” loyal, supportive treatment (“what is good,” *ṭōbâ*) with the same rather than with ill treatment (“that which is evil,” *rā’â*), and not to play the part of an adversary (*šātān*). The idioms *drš ṭōb* and *dbr šālôm* also occur as expressions of loyal, supportive familial behavior. In Esth 10:3, Mordecai is described as “one who seeks that which is good on behalf of his people [*dōrēš ṭōb lē’ammô*]” and “one who says the right thing with regard to all his kin [*dōbēr šālôm lēkol zar’ô*].” A different manifestation of familial support is mentioned in Ruth 4:15. Here, the neighboring women say of Naomi’s grandson Obed that he will support Naomi materially (*kilkēl*) in old age. The Joseph story is similar, with Joseph volunteering to support his father, brothers, and their dependents in Egypt while the famine persists in Canaan (Gen 45:11; 50:21). In Ahiqar, fraternal support includes maintenance of the brother at one’s own expense and is assumed to be reciprocal: “Thereupon, I took you to my house. There, I supported you [*msbl*] as a man does his brother ... Now, what I did for you, thus do for me.” It is not difficult to imagine that an expectation that kin provide material support is assumed by biblical texts, even if it is not typically stated explicitly as it is in Ahiqar.

**Honesty and trustworthiness are qualities expected of family members.** Kin ought to be honest with one another, as honesty is the basis for trust, and those kin who deceive should not be trusted (Jer 12:6). Jeremiah 9:2 speaks of a context in which falseness (*šeqer*) rather than trustworthiness (*’ēmûnâ*) prevails in the land, with Yhwh forgotten and inappropriate acts the norm. As a result of this, brothers should not be trusted (*wē’al kol ’āḥ ’al tibṭāḥû*) and friends should be watched, evidently a reversal of what is expected (Jer 9:3). That trust is a normal expectation in the household is suggested by Num 12:7. In this text, Yhwh speaks of his household (*bayit*), in which Moses is said to be most trusted (*bēkol bētî ne’ēmān hû*). By implication, others in the household are also trusted, though not to the degree that Moses is. Finally, Prov 31:11, which lists the good qualities of the “woman of strength,” speaks of her husband’s trust of her.

**Respect for generational hierarchy in the family setting** is evidenced as an expectation in not a few texts, and such respect is frequently articulated through idioms of honor and reverence. It is the norm that a son honors (*kbd*) his father according to Mal 1:6, just as a servant honors his master and the priesthood ought to honor Yhwh. “Honor your father and your mother” says Exod 20:12 and Deut 5:16, whatever the exact meaning of this statement. According to Lev 19:3, a man must show reverence (*yr’*) for his mother and his father, and in v. 32, the acts of standing before one with white hair and honoring an old man are compared implicitly to reverencing God. In a society whose norms have been reversed, old men are not honored (Lam 5:12) and the youth treats the elder with disrespect (Isa 3:5). Among Jerusalem’s transgressions according to Ezekiel is the diminishment (*qlh*) of parents who are, implicitly, worthy of honor (Ezek 22:7). Whoever diminishes (*qlh*) his father and mother is cursed according to Deut 27:16, and anyone who curses his parents shall be executed (Lev 20:9). Though the conferral of honor is reciprocal in a number of passages (e.g., 1 Sam 2:30), texts that speak of the relationship of children to parents consistently emphasize the honor owed to parents by children. This may simply be the result of the text’s strong accenting of respect for generational hierarchy. Curiously, no text states explicitly that brothers are bound to honor one another, although allies in treaty contexts, who often make use of fraternal rhetoric to refer to one another, assume this to be the case.<sup>28</sup>

The avoidance by kin of sexual liaisons understood to be unacceptable is represented as a norm according to any number of passages. Sexual relations with close female relatives is forbidden by texts such as Leviticus 18 and 20, as is intercourse with the wives of close male kin. Women who are themselves close kin may not be “taken” together by Israelite men (Lev 18:17, 18; 20:14). Though adultery, whether with the wife of a kinsman or that of another man, is consistently condemned by biblical texts, some passages suggest a more tolerant view of brother-sister marriage than one finds in Lev 18:9 and 20:17 (e.g., Gen 20:12; 2 Sam 13:13). At all events, forbidden sexual liaisons not infrequently involve close family members, and these, along with nonfamilial sexual violations, are condemned in a variety of ways (e.g., as polluting abominations in Lev 18:27).

Brothers living together harmoniously is presented as a familial ideal in Ps 133:1: “How good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together.” Such is compared to other attractive things: good oil upon the head and the dew of Mt. Hermon. The Babylonian text referred to as the Marduk Prophecy, like Ps 133:1, represents harmony between



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family members as normative; violence in the family circle, like other social reversals, is exceptional and paradigmatic of a society's dissolution. At the time of social decline, brother fights brother; once normal relations are restored, brother will love brother according to this text. What might contribute to the achievement of such a vision of familial harmony? Very likely the observance of familial expectations such as loyalty, support, honesty and trustworthiness, respect for generational hierarchy, and avoidance of forbidden sexual entanglements.

A number of specific familial duties, often with ritual dimensions, are represented as normative by biblical texts. These include the obligation of an agnatic relative to play the role of redeemer if called upon to do so; the expectation that certain male kinsmen will serve as Levir if required; and the duty of a broader range of family members, in some cases even including spouses, to function as mourners and take on other, death-related responsibilities such as burial, observance of ancestral rites, and care for the family tomb. Redemption is mentioned on a number of occasions in biblical texts. Close male kin on the father's side are obligated to play the role of redeemer (*gō'ēl*), buying back landholdings that have been sold to nonfamily members by relatives with financial difficulties (Lev 25:25–28). The same obligation to redeem applies when kin who are in debt become indentured servants of their creditors (Lev 25:47–49). A third obligation of one playing the role of redeemer is to put to death the murderer of his close kinsman: "The redeemer of blood himself shall kill the murderer; when he encounters him he shall kill him." If the relative's death was an accident, the one responsible for the manslaughter may find refuge from the "redeemer of blood" in one of the cities of refuge established for this purpose according to several texts (Num 35:12, 22–28; Deut 19:1–10). Though close paternal kinsmen such as brothers or uncles have the primary obligation to play the redeemer role, other, more distantly related kin from the patrilineage may also be called upon to do so if necessary (Lev 25:48–49; Ruth 2:1, 20).

A second duty expected of close male kinsmen on the father's side is to play the role of Levir when the need arises. According to Deut 25:5–10, it is a brother specifically who is to fulfill this obligation: "When brothers dwell together and one of them dies without a son, the wife of the dead man shall not become wife to an outsider. Her brother-in-law shall come to her, she shall become his wife, and he shall perform the duty of the Levir for her. The first born son whom she bears will be his dead brother's heir, that his name should not be blotted out from Israel." If the living brother refuses to marry his brother's widow and provide him with an heir, he is to be ritually humiliated by the widow in a public setting. A worse outcome for an uncooperative brother is narrated in Gen 38:8–10. Here, Onan, ordered by his father Judah to perform the role of Levir with Tamar, his sister-in-law, refuses, on the grounds that the child will not be his, and takes action to be sure that she will not be impregnated by him. The story ends with Onan struck dead by Yhwh for his refusal to impregnate his brother's widow and provide him with an heir.<sup>34</sup> After Onan dies, Judah eventually plays the role of Levir unknowingly, a scenario not imagined by Deut 25:5–10, which speaks only of a man's brother who resides with him as a potential Levir. Though referred to as "the redeemer," it is the appropriate Levir whose identity is at issue in Ruth 3:9, 12–13, and he is a kinsman from the wider clan rather than a brother specifically. In Ruth 4:1–13, the roles of Levir and redeemer of landed property are both assumed by Boaz after a closer relation who is said to be the closest "redeemer" declines to exercise his rights. Thus, levirate practices as represented in extant biblical texts vary in their details, as does the technical vocabulary used to refer to the Levir, though in every case a male kinsman—whether a brother, a father, or a more distant agnatic relation—plays the role of Levir and is expected to produce an heir for the deceased.

Close relatives bear a number of death-related responsibilities in the family. They are obliged to bury the dead, play the role of mourner, observe ancestral rites, and care for the family tomb. Texts suggest that burial and related activities are an essential obligation of immediate kin. Children inter their parents (Gen 47:30; 49:29–32; 50:1–11, 12–14; Lev 21:2), parents bury their children (Lev 21:2), siblings inhume one another (Lev 21:2–3; Judg 16:31), and husbands lay to rest their wives (Gen 49:31). Some texts mention the participation of other relatives of the patrilineage, including the uncle, in burial (Amos 6:9–10; Judg 16:31). The ideal interment takes place in the family tomb, likely located on or near the ancestral landholding (*nahālā*). According to at least one text, a funeral procession precedes the burial, with the corpse carried on a bier and followed by mourners (2 Sam 3:31). Several texts suggest that family members might exhume relatives interred elsewhere and rebury them in the family tomb, possibly to improve their afterlife, though the reasons for transportation and reburial are uncertain (Gen 50:25–26; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:33). Protecting the integrity of an exposed corpse is a high priority according to the narrative in 2 Sam 21:10–11, which speaks of a mother's actions to defend the corpses of two of her sons, and possibly other relatives, from the depredations of wild beasts and birds. This is not surprising, given the casting of corpse mutilation as a paradigmatic curse in a variety of biblical texts (e.g., Deut 28:26; 1 Kgs 14:11; 2 Kgs 9:10; Jer 16:4) and the possibility



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that the unburied are thought to suffer in the afterlife, as they do according to cuneiform sources (e.g., Gilgamesh XII.151).

Mourning for a fixed period of time—usually seven days—is represented as an essential duty of family members in any number of texts. Mourners tear their garments, manipulate head or beard hair, cast dirt or ashes upon their heads, weep, fast, wear sackcloth, and sit or lie on the ground, very likely in order to foster close identification with the dead, as Gen 37:35 suggests. In this text, Jacob, who believes his son Joseph is dead, refuses to cease mourning him, saying, “I will descend to my son, to Sheol, in mourning.” Psalm 35:14 speaks of the mourning of a son for his mother as paradigmatic, and Jer 16:7 mentions the mourner drinking from a “cup of consolation” at the time of a father’s or mother’s death. In Gen 27:41, Esau anticipates the coming of the mourning period for his father, Isaac. Brothers weep for their dead brother (2 Sam 13:36). Husbands mourn wives and wives husbands (Gen 23:2; 2 Sam 11:26; Ezek 24:16–17). Parental mourning for a dead child is often represented as profoundly bitter (e.g., Gen 37:34–35; 2 Sam 19:1–5), especially the mourning for an only son (Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; Zech 12:10). Relatives outside of the immediate family circle or friends and allies might play the role of “comforter” (*mēnaḥēm*), a participant in mourning rites who joins with mourners in their ritual actions, consoles mourners, and is responsible for ending the mourning period according to some texts, though most passages that mention “comforters” speak of nonkin rather than kin (e.g., Job’s friends in Job 2:11–13). Finally, supporting a mourning petitioner at a time of illness by enacting mourning rites is very likely assumed to be an obligation of kin, as it clearly is of friends in a text such as Ps 35:13. If this is the case, the family members who are said to keep their distance from the suffering petitioner in texts such as Ps 38:12 and Job 19:13 have effectively rejected this obligation.

Second Samuel 18:18 suggests that the invocation of a dead father’s name by his son is a ritual norm: “As for Absalom, in his lifetime he had taken and set up for himself a stela in the Valley of the King, for he had said, ‘I have no son to invoke my name.’ ” How widely such a rite was to be observed in the view of the text’s author is unclear. It is possible that the text assumes it to be a royal ancestral rite rather than a more generally diffused ritual practice although a more broadly embraced practice is equally possible. It is also unclear whether the text is suggesting that the erection of a stone monument is an exceptional thing, because Absalom has no son to invoke his name, or a standard practice that goes along with filial invocation. Nor does the text suggest how frequently the invocation is to occur. In any case, 2 Sam 18:18 bears witness either to one ancestral cultic observance (invocation of the father’s name) or to two such rites (invocation and the erection of a stela) incumbent upon a royal son—perhaps on nonroyal sons as well—but leaves many questions unanswered. Several other biblical texts mention providing food for the dead, sometimes at the tomb, though none speaks explicitly of the involvement of family members in this activity (Deut 26:14; Tob 4:17; Sir 30:18). Nonetheless, it seems likely that it is relatives who are normally responsible for such alimentary maintenance of the spirits of the dead, given the evidence of cuneiform cultures. The “sacrifice of the clan” or “yearly sacrifice” mentioned in 1 Sam 20:6, 29 may well be a patrilineal ancestral observance, as Karel van der Toorn has argued. If van der Toorn’s interpretation is correct, a meat sacrifice is offered to the dead by the male members of the clan once a year, presumably in a local sanctuary in the clan’s central settlement. Finally, there is the charge to “honor your father and your mother” (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16). This has been interpreted to refer to acts of reverence for dead parents, possibly including the provision of offerings and other ancestral rites, though the commandment is as easily understood to refer to honoring living parents, as Mal 1:6 suggests. Thus, the evidence for familial ancestral observances is quite limited, though 2 Sam 18:18, the one text about which one can speak with some confidence, does suggest that a son, whether in royal contexts or more generally, is obligated to invoke the name of his dead father and may also be required to erect a memorial stela for him. It may be that in some social settings, such rites took place at the tomb, while in others, they took place elsewhere. Unfortunately, the relationship of rites of invocation and stela erection for the dead to feeding the dead remains unclear.

The obligation of kin to maintain and, if necessary, restore the family tomb is attested in Neh 2:3, 5, a narrative in which Nehemiah asks leave from the Persian king Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem to rebuild it and, presumably, repair the tombs of his ancestors: “Why should I not be sad, when the city of the house of the tombs of my ancestors is a ruin and its gates destroyed by fire?... Send me to Judah, to the city of the tombs of my ancestors, that I might rebuild it.” Though only rebuilding the city is discussed explicitly in this text, restoring the tombs seems to be an implicit aim and priority of Nehemiah as he is portrayed in the “Nehemiah Memoir,” given that the tombs are mentioned twice in his speech to the king and are inextricably linked to the city itself, described as “the city of the (house of the) tombs of my ancestors.” The reasons for Nehemiah’s concern about the condition of the tombs of his ancestors is not entirely clear, though two possibilities seem particularly plausible. First, tombs in ruin could well



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have been a source of humiliation for surviving family members, not unlike unburied and mutilated corpses of relatives. Second, a depopulated city and ruined tombs would have made it difficult for ancestral cultic rites to take place with any regularity at the tomb or in the city, if such rites are an implicit concern to the narrator. And it may be that the dead in the underworld were assumed by the author to fare worse if they lacked a family member providing for them at the tomb or near it, though about this we can only speculate. In any case, Neh 2:3, 5 give the impression that it is incumbent upon kin—most likely close, paternal relatives—to maintain and refurbish the family tomb.

Finally, an ongoing relationship between the living and their dead kin, indicated by such practices as proper burial, invocation of the name of the dead, and care for the family tomb, is also suggested by several idioms used in biblical texts in association with death. In a number of texts, those who die are said to “lie down with” their “ancestors” (*škb im ’ăbôt-*; e.g., Gen 47:30; Deut 31:16; 2 Sam 7:12); other texts speak of a person’s death using the idiom “to be gathered to” one’s “people” (*’sp [Ni] ’el ’amm-*; e.g., Gen 25:8, 17; Deut 32:50). These idioms may suggest that dying family members were thought to join their dead kin in the afterlife, and each may also intimate an original association with burial in the family tomb, though one can only speculate about these possibilities, as much remains unclear.<sup>49</sup> Whatever the exact nuances of each of these idioms, they suggest that the relationship of the dying and their dead kin continues in some way after death.

#### *Friends and Family Compared and Classified*

After considering the ways in which familial intimacy and the expectations of kin are represented in biblical texts, I now examine the comparison of friends and family members. Though friends and, in the political sphere, allies are distinguished in a number of ways from family members, a few texts compare friends and relatives explicitly, suggesting that they share, or ought to share, certain characteristics, behaviors, and obligations in common. Other passages suggest implicitly that friends and family members share a common classification, and therefore at least some common expectations must apply to both. I turn first to explicit comparisons of friends and relatives.

#### *Explicit Comparisons*

Several texts present explicit comparisons of friends to family members. An example of this is Prov 18:24: “There are friends for friendly exchanges, / **And there is a friend who clings more closely than a brother** [*wēyēš ’ohēb dābēq mē’āh*].” This verse not only suggests the possibility of gradations of friendship, but also compares the exceptional friend to the brother, using an adjective derived from the verb “to cling to” (*dābēq*), an idiom of familial and treaty loyalty as well as an idiom of physical proximity, as I have observed. The text suggests implicitly an ideal that brothers “cling” closely, that they are in fact paradigmatic intimates to which others (e.g., friends) might be compared. Yet according to this verse, the possibility exists that an exceptional friend might be even more loyal, closely bonded, and perhaps more often physically present than a brother. Thus, the idiom “to cling” is used in this verse to suggest not only that brothers “cling” to one another, but that a close friend might share this characteristic and might even exceed the brother’s “clinging.” As for other friends, described as “friends for friendly exchanges,” the verse assumes that they do not share the same degree of loyalty and closeness, for they are explicitly contrasted with the exceptional friend and implicitly distinguished from the brother. This comparison of the exceptional friend to the brother is typical of texts in which family members are cast as paradigmatic intimates to whom friends or allies might be compared.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, the comparison of relatives to friends, as if friendship were the paradigmatic relationship, a phenomenon familiar to some contemporary Westerners—“my brother/sister/child/parent/cousin is my best friend”—is unattested in biblical texts.

A second example of explicit comparison of friends and family members is also found in Proverbs, **although it deals not with ideal behavior, but rather with the failure to meet normal expectations. Proverbs 19:7 reads: “All the brothers of a poor man despise him, / How much more so are his friends far from him** [*rḥq*].” According to this verse, poverty results in rejection both by family members and by friends, a reversal of behavioral norms in both cases. But the bad behavior of the poor man’s friends is presented as less surprising under the circumstances than that of his relatives, suggesting the idea that the friendship bond is weaker than the family bond. In contrast, the psalms of individual complaint, which speak frequently of disloyal friends and relatives and use similar idioms of distance and detachment (e.g., *rḥq*) about the behavior of both, do not suggest that there is or ought to be a difference of expectations with respect to the behavior of family members and friends. Rather, disloyal friends and family members are cast as equally blameworthy (e.g., Ps 38:12–13).



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#### *Implicit Shared Classifications*

More common than explicit comparisons of friends to family members are implicit shared classifications. **One example is Deut 13:7, a legal text that suggests an implicit common classification shared by an intimate friend and a person's closest family members.** "If," says the text, "your brother the son of your mother, or your son, or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as yourself, misleads you in secret as follows: 'Let us go and serve other gods ..., you shall not listen to him nor shall your eye pity him nor shall you spare or protect him. You shall certainly slay him.'" These potential offenders are clearly to be understood as a man's closest intimates, and they are mentioned because even they must be executed should they tempt an Israelite to worship gods other than Yhwh. According to this text, aside from family members such as the brother who is the mother's son, the son, the daughter, or the wife, this intimate circle includes the exceptional, intimate friend, **described as "your friend who is as yourself [rē'ākā 'āšer kēnapšēkā]."** Clearly distinguished from other friends by the way in which the text describes him, this friend is implicitly classified with intimate family members as part of the circle of people closest to the addressee, those the addressee would be most likely to shield from the consequences of their actions (v. 9). The shared, implicit classification of the intimate friend with closest family members is created through the use of a list that includes both close family members and the intimate friend. Interestingly, though the intimate friend is included in the circle of closest intimates, the brother who is the father's son—but not the mother's—and sisters—married or unmarried, the daughter of the mother or the father—go unmentioned. It is difficult to know what to make of this. On the one hand, the text might be giving several examples of intimate family members without intending to be comprehensive; on the other, it might imply that the unmentioned family members are less close than those who are listed and, consequently, less close than the intimate friend. The former reading seems to me to be the more likely, given that other texts which list close family members such as Lev 21:2–3 include all brothers and at least some sisters—in the case of Lev 21:3, it is unmarried sisters—among those who make up the most intimate family circle.

Several other examples of implicit shared classification of friends and close relatives occur in the Psalms and in wisdom texts such as the book of Job and Proverbs. In these texts, in contrast to Deut 13:7, the common class is suggested not by a list of intimates that includes friends along with family members, but by poetic parallelism. Psalm 15:1–3 speaks of the person who is most worthy:

Yhwh, who may dwell in your tents?  
 Who may reside on your holy mountain?  
 He who walks uprightly,  
 Who does righteousness,  
 And who speaks truth in his heart; Who does not speak slander,  
 Who does not do wrong [rā'ā] to his friend [rē'ēhū],  
 And has not borne reproach (for acts against) his relative [qērōbō].

The implicit shared classification of the friend and relative is indicated by the parallelism of "his friend" and "his relative." This suggests that the two share the same class: intimates whom the worthy person does not wrong. Such parallelism is commonplace in biblical poetry, and often it is the same paired terms that occur over and over again together (e.g., "day/night"). As James Kugel suggests, "fixed pairs" of terms "strongly establish the feeling of correspondence between A and B."<sup>58</sup> Though it may be too much to claim that the specific terms "friend" (*rēa'*) and "relative" (*qārōb*) are a fixed pair, given that "friend" is often paired in poetry with other familial terms such as "brother," the very fact of frequent poetic pairing of a familial term with a term for a friend is itself not insignificant, as it suggests implicitly a relationship between the friend and family members—what I am calling a shared classification.

**Additional examples of the implicit classification of friends with family members by means of poetic parallelism are worthy of note.** One such instance is Prov 17:17: "At all times the friend loves, / And a brother is born for distress." Here, the friend is paired with the brother, and the implication of the verse is that both friend and brother will be loyal, even in times of adversity. The text and its parallelism suggest that together, friend and brother constitute a single class of people on whom one can rely even in tough circumstances. A second text of interest is Ps 38:12: "My loving friends [*ōhābay wērē'ay*] stand at a distance from my affliction, / My relatives [*qērōbay*] stand far off." Here, both friends and relatives are castigated for keeping their distance from the suffering petitioner of Psalm 38. In effect, they have failed to be loyal to the complainant by not offering support. The text suggests that they belong to a single class of people from whom one ought to be able to expect help at times of trouble, as Prov 17:17



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also suggests, albeit from a confident angle. Job 19:13–14 is yet another text that implies through its parallelism that friends and family members share a single classification: those who are expected to be loyal in troubled times. But as with Ps 38:12, the friends and relatives of Job 19:13–14 fail to live up to expectations, though in this case Yhwh is blamed for causing their alienation:

He made my brothers be far from me,  
 Those who know me [yōdē'ay] are estranged from me,  
 My relatives [qērōbay] are nowhere to be found,  
 Those known to me [mēyuddā'ay] have forgotten me.

Psalm 122:8 pairs “brothers” and “friends” as intimates about whom the psalmist cares. The context is a prayer for Jerusalem’s welfare: “For the sake of my brothers and friends, / I call for peace in you.” Finally, several poetic texts from the prophetic corpus attest to a pairing of friend and relative that suggests that they share a common classification. Jeremiah 9:3 states that a man should beware of his friend and trust no brother, suggesting that friend and brother belong to the same class of intimates one would normally trust. Micah 7:5–6 is similar in its warning not to trust family intimates or friends.

**A prose narrative that is characterized by parallelism and which suggests that friends share an implicit classification with relatives is Exod 32:27.** Like Deut 13:7, this text addresses what is presented as a serious crime against Yhwh and commands the punishment of its perpetrators. Those who worshiped the golden calf are to be slain by the Levites, who are told: “Thus says Yhwh, god of Israel: ‘Let each man set his sword upon his thigh. Then pass and return through the camp, from end to end, slaying each his brother, each his friend [rē'ēhū], each his relative [qērōbō].’” As in Deut 13:7, the friend is classified implicitly with family members, and together, these constitute a group of intimates the addressee would be most likely not to want to kill. Here, however, it is the parallelism of the verse that suggests a common classification rather than the presence of close friend and family members together in a single list of intimates. As in Deut 13:7; Exod 32:27 suggests that there can be no mercy for those disloyal to Yhwh, even for those closest to the agents of execution. Interestingly, Exod 32:29 seems to speak of the Levite commissioning himself to Yhwh’s service “at the cost of his son and at the cost of his brother,” leaving the friend unmentioned and adding explicit mention of the son. Like the presence of the friend in a list of relatives, this is likely yet another indication of the privileging of the close family member as paradigmatic intimate to whom the exceptional friend might be compared.

Though friends are not infrequently compared to family members explicitly and classified with them implicitly, it is not usual for them to be called “brother,” “sister,” or any other familial term. In fact, such usage is exceedingly rare. Yet interestingly, political allies are routinely addressed as “brother,” a suzerain typically refers to his vassal as his “son,” and a vassal commonly calls his suzerain “father.” Prose examples of this usage include 1 Kgs 9:13, where Solomon addresses his ally Hiram of Tyre as “my brother”; 1 Sam 24:17, where Saul refers to David as “my son David”; and 1 Sam 24:12, where David calls Saul “my father.” Furthermore, in contrast to kin, allies are also commonly referred to as “friends,” as in Lam 1:2, where two words for friend are used to describe the abandonment of a personified Jerusalem by her allies at the time of the Babylonian conquest:

She has no comforter of all her friends [lit., “her lovers” (’ōhābēhā)],  
 All her friends [rē'ēhā] have treated her deceitfully,  
 They have become her enemies.

It would seem that political allies are treated both as fictive kin *and* as fictive friends, and the manner in which they are addressed or described reflects this duality. The ally can be both “brother” and “friend,” as the example of Hiram of Tyre illustrates. In 1 Kgs 9:13, Hiram is Solomon’s “brother”; in 1 Kgs 5:15, it is said that he had always been a “friend” (lit., “lover”) of David. In contrast, friends are compared to family members and may even share a common classification with them, but they are not typically cast as fictive kin themselves, just as kin are not commonly described as friends. Thus, the distinction between friends and family members is maintained, even if friends and relatives are thought to share a common classification as intimates and at least some common expectations such as loyalty are thought to apply to both. Similarly, a distinction between friends and allies is established by contrasting usages. The ally is called a friend, and loyalty is expected of him, but he is also routinely called a brother, unlike the friend. Furthermore, it seems highly unlikely that any kind of emotional dimension is assumed of the relationship of allies with one another, in contrast to familial relations and many types of friendship, which are represented as having emotional dimensions, as I have argued.

*Shared Expectations, Distinct Obligations*



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Though many of the expectations of family members are shared by friends, friends are exempt from some familial duties, suggesting a set of obligations distinct from those of relatives. I begin with shared expectations, of which there are a number. Like relatives, friends are expected to “love” their friends. Some texts present friends fulfilling this expectation; others emphasize their failure to do so; still others speak of friends who fulfill expectations and friends who do not. To love in the context of friendship appears to have both an emotional and a behavioral resonance, as it does in the context of the family. Proverbs 17:17, bringing the ideal into relief, puts it simply: “At all times the friend loves.” In this context, “to love” means, at least in part, to be loyal in times of need. The setting of adversity is implicit in the statement that a friend loves “at all times” and explicit in the mention of “distress” in the parallel colon (“and a brother is born for distress”). Job 19:19, describing friends who have turned against Job in his time of trouble, states that “all the men of my council abominate [*t’b*] me, / Those whom I have loved [*’hb*] have turned against me.” This verse accents a lack of behavioral parity between friends, something that is also emphasized not infrequently in the psalms of individual complaint (e.g., Ps 35:13–14). Once again, loyalty seems to be at issue, as the verse brings into relief the disloyalty of Job’s friends—they reject him utterly—and suggests implicitly his loyalty to them when they were in trouble (“those whom I loved”). Not surprisingly, the friend can be referred to as “lover” (*’ōhēb*), as in Pss 38:12; 88:19 and Prov 18:24, and allies are called the same (e.g., 1 Kgs 5:15; Lam 1:2). In all of these examples, the behavioral aspect of love in friendship—loyalty particularly—is emphasized rather than the emotional dimension, though other texts communicate the emotive aspect of the love of friends quite clearly.

In 1 Sam 18:1, the “self” or “life” (*nepes*) of Jonathan is “bound” to the “self” or “life” of David, just as the “self” or “life” of Jacob is “bound” to that of his youngest son Benjamin according to Gen 44:30–31. As mentioned earlier, this idiom is highly charged emotionally, given the claim in Gen 44:30–31 that Jacob would die of grief if Benjamin were to die. An emotional resonance, perhaps intense, is therefore likely for the idiom in 1 Sam 18:1, especially given the fact that it is never used of treaty partners, unlike other idioms used to describe the relationship of Jonathan and David that are best explained as treaty language in the contexts in which they occur (e.g., “to love *x* as oneself,” used in 1 Sam 18:3 with “to cut a covenant”). Thus, the binding of selves or lives in 1 Sam 18:1, an idiom of emotional love used in Gen 44:30–31 of parent and child, points to the potential for an emotional bond—possibly intense—between male friends, a phenomenon that may also be supported by other texts, including Deut 13:7; Exod 32:27; and Prov 17:17. In these passages, the emotional dimension of love is less easily established than it is in 1 Sam 18:1, though it does seem likely that it is at issue. Deuteronomy 13:7 focuses on the circle of people most likely to be shielded from harm by the addressee even though they deserve to die in the view of the author. The text seems to be suggesting that one’s feelings toward one’s intimates have the potential to get in the way of “just” punishment and cannot be allowed to do so. Though no love idiom is used in this verse, the emotional commitment of the addressee to relatives and the close friend is in focus. Similarly, Exod 32:27 suggests that the friend, along with the brother and relative (*qārōb*), are among the people one would be most reluctant to kill for committing a serious transgression against Yhwh. In the case of Prov 17:17, it seems likely that the loyalty of the friend who “loves” at all times is driven by emotions, though this is difficult to demonstrate conclusively.

Loyalty, a quality communicated by the love idiom in texts such as Prov 17:17 and Job 19:19, is also expressed through the use of the word *hesed*, though this is quite rare in friendship contexts, in contrast to its more common use in treaty settings and in the family. A primary example of its usage for friends is Job 6:14–15. Though the text is somewhat difficult, its sense is fairly clear: Just as a friend spurns loyalty (*hesed*) and abandons the fear of Shadday, Job’s brothers act deceitfully toward him. The text suggests that friends owe friends loyalty (*hesed*) as brothers owe loyalty to brothers, a manifestation of behavioral parity. It also suggests that acting loyally entails avoiding deception and is buttressed by reverence for the deity. If Ps 109:16 refers to a disloyal friend, he is condemned because he “did not remember to be loyal [lit., “to perform loyalty,” *’āsôt hesed*], / And pursued a poor, afflicted man,” evidently a reference to the petitioner himself (see v. 22). Here, pursuit (*rdp*) constitutes disloyalty.

The “clinging” idiom is also used to express loyalty between friends, just as it is in familial and treaty contexts. Proverbs 18:24 not only compares explicitly the loyalty of the exceptional friend to that of the brother using an adjectival form of the root *dbq*, but also contrasts the exceptional friend to other friends: “There are friends for friendly exchanges, / And there is a friend who clings more closely than a brother.” Thus, according to this text, not all friends “cling” in the manner of the exceptional friend. It is not clear whether the friends “for friendly exchanges” are thought to “cling” less than the exceptional friend or not to “cling” at all, even though they are called “friends” (*rē’im*). Ruth’s “clinging” to Naomi in Ruth 1:14, even after she has fulfilled all expectations toward her mother-in-law and is free to go back to her home of origin in Moab, suggests loyalty that goes beyond that required of a



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daughter-in-law. **I believe that it indicates that a new, voluntary association between Naomi and Ruth is in view, a relationship best described as friendship**, as I shall argue in Chapter 3. It is a relationship characterized by absolute loyalty and unaffected by circumstances, in contrast to the mother-in-law, daughter-in-law relationship of Ruth and Naomi, which clearly has an endpoint once all obligations are fulfilled, as the text takes pains to emphasize. Ruth's speech in 1:16–17 details just what her clinging to Naomi will entail: no separation, even in death. If this reading of Ruth's clinging is correct, it suggests the possibility of female friendship in the world of the text, friendship characterized by loyalty and described using the verb "to cling to." In other words, it is a friendship that is not unlike an exceptional male friendship as it is represented in a text such as Prov 18:24. Just as there is a male friend who clings more closely than a brother, there is Ruth, who exceeds familial obligations in her relationship with Naomi.

Support for friends, particularly in times of difficulty, is another expectation that parallels the obligations of family members to one another. Psalm 88:19 mentions friends who withhold support from a suffering petitioner: "You are far from me, loving friend [*'ōhēb wārēa*]." In v. 9 the text speaks of friends who stand at a distance and treat the petitioner as if he were an abomination. Similarly, Ps 38:12 censures friends who keep their distance from the anguished petitioner, just as it condemns relatives who do the same. Like the unsupportive family members, the disobliging friends are said to "pay back that which is evil instead of what is good" and "act as an adversary" to the petitioner instead of pursuing his welfare (v. 21). Psalm 35:12 uses similar rhetoric in its condemnation of friends, as does Ps 109:4–5, which may also refer to friends when it states that "in exchange for my love, they acted as adversaries toward me." The perspective of Job 19:13–14, 19, 21–22 is similar to that of these psalms of individual complaint, in that these verses criticize disloyal friends who have forgotten Job, act as if they are strangers to him, abominate him, and pursue him. Implicit in these statements from both the psalms of individual complaint and the book of Job is the assumption that friends are obligated to reciprocate loyal, supportive treatment (*tōbā*) that they themselves have received and never to take up the role of adversary. Supportive treatment includes not standing at a distance from a suffering friend or treating the friend as a stranger or worse, but actively supporting the friend (e.g., delighting in his vindication, as in Ps 35:27).

Trustworthiness and honest dealings are expectations of friends, as they are of relatives. Jeremiah 9:3 speaks of both friends and brothers who are unworthy of one's trust:

A man should watch his friend,  
And do not trust any brother.  
For every brother acts aggressively,  
And every friend is untrustworthy.

As I have mentioned previously, the larger context of this verse is a time of trouble in Judah when deceit and falseness prevail in the land, evils are multiplied, and the people "do not know" Yhwh (v. 2; see also v. 4). That one must watch friends because they are untrustworthy suggests what the norm ought to be: trustworthy friends. Micah 7:5–6 is similar in its characterization of a corrupt society in which normative expectations are reversed. Here, too, one ought to be able to trust one's friend and rely on one's other intimates for appropriate behavior, but this is impossible: the friend is not to be trusted, the female lover is not worthy of one's confidences, the son treats his father as if he were a fool, the daughter rises up against her mother and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. In short, "the enemies of a man are the people of his household."

In contrast to the expectations that friends share with family members, there are duties incumbent upon only relatives. Friends are not required to play the roles of redeemer or Levir, and most death-related practices are the obligation primarily of family members. Redemption is an expectation of close male kin on the father's side, as I have discussed. When brothers or uncles or first cousins are unavailable, other male relatives of the clan might be called upon to play the role of redeemer (Lev 25:48). The role of Levir is also a responsibility of male kin, specifically brothers who share the same domicile (Deut 25:5–10) or even the father of the dead man without an heir (Gen 38) or other agnatic kinsmen (Ruth 3:9, 12–13; 4:1–13). As for death-related practices, most are normally the province of immediate family members, with some expected only of male kin on the father's side. Close male relatives such as sons and brothers are required to bury the dead, and husbands are expected to bury wives under normal circumstances (cf. Lev 21:2–4, regarding the priest, whose circumstances differ). Mourning the dead is undertaken by immediate family members of both genders, including spouses, and the one biblical narrative that describes protecting unburied corpses from mutilation casts a female family member as agent (2 Sam 21:10–11). In contrast to these more inclusive practices that involve female relatives, evidence suggests that it is sons who observe ancestral rites for dead fathers (2 Sam 18:18), and it seems likely that the maintenance of the family tomb was the



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responsibility of close agnatic kin. Friends, for their part, might fill in for family members who are not present, as might treaty partners. They might bury the dead, as the Jabesh-Gileadites do for their lord Saul and his sons in 1 Sam 31:11–13, or play the role of primary mourner in the absence of relatives, as the old prophet of Bethel does in the story of the Judean man of God in 1 Kgs 13:29–30. It may be that friends or treaty partners could also play a part in ancestral cult practices or tomb maintenance in the absence of family members, although the evidence for this is not very clear.<sup>83</sup> Finally, there is no evidence that friends were normally interred together, as relatives were, or that they expected to be reunited with dead friends in the afterlife, which may have been the case for family members, as I have discussed.

Friends and allies do, however, have their own distinct responsibilities with respect to death-related rites. They are expected to be comforters (*měnaḥmîm*) in contexts of death, and their absence is noted by texts (Ps 69:21; Lam 1:2, 16). As the behavior of Job's three friends in the Job prologue illustrates, comforters embrace the mourner's rites and support the mourner in a variety of ways (Job 2:11–13). Jeremiah 16:7 suggests that a mourning context includes the presence of comforters who break bread with the mourner "to comfort him concerning the dead" and cause him to drink from "the cup of consolation on account of his father or his mother." It is likely that relatives who are not immediate family members are also assumed to play the comforter role along with friends, since mourners are typically close relations (Lev 21:2–4), though the evidence for this is not very clear.

Friends also have the obligation to enact rites of comforting in non-death-related mourning contexts such as that of petition of the deity; as noted, it is very likely that such ritual action in contexts of petition is incumbent upon family members as well. The disloyal friends and relatives condemned in the psalms of individual complaint for keeping their distance from the petitioner or even acting in a hostile and aggressive manner toward him have in effect rejected the role of comforter. Ex-friends are even said to rejoice over the misfortunes of the petitioner as enemies do (Ps 35:26), in contrast to the petitioner's loyal supporters, who are said to "delight in" his "vindication" (Ps 35:27). The proper role of a friend in a context of illness and petition is brought into relief by Ps 35:13–14, in which the suffering petitioner speaks of what he did for his friends when they were in trouble:

As for me, when they were sick my clothes were sackcloth,  
I afflicted myself with fasting ...  
I walked around as would one mourning (his) mother,  
I was prostrated, (dressed as) a mourner.

When his friends were ill, the petitioner embraced mourning rites as if he were mourning his own mother. He did this in order presumably to support the unmentioned petitions of the sick friends for a restoration of their health. The text assumes not only that this kind of supportive comforting is an expectation of friends, but that normally it is reciprocal, not unlike other behaviors associated with friendship. The lack of reciprocation, as well as the hostile actions of these ex-friends, is at issue in the psalm.

#### *Gradations of Friendship*

Several texts bear witness to the idea that there can be gradations of friendship. Deuteronomy 13:7 speaks of a particularly intimate friend "who is as yourself," whom the text classifies with close relatives. Implicit in the characterization of this exceptional friend is comparison with other friends who are not so close. **Proverbs 18:24** explicitly contrasts the exceptional friend "who clings more closely than a brother" with "friends for friendly exchanges," suggesting that the exceptional friend is in a class by himself, comparable to and even surpassing a brother when it comes to loyalty, intimacy, and, perhaps, maintaining close physical proximity. Proverbs 18:24 may recognize other friends who fall between the two types mentioned explicitly, who might not be exceptional but might be good for more than "friendly exchanges," though the text is completely unclear about this, and about what constitutes "friendly exchanges." The focus of Prov 19:4, in contrast to 18:24, is the friend who is attracted by potential material gain or other status enhancements: "Wealth adds many friends, / But the poor man is separated from his friend." Such friends as these might well be ranked lowest among friends, though the verse says nothing about this. Just as Lev 21:2–4 speaks explicitly of a man's closest familial intimates such as parents, children, brothers, and unmarried sisters, drawing a contrast with other family members, so too do biblical texts know of gradations of friendship, contrasting the exceptional friend with other friends both implicitly and explicitly and recognizing the existence of friends motivated by possible personal profit (Prov 19:4) and friends "for friendly exchanges" (Prov 18:24). It may be that the gradations of friendship witnessed in these texts are modeled on gradations of familial intimacy, though here I can only speculate, given the meager evidence that survives.



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Nonetheless, texts reflect an awareness of differences among friends with respect to emotional intimacy, motivation for friendship, fulfillment of obligations (e.g., loyalty), and, possibly, physical presence.

Thus, the perspective of biblical texts with regard to the existence of gradations of friendship is not altogether different from that of Aristotle, who identifies and ranks several types of friendship, including friendship of the good, friendship motivated by utility, and friendship with pleasure as its goal (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.3–4). Though these three friendship types differ from those suggested by biblical texts in a number of ways, there is some overlap. The “friends for friendly exchanges” of Prov 18:24 might be comparable to Aristotle’s friend who seeks pleasure; the friend drawn by wealth in Prov 19:4 is apparently not dissimilar to Aristotle’s friend motivated by utilitarian aims. The outstanding friend of Prov 18:24 is evidently superior to other friends primarily on account of his loyalty, intimacy, and, possibly, proximity (he “clings more closely than a brother”) and that of Deut 13:7 probably on account of his intimacy (he is “as yourself”). In contrast, the primary quality that characterizes Aristotle’s superior form of friendship is shared virtue or excellence (*aretē*), which will give rise to trust, pleasure, and even utility.

#### Conclusion

Friends and family members share a number of common characteristics and obligations, and these are expressed through both explicit comparisons and implicit common classifications, with the friend always compared to the relative, who the texts suggest is the paradigmatic intimate. Both relatives and friends have a duty to be loving (emotionally and behaviorally), loyal, and supportive, particularly in times of adversity; they are also expected to be trustworthy. Behavioral parity emerges as a central dimension of the relationship of friends to one another and that of family members among themselves. It is an expectation of both friends and relatives that manifestations of loyalty and support (“that which is good” or “good things”) will be repaid to one who has behaved loyally, and those who fail to reciprocate appropriately are castigated by texts of various types (e.g., prophetic materials, psalms of individual complaint, wisdom texts). Although some texts condemn equally friends and family members who fail to live up to these expectations (e.g., Ps 38:12), at least one passage casts the failure of friends as more to be expected than that of relatives, suggesting implicitly that in the writer’s view, familial ties are typically stronger than the bond between friends (Prov 19:7). Yet the possibility of the exceptional friend who might exceed the family member in demonstrations of loyalty and support or in personal intimacy is recognized by several biblical texts (e.g., Deut 13:7; Prov 18:24).

Friends and family members also have separate obligations that set them apart as distinct social actors (e.g., the roles of redeemer and Levir are restricted to male kinsmen on the father’s side; a number of death-related practices are normally expected only of family members, some specifically of agnates). In addition, it seems likely that friends are rarely if ever referred to using familial terminology (e.g., “brother”), another way in which friends are distinguished from relatives. Allies, for their part, are cast as distinct from both friends and family and are best described as both fictive friends and fictive kin. The ally is routinely referred to as “brother,” in contrast to the friend, and as “friend,” in contrast to the family member. It also seems unlikely that an alliance is assumed to have a genuine emotional dimension, in contrast to the relations of family members with each other and those of at least some friends. A man’s wife, too, is a distinct social actor, sharing expectations with both relatives and friends (e.g., loyalty and trustworthiness) but exempted from a number of familial duties, not unlike the friend (e.g., the role of redeemer), though the friend’s intimacy, like that of kin, is generally understood to be nonsexual, in contrast to that of the wife.<sup>92</sup>

Perhaps the closest social analogue to a man’s male friend in the world of the biblical text is the kinsman on a man’s mother’s side. Like the friend, he is evidently expected to be loyal and provide support, and in contrast to agnatic relatives, he is not required to play the roles of redeemer or Levir, nor is there any clear evidence that he is among those with a primary obligation to bury the dead, maintain the family tomb, or enact ancestral rites. Not unlike the friend or ally, he might be expected to fill in for agnatic kin when they are not present, though about this I can only speculate, given the absence of evidence.

#### 2 Failed Friendship

**Failed friendship is a surprisingly common theme in biblical and other West Asian texts.** Disloyal friends appear in psalms of individual complaint such as Psalms 28; 35; 38, and 88; in prophetic anthologies such as Jeremiah and Micah; and in Proverbs and Job, among other texts. Friendships that fail to fulfill expectations contribute to unstable social relations according to extant sources. For Mic 7:5 and Jer 9:3, untrustworthy friends are representative of a society’s decline, as is the disintegration of marriage and family ties. The Marduk and Shulgi prophecies from Babylon represent friends in violent conflict as emblematic of social collapse, not unlike unburied corpses and aggression



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between brothers. Psalm 15:3 speaks of the person who is fit to “dwell on Yhwh’s holy mountain” as one who does not wrong a friend, suggesting that one who does such a thing is unworthy of divine favor, not unlike the person who commits slander according to this text. Thus, failed friendship and the conflict it engenders are presented as social evils, a blight in the eyes of Yhwh comparable to other symptoms of social distress such as the collapse of familial relationships and larger societal structures. In this chapter, I explore the theme of failed friendship and its ramifications by identifying the behaviors that transform a friend into an ex-friend or even an enemy and how such actions compare with those of treaty violators, disloyal relatives, and enemies who were never friends or allies and who are not relatives. I study the idioms of failed friendship, comparing them with idioms of treaty violation, idioms used of disloyal family members, and those employed to characterize the behavior of other enemies. I also examine the deity’s role in the failure of friendships and consider why the loss of friendship is not typically mentioned among the curses that might afflict a treaty violator or another type of offender and why having loyal friends is not mentioned in extant petitionary prayers such as Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8 or in collections of blessings such as Deut 28:1–14. Finally, I examine the topos of the disloyal friend in the psalms of individual complaint, asking how it functions to promote the psalmist’s purpose: persuading the deity to intervene on the sufferer’s behalf. Like failed friendship, familial relationships that do not live up to expectations are strikingly commonplace in biblical narratives (e.g., the stories of Cain and Abel; Jacob and Esau; and Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom) and are also at issue in the psalms of individual complaint (e.g., Ps 38:12) and wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 19:7), with parallels in cuneiform and other West Asian sources. In this chapter, I compare the representation of failed friendships to that of failed familial relationships.

#### Actions That Constitute Rejection of the Friend

What behaviors cause friendships to fail and what idioms are used to describe those behaviors? Aside from general, nonspecific actions such as doing wrong (*rā’ā*) to the friend (Ps 15:3), biblical texts treating failed friendship speak of both specific actions and particular examples of inaction through which rejection of a friend is realized and communicated. Some manifestations of rejection might be characterized as active or even aggressive (e.g., deceiving the friend, spreading lies about the friend, or rejoicing over the friend’s misfortune); others, in contrast, involve a lack of engagement or action where such is expected (e.g., standing at a distance or being far from a friend in need). I begin with several examples of inaction that constitute and convey rejection.

“To stand at a distance” or “be far from” a person, particularly at that person’s time of need, are fairly prominent idioms of rejection by means of inaction, especially in the psalms of individual complaint, and not infrequently used of the friend. Sometimes, such rejection is represented as a matter of choice, as in Ps 38:12, where the complainant’s “loving friends stand at a distance from [*’āmad minneged*]” his “affliction,” and in Prov 19:7, where the poor man’s friends are said to be “far from him [*rḥq*].” In other texts using these idioms, Yhwh is said to be the cause of the rejection, as in Ps 88:9: “You made my friends [*mēyuddā’ay*, lit., “those known to me”] be far from me.” Such idioms of rejection are also used of family members who refuse to play expected roles, as Ps 38:12 demonstrates: At the time of his suffering, says the psalmist, “my relatives [*qērôbay*] stand at a distance.” Texts that speak of treaty violation use similar idioms. In Jer 2:5, Israel’s ancestors are described as going far (*rḥq*) from Yhwh when they reject him and worship other gods:

What wrong did your ancestors find in me,  
That they went far from me,  
Going after that which is empty and becoming empty?

Obadiah 1:11 castigates the Edomites, Judah’s allies, for standing at a distance (*’āmad minneged*) when Jerusalem fell. Lamentations 1:2 states that personified Jerusalem, in the figure of a mourning widow, has no comforter since her allies have rejected her; in 1:16, she states that a comforter who would restore her spirit is “far from” her. The petitioner of the psalms of individual complaint commonly calls upon Yhwh not to be far off or stand at a distance, but to deliver him from his travails, implicitly suggesting that by not helping, Yhwh is behaving in a manner not unlike the psalmist’s ex-friends and whatever other enemies might be in view: “God, do not be distant from me! / My God, hasten to help me!” (Ps 71:12). In fact, the author of Psalm 38 uses these idioms of both Yhwh and disloyal friends in the same composition: The sufferer complains that “loving friends” stand at a distance from his affliction in v. 12, while Yhwh is petitioned not to be far from him in v. 22. Thus, standing at a distance or being far from are idioms of rejection used not only of the friend, but of disloyal family members, of treaty partners, and, in the case of the psalms of individual complaint, of Yhwh by Yhwh’s supplicant. In all cases it is assumed that the allegedly absent or



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distant person or entity—whether it be a friend, a relative, a treaty partner, or the deity—has violated an obligation by not demonstrating loyalty, for example, by helping at a time of need (e.g., Ps 38:12 or Obad 1:11).

Another idiom of rejection that might be characterized as an example of inactivity where activity is expected is “to forget about” (*škh*) the friend. In Job 19:14, Job’s relatives (*qērôbay*) are criticized for having “failed” or “ceased” (evidently meaning “ceased/failed to be present”), while his friends (lit., “those known” to him) are said to have forgotten him: “My relatives have ceased to be present, / My friends have forgotten me.” “To forget” in this context is associated with abandonment, both physical and emotional, as the whole of Job 19:13–14 suggests: Brothers are far away from Job; what are likely friends (*yōdē’ay*, “those who know me”) are estranged from him; relatives have ceased to be present; friends (*mēyuddā’ay*, “those known to me”) have forgotten him. Just as a friend might be forgotten by a friend, so Yhwh frequently claims that Israel has forgotten him, that is to say, broken the covenant (e.g., Deut 32:18; Jer 2:32; Hos 8:14). Sometimes it is Yhwh himself who is accused of forgetting Israel, particularly after disaster: “Zion says, ‘Yhwh has abandoned me, / My lord has forgotten me’ ” (Isa 49:14). In all of these cases, it is assumed that the party forgetting has failed to fulfill expectations, whether they be those of a friendship not explicitly cast in treaty terms, as in Job 19:14, or those of a formal treaty, as in texts such as Jer 2:32 or Isa 49:14. In the latter example, the accusation of abandonment through forgetting is followed by reassurance that Yhwh has not—could not—forget Israel:

Does a woman forget her infant?  
A mother the child of her womb?  
Though these might forget,  
I will not forget you!

Thus, the image of the forgotten friend evokes the idea of unjustified abandonment, not unlike the treaty partner who has been forgotten.

In addition to several idioms of inactivity such as “to stand at a distance from,” “to be far from,” or “to forget,” texts express rejection of the friend using a number of idioms suggesting action or even aggression. One such idiom is to treat the friend as an “abomination.” Job 19:19 reads: “All the men of my council abominate [*t’b*] me, / They whom I loved have turned against me [Ni *hpk bē*].” Similarly, Ps 88:9 speaks of the petitioner becoming an abomination to his friends because Yhwh has alienated them from him: “You made my friends [“those known to me”] be far from me, / You made me into an abomination [*tô’ēbā*] to them.” What, precisely, does it mean to treat someone as an abomination? Job 19:19 suggests that one component of such treatment is to turn against the abominated person; Ps 88:9 indicates that keeping one’s distance is another. Deuteronomy 23:4–9, a text that speaks of certain aliens to be excluded from the Israelite community either permanently (Moabites and Ammonites) or temporarily (Edomites and Egyptians), suggests that abominating others in this context means excluding them permanently and not abominating them means allowing them to enter the community eventually: “You shall not abominate the Edomite for he is your brother. Nor shall you abominate the Egyptian, for you were a resident alien in his land. Children of the third generation who are born to them may enter the assembly of Yhwh” (vv. 8–9). The unclean animal, which is excluded from the Israelite diet, is labeled an “abomination” in Deut 14:2, as are forbidden sexual unions according to Lev 18:22, 26, 27, 29, 30. Thus, abomination idioms are used consistently to speak of active exclusion and rejection—of particular aliens, unclean edible animals, and certain sexual acts—and even suggest abhorrence or hatred in some contexts (e.g., Deut 7:26; Ps 119:163). Though less commonly than the idioms “to stand at a distance” or “be far from,” “to abominate” occurs as an idiom of treaty violation in a few contexts (e.g., 1 Kgs 21:26; Ezek 16:52). It is also used of Yhwh rejecting Israel after it has transgressed, as in Ps 106:40 and Amos 6:8.

“To pay back that which is evil instead of what is good” is a second idiom of active rejection and it particularly foregrounds the expectation of reciprocity between friends. It occurs in Ps 35:12 where it is used of disloyal friends who were described as “violent” or “false” witnesses (*ēdē hāmās*) in the previous verse: “They pay me back that which is evil instead of what is good, / Bereavement for my person (?).” Verses 13–14 then speak of what the petitioner did for the friends when they were sick, underscoring the inappropriateness of their behavior now that the petitioner is the one in need. In Ps 7:5, the petitioner states rhetorically that if he has paid back (*gml*) that which is evil to his friend (*šōlēmī*), he deserves to be pursued and overtaken by his foes. A similar idiom occurs in Ps 38:21, although in this example it likely applies to disloyal family members as well as to unfaithful friends, both of whom are mentioned together in v. 12. Another version of the idiom occurs in Ps 109:5 and may apply either to friends or family members or to both at the same time. The idiom “to pay back that which is evil instead of what is good” in all



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cases assumes a preexisting, positive, reciprocal relationship between two parties that has been violated by the one who acts malevolently. It is used not only of friends and possibly family members, but also of people who have benefited from fair and even generous treatment by others who (allegedly) do them wrong in return. In Gen 44:4, 6, Joseph’s brothers, who are unaware that they are dealing with Joseph, are accused of paying back that which is evil instead of what is good when they allegedly steal from Joseph before their departure from his court. In Jer 18:20, Jeremiah accuses his adversaries of paying back that which is evil instead of what is good though he had petitioned Yhwh on their behalf in the past:

Should that which is evil be paid back instead of what is good?  
 But they have dug a pit for my life!  
 Remember how I stood before you,  
 Speaking favorably [*tôb*] of them,  
 In order to turn back your rage from them.

Oddly, the idiom “to pay back that which is evil instead of what is good” is not used of treaty violators, in contrast to other idioms I have discussed (e.g., “to stand at a distance” or “to be far from”), even though its focus is reciprocity, a central tenet of covenant relationships of all types. Finally, and perhaps obviously, I note that the idiom is never used of enemies who were never friends and are not relatives, given its assumption of preexisting positive relations that have now been violated.<sup>17</sup>

To pursue a friend, to devise or seek to do harm to him, or to attempt to kill him are—needless to say—acts that are understood to constitute the friend’s rejection. In Job 19:21–22, Job confronts his three friends, accusing them of doing the opposite of what they are obligated to do at his time of trouble:

Favor me, favor me, you are my friends,  
 For the hand of God has struck me.  
 Why do you pursue [*rdp*] me like God?  
 With my flesh you are not satisfied!

In Ps 35:3–4, the petitioner’s pursuers (*rôdēpîm*), evidently ex-friends, are described as “those who seek my life” and “those who devise evil against me”; in Ps 38:13, the sufferer’s opponents are described as “those who seek my undoing [*dôrēšê rā’ātî*]” and “those who seek my life [*mēbaqšê napšî*],” likely a reference to relatives as well as friends, who are said to stand at a distance in the previous colon. In Ps 71:13, the enemies of the petitioner, who might be ex-friends, disloyal relatives, or other foes, are described as “those who seek my undoing [*mēbaqšê rā’ātî*]” and “adversaries of my life [*šōtēnê napšî*].” Elsewhere, relatives are said to pursue (*rdp*) with hostile intent (Gen 31:23), and former allies might do the same (Amos 1:11), not unlike enemies who were never friends or treaty partners and are not relatives (Gen 35:5; Exod 14:8; Josh 24:6).

Speaking words of deceit or treachery to or against the friend is mentioned in a number of texts, including Jer 9:7; Ps 28:3; 35:20; and possibly Pss 38:13; 62:5. In Jer 9:7, the wicked person deceives his friend, outwardly displaying the good will expected of friendship, while inwardly plotting the friend’s ruin:

[His] tongue is a slaughtering arrow [*hēš šōhēt*],  
 Treachery he speaks with his mouth,  
 He speaks positively [*dbr šālôm*, lit., “speaks good will”] to his friend,  
 But privately he sets his trap.

In Ps 28:3, doers of iniquity are characterized as “those who communicate their good will [*šālôm*] to their friends, / But (have) evil in their hearts.” Similarly, Ps 62:5 speaks of associates—possibly disloyal friends—who “with their mouths bless, / But secretly they curse.” In these examples, the wicked person is a hypocrite, acting as if he were loyal, saying the right thing (lit., speaking “good will”) as expected, while secretly harboring hostility. Other texts speak of hostile friends devising “words of treachery” or “deceit” instead of communicating their “good will” (Ps 35:20), likely a reference to treacherous statements made about the friend to others rather than deceptive words said to the friend himself, given that the text suggests that the enemies should have spoken positively but did not. In Ps 38:13, the psalmist’s foes, who likely include ex-friends and who are said to pursue his life, “speak treacherously all the day,” perhaps also a reference to the kind of deceiving of third parties about the friend that is evidently mentioned in Ps 35:20. The theme of the untrustworthiness of hypocritical friends is addressed in a number of other texts, including Jer 9:3–4 and Mic 7:5–6, which advise that friend and relative are not to be trusted; Jer 9:4, for its part, also condemns the man who deceives his friend and does not speak the truth to him.



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Rejoicing over a friend's misfortune constitutes rejection of a friendship in a most public way, since it is mourning in response to a friend's calamity or illness that is expected as a demonstration of loyalty and affiliation, as the behavior of the psalmist in Ps 35:13–14 makes clear ("When they were sick, my clothes were sackcloth"). Yet in Psalm 35, the supplicant's enemies—ex-friends—rejoice at his "stumbling" (v. 15), gathering against him. In vv. 19 and 24, Yhwh is called upon not to allow these foes to rejoice over the psalmist's calamity, and in v. 26, the petitioner calls for the shaming of "those who rejoice in" his "misfortune." In contrast to these disloyal friends, friends who are loyal to the petitioner are referred to as "those who delight in my vindication," and they are called upon to rejoice and cry out joyfully when the vindication comes, thereby perpetuating and communicating their affiliation with the psalmist (v. 27). That it is the enemy who rejoices at the time of one's calamity is made clear by 2 Sam 1:20, where the poet calls for the news of Israel's defeat at Mt. Gilboa to be withheld from the Philistines, "lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, / Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult." That it is one's own affiliates—family members, friends, allies—who mourn at such a time is made clear by 2 Sam 1:24: "Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul!" Another text which illustrates the expectation that the enemy will rejoice at the time of one's calamity is Prov 24:17, though the text is critical of the norm. It states: "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice, / When he stumbles, let your heart not exult."

In addition to feelings of joy, rejoicing in the biblical context has specific behavioral components, including festive eating and drinking, singing joyful songs, wearing special garments, and anointing with oil. These acts are the diametrical opposite of mourning rites such as fasting, wearing sackcloth, weeping, intoning dirges, and strewing ashes or dirt upon the head. This relationship of rite and its opposite or antitype is well illustrated by Isa 22:12–14, as are the ramifications of not enacting the appropriate rites required by the context (in this particular case, impending calamity):

The Lord Yhwh of hosts called on that day,  
For weeping and mourning,  
For tonsure and for wearing sackcloth.  
But instead there was joy and rejoicing,  
The slaying of cattle, the slaughter of sheep,  
The eating of flesh and the drinking of wine,  
"Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

Then Yhwh of hosts revealed himself in my hearing [as follows]:

"This iniquity shall not be forgiven to you [= Israelites] until you die."

Inappropriate rejoicing in Isa 22:12–14 is a transgression with serious ramifications: It offends Yhwh and will not be forgiven during the lifetime of the offenders. Similarly, to rejoice over the calamity of a friend is a transformative act: It makes one into an enemy and is very likely also an unforgivable offense.

"To hate" is an idiom evidently used of the complainant's ex-friends in Ps 35:19: "Let my enemies without cause [šeqer] not rejoice over me, / Let those who hate me [šōnē'ay] without justification [hinnām] not wink maliciously." The petitioner's enemies in Ps 38:20, who are likely friends as well as family members, are also said to hate him: "Those who despise me wrongfully [šeqer] are many." Psalm 109:4–5 contrasts the psalmist's "love" with his enemies' adversarial (štn) behavior: "They pay me back that which is evil instead of what is good, / Hatred in place of my love." "To hate" (šānē) is the opposite of "to love" ('āhēb), an idiom of loyalty with—at times—emotional resonances, used both of family members and of friends in biblical texts, as I discussed in the previous chapter. The idioms "to hate" and "to love" are also used in treaty contexts, where hating the treaty partner represents treaty violation and loving the treaty partner means demonstrating loyalty to him, as in Exod 20:5–6 par. Deut 5:9–10. Here, Yhwh describes himself as a zealous god who punishes descendants for the iniquity of their ancestors to the third and even the fourth generation of "those who hate me," but "who practices loyalty [hesed] to the thousands, to those who love me, that is, those who keep my commandments." Similarly, David is castigated for "loving those who hate you" and "hating those who love you" when he mistreats his loyal army by mourning for his rebel son Absalom after he has been killed (2 Sam 19:6–9). As these examples suggest, love in a treaty context is expected to be reciprocal. The same is true of love among friends. In Job 19:19, Job complains of friends who have turned against him (hpk bē-), though he had "loved" them, implying that the friends have done wrong. Thus, "those who hate" the sufferer "without justification" in Ps 35:19, and "wrongfully" in Ps 38:20, also described as his enemies in each text, are, like treaty breakers and Job's disloyal friends (Job 19:19), clearly people who have violated a previously established relationship premised on reciprocal acts of loyalty, not unlike those who "pay back that which is evil



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instead of what is good, / Hatred in place of my love” in Ps 109:5. (In the latter case, the offenders are also said not to have remembered “loyalty” [*hesed*] in v. 16.) That relationship is, in the context of Psalm 35, evidently a friendship while Ps 38:20 likely refers both to friends and to family members. In Psalm 109, the relationship in question is either a friendship, a familial tie, or both. The fact that the enemies of Ps 35:19 have hated “without justification” and those of Ps 38:20 despise “wrongfully” implies that the petitioner in these psalms is innocent, having done nothing untoward that might warrant the hatred of his foes.

A final idiom of rejection that might apply to friends is “to act as an adversary toward [*štn*].” Acting as an adversary (*a šātān*) toward another constitutes rejection according to Ps 38:21: “They who pay back that which is evil instead of what is good, / Acting as an adversary toward me ...” As I have discussed, disloyal friends and unfaithful relatives are mentioned together in Ps 38:12, and these are likely the people in question in v. 21 as well. Psalm 109:4 may refer to friends when it states that “in place of my love, they act as adversaries toward me,” though it could just as easily refer to relatives or to both friends and relatives. Given that the friend might be accused in these texts of being an adversary, what might it mean to play such a role? Psalm 109:4–5 associates playing the adversary with malevolent treatment and hatred; in v. 20, the adversaries “speak that which is evil against” the complainant’s “life,” quite possibly in a legal setting. A legal context is also suggested by the sufferer’s call for his enemy to be judged, with an adversary (*šāt. ān*) standing to the foe’s right, presumably to accuse him (Ps 109:6; cf. Zech 3:1) In Ps 38:20, the enemies who “hate wrongfully” and “are many” may well be the adversaries of the following verse, likely acting in a judicial context.

Biblical texts speak of both divine and human adversaries, locating them in judicial settings (e.g., Zech 3:1) and elsewhere (Num 22:22; 1 Sam 29:4; 1 Kgs 5:18). An adversary might challenge a decision, as Abishay does in 2 Sam 19:22 when he demands that David put Shimi to death for cursing David though David is reluctant to do so. In 1 Kgs 11:14, 23, and 25, Solomon’s foreign enemies Hadad the Edomite and Rezon of Damascus are described as his adversaries. Divine adversaries such as “the Satan” accuse the innocent of crimes (Zech 3:1–2) or potential crimes (Job 1:11) in the context of the divine court, and Satan (without the definite article) incites humans to do wrong (1 Chr 21:1) What seems clear from this evidence is that adversaries can be both human and divine and might level accusations in legal settings or challenge decisions or cause problems in extralegal contexts. To play the adversary in Psalms 38 and 109 seems to involve at least in part leveling hostile accusations—false according to the psalmists—likely in a legal setting that result in or follow a rupture of relations. Enemies—in this case, ex-friends—who accuse the petitioner in a legal setting are also mentioned in Ps 35:11–12, though they are not referred to by the term “adversary.” Nonetheless, they are described as “violent” or “false” witnesses who stand up and “ask me about things I do not know,” thereby paying back that which is evil instead of what is good according to the psalmist.

In addition to rejection realized and communicated through both action and inaction, biblical texts speak of states of estrangement that might exist between parties, including friends, who formerly enjoyed good relations. According to some of these texts, such alienation is the result of offensive action taken by one party against the other or of inaction where supportive acts are expected. Job 19:13 speaks of the estrangement of what are likely friends (“those who know me”): “My friends are completely estranged from me [*’ak zārū mimmennī*].” Here, the rupture in relations is likely the result of inaction rather than action, as suggested by the idioms used in the other cola of vv. 13–14: forgetting, standing at a distance, failing to be present. A comparable idiom is used of treaty violation in Isa 1:4, where a sinful Israel is said to have “become estranged” (*nāzōrū ’āhōr*) from Yhwh through the act of spurning him; similarly, “to be estranged from” (*nāzōrū min*) is used in Ezek 14:5 of Israel’s alienation from Yhwh “because of their ‘idols.’” In Ps 69:9, the sufferer speaks of being estranged (*mūzār*) from his brothers, “an alien to the sons of my mother,” evidently on account of bearing reproaches (shame) because of his “zeal” for Yhwh’s “house.” In the case of Job 19:13, the estrangement of Job’s friends as a result of their inaction is said to be caused directly by Yhwh; in the examples of sinful Israel in Isa 1:4 and Ezek 14:5, alienation from Yhwh is the Israelites’ own fault, the result of their transgressions; in Ps 69:9, it would appear that the petitioner’s separation from family members is the result of his own overzealousness for Yhwh. In each of these cases, a state of alienation is said to exist, the result of inaction where action is expected or of offending actions of some kind. As with many of the idioms of rejection discussed here, a state of estrangement might describe the relations of friends, those of family members, or those of treaty partners.

#### **Disloyal Friends, Family Members, Treaty Partners, and Other Enemies: Similarities and Differences**

A number of the offending actions ascribed to disloyal friends, family members, and treaty partners are shared in common with those attributed to enemies who were never friends or allies and who are not relatives. In contrast,



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other offensive acts or examples of inaction are unique to people who have previously enjoyed positive, and sometimes formal, relationships with one another (e.g., friendship, family ties, or treaty relations). One example of the former is the aggressive act of pursuit (*rdp*). In Ps 35:3, 4, the pursuers are evidently ex-friends, as they are in Job 19:21–22; in Ps 109:16, on the other hand, they might be friends, family members, or some combination of each, but whoever they are, they were bound to the sufferer they pursue by a relationship that required “loyalty” (*hesed*). Yet pursuit is also a characteristic behavior of enemies who were never friends or allies and are not relatives, as the examples of Exod 14:4, 8, and 9 and Josh 2:5, 7 demonstrate: In Exodus 14, Pharaoh pursues the fleeing Israelites to the Sea of Reeds; in Joshua 2, the king of Jericho orders his men to pursue the Israelite spies who have been hidden away by Rahab. Other cases of aggressive action shared in common by disloyal friends, relatives, and treaty partners, on the one hand, and enemies who never enjoyed a positive previous relationship, on the other, include rejoicing over one’s misfortune, abominating one, and acting as one’s adversary. In contrast to these acts, a number of other offending behaviors are associated only with people who violate the expectations of a previously established relationship requiring loyalty such as a friendship, a family relationship, or an alliance. Examples of these include standing at a distance at a time of need instead of being present and helping out, paying back that which is evil instead of what is good, and hating instead of loving. In each of these cases, the loyal actions required by the preexisting relationship have not been manifested, and hostile action or inaction has been substituted for them, with damage or termination the result.

The issue of damage versus termination as the result of disloyalty is an interesting one, given the differences between voluntary associations (e.g., friendships and at least some treaty relationships) on the one hand and familial ties by blood on the other. In the case of friendships and voluntary treaty relationships such as alliances of equals, offensive actions or inaction is often portrayed as sufficient cause to terminate the preexisting relationship, with the offender recast and treated as an enemy. The ex-friends of the psalms of individual complaint are not only referred to as “enemies without cause” and “those who hate me without justification” (e.g., Ps 35:19), but the sufferer calls for their shaming (Ps 35:4, 26) and curses them in a number of other ways, including calling for their military defeat, exile, and pursuit by the angel of Yhwh (Ps 35:4–8). Such cursing is an act typical of an enemy, not a friend. Once done, it cannot easily be undone, and therefore any chance of reconciliation is likely eliminated.<sup>38</sup> Second Samuel 10:1–19 illustrates the transformation of a treaty partner into an enemy. The Ammonites, David’s allies, intentionally shame David’s emissaries when they come to the Ammonite court to offer comfort after the king of Ammon’s death, thereby humiliating David himself. By doing so, the Ammonites have “made themselves odious [*b’š*] to David” (v. 6), and war follows, with David defeating the Ammonites and their allies, presumably recovering his honor by so doing. Once they have become “odious,” it seems likely that there can be no reconciliation with the Ammonites, as the previous relationship between Israel and Ammon has evidently ceased to exist and has been replaced by one of mutual hostility and aggression. It is an interesting fact that biblical texts which speak of failed friendship or terminated alliances seldom if ever raise the issue of reconciliation between parties. The few military narratives that mention peace usually refer to a peace imposed by a victor on the vanquished, and these are generally not ex-treaty partners in any case. An example of this is 2 Sam 10:19. Here, the Aramean allies of the Ammonites are said to “make peace with Israel and serve them.” Proverbs 16:7 might be an example of reconciliation between ex-friends that is initiated by Yhwh, if indeed the man’s enemies are his former friends, but unfortunately, the identity of the foes in this context is wholly unclear: “When Yhwh finds favor with a man’s actions, / Even his enemies he causes to be at peace with him.” Even if the foes who make peace are former friends, the mechanics of their reconciliation with the favored man are obscure. Do they apologize for their disloyal acts and ask for forgiveness, as a transgressing worshiper of a deity might? In short, reconciliation between estranged friends is a subject about which we would like to know much more.<sup>41</sup>

What of disloyal blood relations? In contrast to evidence pertaining to voluntary associations such as friendships and alliances, there is little biblical data to suggest that such familial ties are subject to termination. A brother does not typically cease to be a brother, even if he has behaved dreadfully. A recalcitrant son who offends constantly is to be executed by the community, according to Deut 21:18–21, but he is not said to be disowned by his parents. Close family members such as the brother, son, or daughter who incite one to worship gods other than Yhwh are to be killed, but nothing is said about ending their familial ties with one (Deut 13:7–12). Untrustworthy and disrespectful nuclear family members are said to be a man’s enemies in Mic 7:5–6, but nothing in the text suggests that they cease to be family members. Nonetheless, several texts seem to conceive of the possibility of disowning



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blood relatives and bear witness to the existence of a rhetoric of termination. Among these texts is Deut 33:9, which speaks of Levi as

One who says regarding his father and his mother,  
“I do not see them,”  
His brothers he does not recognize [Hi *nkr*],  
His sons he does not know [*yd*].

This statement in Deut 33:9 is intended to emphasize the extreme zeal of the Levites, who, according to Exod 32:27–29, executed even immediate family members who had worshiped the golden calf, thereby earning their priestly status. Assuming that Deut 33:9 alludes to something analogous to the events narrated in Exod 32:27–29, as most scholars believe, the meaning of Deut 33:9 seems to be that the Levites ignored blood relationships—in effect, they disowned their kin—killing offenders irrespective of their status, as one is also commanded to do in Deut 13:7–12. That this is understood to be a painful and exceptional act is underscored by the words of Exod 32:29, which states that each Levite won his commission “at the cost of his son and his brother.” Thus, in contrast to texts such as Deut 13:7–12 and 21:18–21, which say nothing about the possibility of terminating blood relatives who are serious offenders, Deut 33:9 appears to take the opposite position and bear witness to a rhetoric of familial termination that seems also to be reflected in Isa 63:16. Here, Abraham is said not to “know us” (*yd*), and Israel is said not to “recognize us” (Hi *nkr*); in contrast, Yhwh is “our father” and “our redeemer.” Though much about the passage remains obscure, the rhetoric of familial termination is not unlike that found in Deut 33:9. In short, it would seem that according to a few sources, familial ties might be subject to termination under certain circumstances, in contrast to many other texts, which do not suggest this possibility. Whether relatives who are said to be enemies in the psalms of individual complaint have been disowned or not remains unclear.

#### **Causes of Failed Friendships**

Failed friendship, as mentioned, might be caused either by choices made by friends or by divine intervention and influence on the behavior of friends. A divine role in the failure of friendships is acknowledged explicitly in texts such as Ps 88:9, 19 and Job 19:13–14. According to Ps 88:9, Yhwh has made the psalmist’s friends be far from him, transforming him into an abomination in their eyes. In Job 19:13–14, it is both friends and family members whom Yhwh has alienated from Job. At the same time, other texts suggest that human agency brings about the decline and termination of friendships. Psalm 15:3 states that one who is worthy to dwell on Yhwh’s holy mountain does not wrong a friend, among other behaviors to be avoided. This statement suggests implicitly that doing wrong to a friend is a choice, not unlike slandering with the tongue (v. 3) or, in contrast, doing that which is right (v. 2). If one chooses not to do wrong but to do what is right, one is deemed most worthy according to the psalmist, who seems not to consider the possibility that Yhwh could cause the offender to act maliciously for his own purposes. Psalm 35:12–13 also assumes that friends choose to act loyally or disloyally. Here, the petitioner insists that he behaved in a manner befitting a loyal friend when his friends were sick; in contrast, his friends have paid back that which is evil instead of what is good (v. 12), choosing, the text implies, to be disloyal. Nothing is said about Yhwh causing their hostile, disloyal acts; it would appear rather that they are the result of their own volition. In Ps 38:12, friends, like relatives, stand at a distance, evidently by their own choice, in contrast to the friends of Ps 88:9, 19 and the friends and family members of Job 19:13–14, who are kept away by Yhwh’s intervention. Yhwh’s acting to alienate friends and family members in Psalm 88 and Job 19 is one way in which he has increased the sufferer’s misery. In Ps 88:15, it is said to be a manifestation of his rejection of the petitioner: “Why, Yhwh, do you spurn my life, / Hide your face from me?” Elsewhere in Psalm 88, Yhwh is said to have put the sufferer in a deep, dark pit; his wrath “lies” upon him; he afflicts him with his breakers (vv. 7–8); he is enraged at him (v. 17). Thus, the alienation of friends in a text such as Psalm 88 is one among a number of punishments meted out to the suffering petitioner by Yhwh, apparently as a penalty for unnamed offenses. According to Job 19:13–22, the loss of friends is one of several social deprivations suffered by Job, who is also bereft of family members (*qērôbay*), servants, nonfamilial household residents (*gērîm*), his wife, and his children, all because of Yhwh’s intervention. In the case of Job, the reader is aware that the primary character is innocent, and his suffering, at least according to the book’s prologue, is a test (see Job 1–2). Psalm 88, in contrast, suggests that the sufferer has committed offenses, though these are not mentioned explicitly, as they are in Ps 38:5–6 or Ps 69:6.

#### **Cursing Disloyal Friends, Disloyal Friends as a Curse**

The call for the shaming of unfaithful friends and relatives is a common motif, witnessed frequently in the psalms of individual complaint (e.g., Pss 35:4, 26; 40:15, 16; 69:7; 70:3, 4; 71:13, 24). The humiliation of disloyal treaty



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partners is also a widespread theme in biblical texts (e.g., Deut 28:25, 48). Shaming is but one of a number of curses that might be pronounced against foes, including ex-friends, treaty violators, disloyal relatives, or other enemies. In Ps 109:6–20, people who may be friends, family members, or some combination of relatives and friends are cursed by the sufferer for having spread “words of hatred” about him (v. 3) and for acting as an adversary instead of reciprocating “love” (v. 4), among various offenses:

Let his days be few in number,  
Let another take his office (?).  
Let his children become fatherless,  
His wife become a widow ...  
Let his lender take everything he has,  
Let outsiders dispossess him of his property.  
Let him not have one who is loyal,  
Let there not be one who shows favor to his orphans ...  
Because he did not remember to act loyally [*šh hesed*],  
But pursued a poor, afflicted man. (vv. 8–9, 11–12, 16)

Psalm 35 is similar in its denunciation of friends who pursue the petitioner and seek his life:

Let them be driven back and be shamed,  
those who plan to harm me.  
Let them be like chaff before the wind,  
(with) the Angel of Yhwh thrusting (them) down.  
Let their way be darkness and slipperiness,  
(with) the Angel of Yhwh their pursuer.  
For without reason, they hid their net for me (in a) pit (?). (vv. 4–7)

The curses enumerated by these two psalms are not unlike those found in suzerain-vassal treaties and include a short life, loss of position, surviving widow and children bereft and abandoned, loss of property and possessions to lenders, military defeat by enemies, exile, and shame. Disloyal allies are also cursed in this manner, as Obad 1:15; 18 and Lam 4:21–22 demonstrate, as are enemies who share no previous positive relationship with the imprecating party. Obadiah 1:15 states that Edom’s “recompense” will turn back upon its own head; 1:18 envisions the House of Jacob and the House of Joseph consuming the House of Esau (= Edom). In 1 Sam 17:43, Goliath curses (Pi *qll*) David before their individual combat. Jeremiah 50:2–3 envisions curses coming to fruition against the Babylonians who had destroyed Jerusalem, conquered Judah, and exiled its elite:

Tell among the nations and report,  
Lift up a standard and make known,  
Do not conceal, but say:  
“Babylon is taken,  
Bel is put to shame,  
Marduk is dismayed.  
Her idols are humiliated,  
Her dung balls dismayed.  
For a people from the north has ascended against her,  
It will make her land into a devastation.  
There shall be no dweller in her,  
Human and animal shall depart.”

Divine agents enforce imprecations, as any number of texts illustrate. In Ps 35:5–6, the sufferer calls for Yhwh’s angel, acting as Yhwh’s agent, to put curses into effect, harassing the sufferer’s enemies. According to 1 Sam 17:43, Goliath curses David by his gods, indicating their expected role in the enforcement of the imprecation. And in Deut 28:20–24, Yhwh himself will unleash punishments against the Israelites if they violate the covenant with him. Gods serving as enforcers of treaty stipulations is in fact a common motif in treaties themselves, as the Sefire inscriptions and Esarhaddon’s Vassal Treaty well illustrate.

Even though disloyal friends and family members are cursed for their offenses in texts such as Psalms 35 and 109, not unlike unfaithful treaty partners or other enemies in other texts, a call for enmity between friends or between family members is exceedingly rare in curse formulae themselves. The many covenant imprecations



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enumerated in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, as well as curses evidenced in other biblical and nonbiblical texts, do not usually include strife between friends or between relatives, or the loss of friends and the alienation of family members, in contrast to such typical curses as loss or lack of progeny, ill health,<sup>54</sup> famine and crop failure, military defeat,<sup>56</sup> exile, disability,<sup>58</sup> lack of burial, loss of name,<sup>60</sup> and lack of rest in the afterlife. An exception to this pattern is Psalm 109, whose litany of curses includes the following: “Let him not have one who is loyal, / Let there not be one who shows favor to his orphans” (v. 12). “One who is loyal” is someone obligated to practice loyalty (*hesed*), most likely a friend or a relative in the context of Psalm 109. The second colon of the verse suggests that at least part of what constitutes loyalty is care for the dead man’s surviving children.<sup>63</sup> That the enemy who is being cursed should not have one who is “loyal” therefore means that he should lack friends and relatives who are willing to fulfill their obligations to him after he has died. Aside from taking care of his children, such obligations might also include burial, mourning, and—for family members specifically—ancestral rites, among other possibilities. The curse of lacking “one who is loyal” is particularly apt in the context of Psalm 109, given the disloyalty of the sufferer’s foe (“He did not remember to act loyally”; v. 16).

Although conflict between friends or relatives is not typically mentioned in biblical or other curse formulae, it is sometimes presented in texts as emblematic of social decline and even collapse. Examples of this include Mic 7:5–6 and the Marduk and Shulgi prophecies from Babylon. In Mic 7:5–6, social decline is exemplified by friends, spouse, son, daughter, and daughter-in-law who act not as intimates should, but as enemies do: Friends are not to be trusted; a man must watch what he says to his spouse; a son treats his father as if he were a fool; and a daughter defies her mother, a daughter-in-law her mother-in-law. In short, intimates behave in ways that are opposed to societal norms. The Marduk Prophecy and the Shulgi Prophecy both speak of the collapse of society, in the first case as a result of Marduk’s departure to Elam, in the second because of factors now unclear due to the text’s state of preservation. The Marduk Prophecy uses the following image of strife to evoke social disintegration: “Brother consumes his brother, friend strikes down his friend with a weapon.” The Shulgi Prophecy is similar: “Companion fells his companion with a weapon, friend kills his friend with a sword.”<sup>66</sup> Violence between friends and between family members is paired with other symptoms of social degeneration, including piling up unburied bodies, illness, injustice, and disrupted travel in the Marduk Prophecy and the selling of children and abandonment of spouses in the Shulgi Prophecy. Some of these acts or conditions are typical of curses (e.g., lack of burial, illness); some, such as loss of loyal friends, are not.

Just as strife between friends or between family members is rarely encountered as a curse, so gaining and retaining friends and having loyal relatives are not typical of the content of blessings, in contrast to successful procreation, abundant food and livestock,<sup>68</sup> prayers received, a long life,<sup>70</sup> and victory over enemies. When Solomon petitions Yhwh, he asks that his prayers be heeded, that his progeny reign forever, that the people’s sin be pardoned if they repent, that there be no famine or drought or plague or exile for the people if they return to Yhwh, that the legitimate supplications of individuals be answered, and that Yhwh bring military victory to his people (1 Kgs 8:23–53). But he says nothing about securing loyal friends and allies and having faithful relatives. When Tiglath-Pileser III petitions the gods in exchange for the monumental basalt bulls that he erects for them at Hadattu, he asks for the preservation of his life and prolonging of his reign, the well-being of his progeny, successful harvest, and avoidance of illness, but not for loyal friends, allies, or family members. The blessings of Deut 28:1–14, for their part, are similar, promising obedient Israelites military victory over enemies, prosperity, and other goods, but these do not include loyal friends, allies, and relatives.

Why is it that having loyal friends and relatives generally goes unmentioned in blessing formulae, and the loss of friends and the alienation of family members is rarely formulated as a curse? This question is especially apt, given texts, both biblical and cuneiform, that speak of conflict between friends and between family members as emblematic of social decline and even collapse, along with developments frequently associated with the content of curses (e.g., lack of burial, illness). It is impossible to answer this question with any confidence, though it may be that the loss of loyal friends and family members was simply thought to be a less profound punishment than lack of progeny, famine, illness, exile, and other characteristic curses. Similarly, it is possible that retaining loyal friends and family members was thought to contribute less to a blessed state than would having abundant food, securing an heir, experiencing good health, and living a long life, which are typical blessings. But here I speculate.

#### **Unfaithful Friend and Disloyal Relative in the Psalms of Individual Complaint**

The disloyal friend makes his appearance in more than a few biblical texts. As mentioned, he is found in the psalms of individual complaint, in prophetic texts such as Jeremiah and Micah, and in wisdom materials such as the



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book of Job and Proverbs. He is not unlike the unfaithful family member, a surprisingly common presence throughout the biblical anthology. The disloyal friend and his counterpart, the treacherous relative, are recurring characters in the psalms of individual complaint, and so we might refer to them as constituting topoi in these texts. We might also ask how their presence functions to promote the psalmist's purpose: persuading the deity to intervene on his behalf.<sup>74</sup> Complainants accuse friends and family members of a variety of offenses that constitute disloyalty: they tell lies about or to the sufferer (Pss 28:3; 35:20; 38:13, 20; 62:5), stand at a distance from him in his time of need (Pss 38:12; 88:9), hate him (Pss 35:19; 38:20; 109:5), pay back that which is evil instead of what is good (Pss 35:12; 38:21; 109:5), bear false witness against him (Ps 35:11), rejoice over his misfortune (Pss 35:15, 19, 24, 26; 38:17), and pursue him and even seek his life (Pss 35:3–4; 38:13; 109:16), among other unacceptable actions and manifestations of inaction. They become, in effect, the sufferer's foes and are called "enemies" on any number of occasions, as I have discussed. In a fascinating twist, Yhwh is sometimes accused implicitly of abandoning the supplicant in his time of need, as Ps 35:17 suggests: "My Lord, how long will you see? / Save my life ...!" Though Yhwh is said to be unresponsive to and disengaged from the sufferer, not unlike the alienated friends and relatives in a text such as Ps 38:12, in the psalms of individual complaint there is always hope that Yhwh will change his stance and intervene when petitioned to do so, in contrast to disloyal friends and family members, who are presented as incorrigible.

How does the disloyalty of friends and relatives function to help secure Yhwh's saving intervention? That friends and family members are said to treat the complainant in a hostile or indifferent manner adds to his suffering and brings his isolation and vulnerability into relief, as do other images underscoring the petitioner's defenselessness and solitude: "As for me, I was like a deaf person, unable to hear, / Like a mute person, who could not open his mouth" (Ps 38:14). In Ps 109:16, the sufferer refers to himself as "afflicted and poor"; in Ps 88:5, he is "like a man without strength"; in Ps 35:10, he describes himself as "afflicted" and "poor," vulnerable to "his plunderer"; in Ps 70:6 he is "afflicted and poor." In some of the psalms of individual complaint, petitioners refer indirectly to their embrace of petitionary mourning rites, likely intended to attract the attention of the deity to their plight and to communicate repentance in cases where the sufferer acknowledges transgressions (e.g., Pss 38:5–6, 19; 69:6). Psalm 109:24 speaks of the supplicant's fasting: "My knees stumble from fasting, / My flesh is lean, without fat"; in Ps 71:21, the petitioner expresses confidence that Yhwh will comfort him, suggesting that he is in a state of mourning; Ps 69:21 is similar, mentioning expected comforters whom the psalmist does not find. Like the embrace of petitionary mourning rites, the supplicant's isolation, vulnerability, and suffering, which are to a large degree the result of his abandonment and even oppression by family members and friends in a number of these psalms, should function—at least in the mind of the petitioner—to attract Yhwh's attention and interest and thereby secure his deliverance of the complainant. According to Ps 35:22, Yhwh should intervene precisely because he has witnessed the hostile acts of the sufferer's ex-friends: "You have seen, Yhwh, do not be silent, / My Lord, do not be far from me!" Psalm 109:21–22 is similar, stating that Yhwh should deliver the petitioner "for [kî] afflicted and poor am I, / My heart within is wounded."

Yet the supplicant of the psalms of individual complaint is not always alone in his suffering. In Ps 35:27, loyal friends are mentioned, and they are called upon to praise Yhwh and rejoice at the petitioner's acquittal:

Let them cry out joyfully and rejoice,  
Those who delight in my vindication,  
Let them say always,  
"Yhwh who delights in the well-being of his servant is great."

These loyal friends serve as a counterpoint to the faithless friends, who are mentioned in v. 26:

Let them be ashamed and humiliated,  
Those who rejoice in my adversity,  
Let them be dressed in shame and disgrace.

If anything, the mention of steadfast friends brings the disloyalty of the faithless friends into greater relief, suggesting implicitly that their faithlessness is without a basis, as the psalmist asserts directly elsewhere (e.g., in v. 19, where enemies are referred to as "those who hate me without justification" and "enemies without cause"). Nonetheless, the presence of loyal friends in Psalm 35 also functions to lessen the isolation of the petitioner, which is obviously more profound if he has no supporters, as appears to be the case in other psalms of individual complaint.

### Conclusion



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In this chapter, I have spoken at some length about the hostile behaviors of friends toward friends—both their specific actions and examples of their inaction in contexts where action is expected—that constitute and communicate rejection. I have also examined the idioms used by our texts to describe these antagonistic behaviors. Examples of inaction when active intervention is expected include standing at a distance or being far from a friend in need, or forgetting about that friend; examples of active, even aggressive behaviors toward a friend that realize and signal rejection include deceiving the friend, spreading lies about him, abominating him, pursuing him with an intent to harm him, paying back that which is evil instead of what is good, and rejoicing over his misfortune and hating him. Several other idioms, such as acting as an adversary and not practicing loyalty (*hesed*), may also be used of friends who reject friends, though the contexts in which these idioms occur as easily suggest that the actions are those of family members or a mixed body of relatives and friends. All of these hostile behaviors, whether examples of inaction or action, result in estrangement between friends.

Many of the behaviors understood by our texts to constitute rejection of the friend are the same as those said to characterize disloyal relatives, treaty partners, or both. Such people might be described as standing at a distance, being far from, forgetting about (treaty partners), or paying back that which is evil instead of what is good (family members). All of these acts, and others I have discussed, such as hating instead of loving and not practicing loyalty, assume a preexisting set of obligations that have not been fulfilled, and this is why these particular behaviors are not associated with enemies who were never friends or treaty partners and are not family members. Other acts, in contrast, might characterize such enemies as well as disloyal family members, treaty partners, and friends. These include rejoicing over someone's misfortune, pursuing with an intent to do harm, abominating, and acting as an adversary. These acts do not necessarily presume previous ties between the parties, in contrast to behaviors that assume a bond such as friendship, family status, or a treaty relationship.

Although many of the behaviors that constitute rejection are ascribed not only to disloyal friends, but also to unfaithful treaty partners and family members, the results of hostile actions and examples of inaction that manifest disloyalty may differ, depending on the status of the disloyal person in question. If the relationship is one of voluntary association (e.g., friendship or alliance), texts frequently portray the bond as broken, with the offender recast as an enemy and evidently no possibility of reconciliation. But if the tie is familial, the evidence is more ambiguous: some texts seem to suggest that such a relationship very likely survives—at least technically—even the worst offenses, while a few others suggest the possibility of the termination of family members.

Texts suggest that failed friendship might be caused by the choices made by friends themselves or by Yhwh's decision to intervene in order to bring about suffering. Some texts describe friends who choose to keep their distance at a time of trouble (e.g., Ps 35:12–13), while other passages are clear that friends are kept away by Yhwh (e.g., Ps 88:9, 19). Some passages speak of friends who forget their friends or have become estranged from them because Yhwh has caused them to do so (Job 19:13, 14), while other texts speak of friends who choose to bear false witness (Ps 35:11) or rejoice over a friend's misfortune (Ps 35:15). Hostile acts of friends due to Yhwh's intervention may be intended to punish people who are understood to be offenders (e.g., Ps 88) or innocent people who must be made to suffer for reasons other than transgressions (e.g., Job). In Psalm 88, the supplicant believes himself to be rejected by Yhwh and the target of his wrath (vv. 15, 17). Job, for his part, suffers many losses, including the loss of his friends, though he is innocent, a fact emphasized by the book's prologue.

Like other enemies, disloyal friends and family members might be cursed (e.g., Pss 35:4–7; 109:6–20), yet to have a faithless friend or relative is itself rarely mentioned as a curse, although conflict between friends and relatives is sometimes presented as emblematic of social decline or collapse. Psalm 109:12 is the exception. Here, the psalmist who curses his enemy asks that he should have no one who fulfills obligations of loyalty (*mōšēk hesed*, lit. "one who maintains loyalty"). This is most likely a friend or relative in the context of Psalm 109, which does not seem to concern itself with treaty partners. One manifestation of loyalty, according to this verse, is care for a dead man's orphans. Just as having disloyal friends and relatives is rarely attested as a curse, to have a faithful friend or family member generally goes unmentioned in blessing formulae. The reasons that friends and relatives are rarely invoked in curses or blessings are unclear, though it may be that having disloyal friends and family members was thought to be less of a privation than famine, childlessness, or exile and that having loyal friends and relatives less of a boon than fertility, abundant food, and long life.

Disloyal friends or family members, recurring characters of the psalms of individual complaint, likely function to help secure Yhwh's saving intervention on behalf of the suffering complainant. Their hostility increases his suffering and underscores his isolation and vulnerability; like the psalmist's embrace of petitionary mourning rites, the



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presence of disloyal friends and relatives should help, at least according to the psalmist, to attract Yhwh's interest and secure his intervention. Yhwh has witnessed the supplicant's suffering, including how the psalmist's ex-friends and hostile family members have treated him. Psalm 35 also mentions loyal friends, who serve as a counterpoint to disloyal friends, bringing the faithlessness of the latter into greater relief and suggesting implicitly that their disloyalty is groundless, as the petitioner himself claims (e.g., Ps 35:19). Nevertheless, the mention of loyal friends diminishes the isolation and vulnerability of the petitioner of Psalm 35.

#### 3 Friendship in Narrative

Friendship as it is represented in prose narrative has received more attention from specialists than other aspects of biblical friendship, most likely because the characters of narrative are often more fully realized than the anonymous friends mentioned in the psalms of individual complaint, Proverbs and Job, and prophetic texts. The friends who appear in narratives are usually named, unlike those in other texts. Their decisions and actions—good and bad—when they are portrayed, contribute to plot development. Their motivations might not always be clear and might sometimes be complex; they might express a range of emotions; they might ask questions; they might offer and ask for commitment; they might fulfill obligations; they might betray trust. Certain friendships represented in prose narrative might have some basis in the relationships of historical personages (e.g., David and Jonathan); others are more likely literary creations in their entirety, without any such foundation (e.g., Ruth and Naomi, Job and his three friends). In either case, the biblical text provides us with narrative portraits of friends and their friendships, which lend themselves readily to literary analysis. Though Jonathan and David and Ruth and Naomi have attracted by far the most interest from commentators, and will be of central concern to me as well, I will also discuss in this chapter other friendships represented in biblical narrative. These include Job and his three comforters, Jephthah's daughter and her companions, and Amnon and Jonadab (2 Sam 13). I begin with Ruth and Naomi.

#### **Ruth and Naomi**

I understand the book of Ruth as a narrative about a friendship between two widows of different generations and different national backgrounds who share a connection to the family of their dead husbands and, through that connection, help one another to survive, prosper, and remain together in the same community. Why characterize their bond as a friendship? Although the technical vocabulary of friendship is mainly lacking in the narrative and Ruth and Naomi are identified as mother-in-law and daughter-in-law throughout the text, the voluntary nature of their association after the deaths of their respective husbands is brought into relief in the novella's first chapter and continues to move the plot forward as the story develops. In the later chapters, one can speak of mutual affection and elements of behavioral parity characterizing their new, **voluntary relationship (e.g., mutual trust, love, loyalty, and good will, features of friendship that I have discussed)**. Though ultimately their link by marriage to Elimelek's clan will provide the two of them with security and prosperity through the person of Boaz and the child Ruth bears him, their enduring choice of one another, their mutual affection, and their acts of reciprocity are what allow them to achieve this end.

Naomi, who left Judah with her husband and two sons on account of a famine, settles in Moab, a neighboring kingdom. After her husband Elimelek dies, her sons Mahlon and Kilyon marry Moabite women, Ruth and Orpa. Then Mahlon and Kilyon die without issue, leaving the three women on their own, as widows. When the famine in Judah ends, Naomi begins the trek back to Bethlehem, with her two daughters-in-law accompanying her. After Naomi urges them both to return to their natal houses in Moab, Orpa agrees to go, but Ruth refuses, "clinging" (*dbq*) to Naomi (1:14). That **Ruth's "clinging" is a choice** rather than the fulfillment of an expectation is made clear by Naomi's speech in 1:8-9: "Go, return each woman to her mother's house! May Yhwh be loyal to you [*'āsâ hesed*] as you have been with the dead and with me! May Yhwh grant to you that you may find a place of repose, each in the house of her husband.' Then she kissed them and they lifted up their voices and wept." That the two daughters-in-law have fulfilled every familial expectation with respect both to their husbands and to Naomi and are therefore free to go their own way with Naomi's approbation is made clear by Naomi's statement that Ruth and Orpa have been loyal both to Mahlon and Kilyon and to her. Had they failed to be loyal in any way, had they not done all that might be expected of them, the author would not have had Naomi make such a statement. In short, leaving Naomi to find new husbands is presented as a sensible choice that would bring no disrepute upon either Ruth or Orpa. When the women still refuse to leave her and insist on returning to Judah with her (1:10), Naomi presses them in 1:11: "Why should you go with me? Do I still have sons in my body that they might become your husbands?" Naomi's statement seems to suggest the possibility that other sons could play the Levir role that living brothers might potentially play for their dead brothers without issue, thereby providing each of the dead with an heir. Yet, as a number of scholars



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have noted, such living brothers, even if they existed, would not be fathered by the same man and therefore would not be obligated to play the Levir as it is understood in other biblical texts. Therefore, the presuppositions about the Levir role reflected in Naomi's statement must be different from those of texts such as Deut 25:5–10; Genesis 38, and even Ruth 4:5, 10. At all events, Naomi's statement underscores Ruth's and Orpa's lack of further obligation to their dead husbands and to Naomi. Thus, whatever association **Ruth continues to maintain with Naomi and the family of her dead husband Mahlon is completely voluntary in nature, fulfilling no familial expectations. In a word, the relationship of Ruth and Naomi begins anew as a bond of choice.** Ruth insists on accompanying Naomi back to Bethlehem, and Naomi chooses to accept Ruth's decision to do so: "When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her, and the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem" (1:18–19). **Given that the new bond between Ruth and Naomi is both voluntary and reciprocal in nature and that familial obligations do not constitute it, I analyze it as a friendship.**

Ruth refuses to leave Naomi, even after Orpa has done so and even when urged by Naomi once again to do so (1:15). Replying to Naomi's urgings, Ruth says: "Don't press me to leave you ... for wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you spend the night, I will spend the night; your people shall be my people, and your god my god. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. May Yhwh do thus to me, and more also, if (even) death separates me from you" (1:16–18). This remarkable declaration is rich with meaning. **It consists of a series of separate statements that commit Ruth to remain with Naomi for life and even beyond, one of which is a declaration formulated in the style of an adoption that embraces Naomi's people and her god, and another an oath of loyalty to Naomi sworn by Yhwh.** Ruth is clearly determined to remain with Naomi for the rest of her life and uses declarations of intent, including an adoption-like declaration as well as oath-taking, to commit herself unalterably to this course of action.

Adoption formulae state that which will be once the adoption is realized. In Gen 48:5, Jacob adopts his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh by saying to Joseph: "As for your two sons ... they shall be mine [*lî hēm*]." In 2 Sam 7:14, Yhwh says the following of David: "I shall become his father and he shall become my son." In Jer 31:33, Yhwh states regarding Israel: "I shall become their god and they shall become my people." Hosea 2:25 has Yhwh say, "You are my people [*'ammî 'attâ*]," and Israel say, "(You are/Yhwh is) my god." Such formulae function to make real new relationships just as termination formulae end existing relationships.<sup>15</sup> Ruth's statement that Naomi's people shall be her people and Naomi's god her god is adoption-like in its structure and the fact that it is cast as a formal declaration. For Ruth to commit herself to Naomi's god while apparently still in Moabite territory is striking, though her commitment is not ultimately surprising given that the two of them are going to settle in Bethlehem, where Yhwh is worshiped as the national god of Judah.<sup>17</sup> Ruth's embrace of Naomi's people is also noteworthy, given that the text seems to assume that Ruth and Orpa have already left their natal people by marrying Israelite resident aliens in Moab. It may be that the formal embrace of Naomi's people is intended to underscore the voluntary nature of Ruth's and Naomi's continuing association because Ruth's husband Mahlon is dead and Ruth owes nothing further to her family by marriage, including her mother-in-law. Like Orpa, she is free to go back to her natal people with no disapprobation whatsoever, but she chooses not to do so.<sup>19</sup>

Ruth's oath by Yhwh is the third prominent feature of her speech in 1:16–18. In her oath, Ruth states that even death will not separate her from Naomi. This pledge is directly related to that which precedes it: Ruth's statement that wherever Naomi dies, she will die and be interred. Both the oath and Ruth's preceding statement suggest that she intends to be buried with Naomi, presumably in the same tomb. Would this be possible for two widows related only by marriage? Though interment of married women who predecease their husbands is represented as occurring in the tomb of the husband's family (e.g., Gen 49:31), there is little or no data pertaining directly to the burial of widows. There is, however, indirect evidence that suggests the possibility either of burial in the tomb of the husband's family or of interment with the widow's natal family, depending on circumstances. Ruth can speak of death and burial as she does because she seems to assume the possibility of burial in her husband's and father-in-law's family tomb. Naomi and Ruth will both be buried in the tomb of the family of their husbands, as wives normally would be, and that is how they can remain together even after death. It would not be possible otherwise, as the locus of burial is determined by familial ties, and their natal families—and nations of origin—differ.

That ties with a dead husband's family are assumed to continue for the widow if she desires it is what allows Ruth to make her dramatic promise and the plot of the novella to develop as it does. Naomi and Ruth go to Bethlehem and receive support from Boaz, a kinsman of their husbands. The continuing nature of the women's ties to the clan of Elimelek, Naomi's dead husband, is best illustrated by 2:20, where Boaz is described by Naomi as "our relative" (*qārôb lānû*) and "one of our redeemers" (*miggō 'ālēnû*). This rhetoric suggests not only the absorption of



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the women into the clan of their husbands, just as one would expect, but also its continuing validity for them as widows. Their husbands' agnate is their relative; their husbands' kinsmen on the father's side who may serve as redeemers are theirs as much as their husbands'.<sup>25</sup> That the narrative subtly brings into relief this dimension of the women's relationship is not insignificant: It is their tie to the family of their dead husbands that will allow them not only to remain together in the same community, but also to help one another and ultimately to prosper through Ruth's marriage to Boaz. When Ruth speaks of even death not separating her from Naomi, it is more than simply a declaration about the degree of her commitment to Naomi; it is a statement that alludes subtly to their shared family by marriage, and what it can do for them once they return to Bethlehem.

As mentioned, Ruth and Naomi are both widows, women without a male decision-maker, protector, or provider. Their husbands are deceased; Naomi has no living children and Ruth none living or dead; Ruth's father-in-law Elimelek is dead and so, presumably, is Elimelek's father, Naomi's father-in-law. Although the word "widow" does not occur anywhere in the novella, it is their status as widows that allows them to choose to stay together and to support one another both materially and otherwise as they seek to move forward in their lives. In short, it allows for their friendship. That they are not under the authority of a male relative means that they make their own decisions, including the choice to remain together when this is neither required nor expected; that they have no male provider means that they must provide for themselves, something they attempt to do through reciprocal acts of initiative; that they have no male protector underscores their vulnerability and leads initially to Boaz's emergence in the role of protector and ultimately husband to Ruth. Though still formally mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, the two women nonetheless share the status of widow, and the new, voluntary association that they have both embraced features manifestations of mutual affection and behavioral parity, characteristics of friendship in other biblical texts. Ruth helps Naomi, Naomi helps Ruth: Ruth takes the initiative to get food for the two of them (2:2) and succeeds (2:17–19; 3:17); Naomi acts to get Ruth a husband (3:1–4), something that would make her happy (3:1), benefit both of them materially, and provide them both with security (4:14–15). Naomi advises Ruth regarding her work in the fields (2:22) and her developing relationship with Boaz (3:18); Ruth follows her advice (2:23; 3:6) and goes beyond it, seeking success in her dealings with Boaz (3:9). Though the text does not say so in as many words, Ruth and Naomi share a bond of mutual affection; they seek one another's welfare consistently, and each pays back that which is good in exchange for the good done by the other. In short, they behave toward one another as ideal male friends ought to behave according to texts such as Pss 35:12–14; 88:19; Job 19:19; and Prov 17:17.

**The verb "to cling to" (*dābaq bē-*)** occurs in 1:14, where it is said that Ruth "clung to" Naomi when Orpa left Naomi to return to her people and her god(s). The same verb occurs three more times in the book with reference to Ruth's gleaning in Boaz's field. In 2:8, Boaz instructs Ruth to "cling to" (*dābaq 'im*) his girls who are harvesting grain, meaning to glean closely behind them as they work; in 2:21, Ruth relates Boaz's directions to Naomi; and in 2:23, she is said to follow them (*dābaq bē-*). Ruth's "clinging" to Boaz's female reapers provides her with security out in the field, as Boaz intends (2:9) and as Naomi notes with approbation (2:22); it also provides her with sustenance (2:9). Yet why, through the repeated use of the verb "to cling to," does the author so obviously establish a link between Ruth's ongoing and permanent voluntary affiliation with Naomi, an affiliation characterized by emotional engagement and loyalty, and her temporary association with Boaz's harvesters, which serves utilitarian purposes? Perhaps the use of the verb "to cling to" in both 1:14 on the one hand and 2:8, 21, and 23 on the other is intended to bring into relief the common physical locus implicit in the verb as well as the concrete benefits such a shared location might bestow. Just as Ruth "clings" by choice to Naomi—which means that she will not be separated from her physically, and, by implication, that the two women will support one another and profit from so doing—so Ruth "clings" physically to Boaz's harvesters for her protection and sustenance.

But Ruth's loyal clinging to Naomi also brings to mind the clinging of the exceptional male friend to his friend in Prov 18:24. In that verse, this friend distinguishes himself from other friends. While there are friends "for friendly exchanges," he "clings more closely than a brother." Clinging is clearly an activity of both intimate friends and close relatives (e.g., brothers) according to Prov 18:24, and in that context, it may suggest a combination of loyalty, close emotional bonding, and physical proximity. The verb "to cling to" in Ruth 1:14 may be similarly intended to evoke the fidelity, proximity, and emotional engagement of both the ideal relative and the ideal friend, roles that Ruth combines in herself at this turning point in the story. Furthermore, the verb "to cling to" may be intended to function as a bridge between an in-law relationship that has been characterized by Ruth's exceptional loyalty, something Naomi points out (1:8), and a new, voluntary bond, realized by an exceptional declaration of commitment on Ruth's part. In short, "to cling to" in 1:14 may suggest continuity of commitment as the relationship between Ruth and



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Naomi evolves from one in which familial obligation was the primary component to one in which choice is front and center, given that clinging is characteristic of both the idealized family member and the exceptional friend according to Prov 18:24.

If Naomi and Ruth have a new, voluntary, and reciprocal relationship not shaped by familial expectations, why does the author continue to use familial language in the narrative? Posed differently, what purpose does it serve the author to refer frequently to Naomi as Ruth's mother-in-law and Ruth as Naomi's daughter-in-law and to have characters in the story refer to them in this manner? Other terms of identification are also used along with these identifiers. At several points, Naomi refers to Ruth as "my daughter," as does Boaz (2:2, 8, 22; 3:1, 10, 11, 16, 18), and Ruth is frequently called "the Moabite woman" by the narrator and by characters in the story (e.g., 1:22; 2:2, 21; 4:5, 10). It is best to consider all such terms at once as we strive to make sense of them in context. I begin with "my daughter." Besides functioning as a term of endearment for both Naomi and Boaz, the use of "my daughter" by both Naomi and Boaz suggests that Ruth is younger, a member of the generation that follows theirs. That Boaz is older than Ruth is made clear by his statement in 3:10 commending her for "not going after young men, either poor or rich"; that Naomi belongs to the generation preceding Ruth's is obvious. The use of "mother-in-law" and "daughter-in-law" in the narrative may also be understood as an indicator of age difference, though I believe there is more intended by the author's employment of this pair of terms. Though Ruth and Naomi have a new relationship characterized by choice, mutual affection, and behavioral parity, their common tie to the family of Elimelek is key to the development of the novella's plot and their ultimate survival and prospering in the same community. Thus, the author's perpetuation of the in-law terminology may be intended to underscore the continuing importance of the two women's tie to the family of their dead husbands and to foreshadow future positive developments for them both in the context of that family. It seems to me less likely that terms such as "daughter-in-law," "mother-in-law," and "daughter" are intended to highlight status differences between Ruth and Naomi as some have argued. Whatever status differences remain after the commencement of their new bond are muted to a large degree by the narrative's emphasis on volition and reciprocity. Finally, the emphasis on Ruth's Moabite origin may bring into relief the degree to which she has sacrificed in order to "cling" to Naomi and accompany her to Bethlehem. As Boaz states with approbation, she has "abandoned" (*'āzab*) her father, her mother, and her birthplace to "go to" (*hālak 'el*) a people she had not known previously (2:11). Ruth's voluntary presence in Judah as an alien also brings her lower status than she would have at home, as her response to Boaz's generosity in 2:10 suggests: "Why have I found favor in your sight that you recognize me, even though I am a foreigner?" Finally, Ruth's Moabite origin might also serve anti-xenophobic purposes, as many scholars have argued, though our ignorance regarding the date and context for the novella's composition cautions against putting too much weight on such a speculation.

Ruth's flawlessness as a friend and a person deserves comment, as does Naomi's more multifaceted and complex character. Although Ruth is more fully drawn than the unnamed loyal friends of a text such as Psalm 35 who delight in the psalmist's vindication, her perfect loyalty as wife, daughter-in-law, and friend; her enthusiastic commitment to Naomi; her generosity to Naomi and Boaz; and her willingness to sacrifice for Naomi's sake reveal a character without complexity, one completely lacking in ambivalence, selfish motivations, bad moods, jealousy, self-pity, self-doubt, and actions and words that are in any way incongruent. According to Boaz, everyone in the community knows that Ruth is an ideal woman ("a woman of strength," 3:11). More complex and interesting as a character is Naomi, who accedes to Ruth's decision to accompany her to Judah, though without enthusiasm. Upon arriving in Bethlehem, Naomi complains to the women of the town about how Yhwh has made her suffer, claiming that "Yhwh has brought me back empty," even though she has with her a most loyal and caring friend in Ruth. Although Naomi comes across as worn down and unappreciative of what is good in her life at the end of chapter 1, she is enlivened beginning in chapter 2, expressing enthusiasm for Ruth's accomplishments in the field (2:18–19, 20), offering advice to Ruth regarding her safety (2:22), and finally taking the initiative in 3:1–4, coming up with a plan to secure Boaz as Ruth's husband. In so doing, she reciprocates Ruth's efforts on her behalf and emerges as a genuine friend to Ruth. Even here, however, Naomi stands to benefit from Ruth's marriage, eventually gaining a grandson who will lift her spirits and provide for her in old age (4:15), though her stated motivation in 3:1 is Ruth's happiness alone. In a word, while growing as a character, Naomi retains her complexity; in contrast, Ruth remains fairly consistent and predictable.<sup>36</sup> Boaz, too, is a more complex character than is Ruth, given the self-doubt he expresses when he thanks Ruth for choosing him rather than a younger man (3:10).

#### Jonathan and David



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Several narratives embedded in the larger text of 1 Samuel concern the relationship of Jonathan and David. Most prominent among these are 1 Sam 18:1–4; 19:1–7; 20:1–21:1; and 23:14–18. In three of the four texts, **the relationship is clearly cast as a covenant**, though the nature of the treaty differs from text to text, with David in the subordinate role in 20:1–10, 18–22, 24–41, and 21:1; Jonathan the vassal in 20:11–17, 23, 42, and 23:14–18; and a treaty of unclear nature assumed in 18:1–4. The fourth text, 19:1–7, may also suggest a treaty relationship of some kind between David and Jonathan, though this is not entirely clear. In addition to the presence of treaty language, the relationship is also one of brothers-in-law according to the narrative in 18:27: David marries Saul’s daughter Michal at Saul’s invitation. Although the word *rēa’* with the meaning “friend” and other terms for “friend” are not used of Jonathan and/or David in the Jonathan-David narratives, the relationship of David and Jonathan is almost universally described as a friendship. Given the prominence of treaty idioms in the narrative, it is fair to ask whether such a designation is justified. Are David and Jonathan friends who have formalized their relationship through the idiom of treaty-making? Or are they simply bound by a formal, political covenant and nothing more? I argue that Jonathan and David are justifiably characterized as friends in at least some of the narratives that describe their relationship. Though it might be possible to explain acts of loyalty such as Jonathan’s defense of David before Saul (19:4–5) as the fulfillment of treaty obligations, passages that speak of or represent an emotional bond between David and Jonathan suggest that there is more to their relationship than simply a covenant tie. And the fact that their bond is represented as superseding Jonathan’s relationship with his father in several of the narratives is also reason to think that for the authors of these texts, a strong, personal commitment is in view rather than simply a treaty relationship.

The text of 1 Sam 18:1–4 states that the “self” or “life” (*nepes*) of Jonathan was “bound” to the “self” or “life” of David; that Jonathan “loved him as himself”; that Jonathan and David cut a covenant “when” or “because he loved him as himself”; and that Jonathan removed his garment and gave it to David, along with his weapons and other personal items. Like other narratives that tell of the relationship between David and Jonathan, this passage is imbued with the idiom of covenant, **mentioning both that Jonathan and David cut a covenant (*kārat bērit*) and that Jonathan loved David as himself, the latter an idiom used in treaty settings to communicate loyalty to the treaty partner**. As is often pointed out, Esarhaddon requires his vassals to swear as follows: “[You swear] that you will love Ashurbanipal, the crown-prince, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord as [you do] yourselves.” In other words, the vassals bind themselves by oath to be loyal to their overlord’s son when he comes to the throne, and the idiom used is to love the treaty partner as one would oneself. Whether Jonathan’s loving of David in this manner suggests David’s subordination to him, his subordination to David, or a treaty of equals remains unclear, though it is worth noting that Jonathan is the initiator of the formalization of their relationship according to this text: He loved David as himself, and they cut a covenant when/because he did so according to v. 3. In addition, Jonathan gives David his clothes, weapons, and other personal items according to 18:4, not unlike Saul’s gift of weapons and armor to David according to 17:38–39, actions thought by some to be tied to treaty-making.

Besides the **covenant idioms used of the relationship of Jonathan to David in 1 Sam 18:1–4, there is the text’s initial statement that the “self” or “life” (*nepes*) of Jonathan was “bound” to the “self” or “life” of David. This idiom occurs only one other time in the Hebrew Bible. In Gen 44:30–31, it describes the relationship of Jacob to his youngest son Benjamin, whom he is elsewhere said to love (44:20): The “self” or “life” of Jacob is said to be “bound” to that of Benjamin, and were Benjamin to die, Jacob would die of grief (*yāgôn*). In contrast to the idiom to love someone else as oneself, the binding of selves/lives is not otherwise used in treaty settings and appears to be highly charged emotionally. In Gen 44:30–31, the binding of selves/lives conveys the love of a father for a favorite son, a love so intense that the death of the son would put the father in his grave. A comparably intense emotional resonance is therefore possible for the idiom when it occurs in 1 Sam 18:1; at minimum, the idiom suggests that an emotional bond has been established between Jonathan and David. The possibility of emotional bonds between men in the biblical text, even strong ones, is also supported by texts such as Deut 13:7–12; Exod 32:27, and Prov 18:24, which speak of or suggest the existence of the exceptional friend. I would not want to argue that the bond imagined in 1 Sam 18:1 is necessarily analogous in its details to that of a parent and beloved child; only that it is represented as emotionally resonant, possibly intense, at the very least for Jonathan. Jonathan establishes the emotional bond (his “self” or “life” is bound to that of David) as well as the formalization of the relationship through treaty-making (they cut a covenant “when” or “because” Jonathan “loved” David “as himself”). In fact, according to 18:1–4, David is an agent only in his participation in making the covenant (“Jonathan and David cut a covenant”); otherwise, Jonathan is the initiator and David is portrayed following his lead.**



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First Samuel 19:1–7 is a second text that portrays the relationship of Jonathan and David. Though Saul has ordered David’s death, Jonathan “delighted exceedingly in David” (v. 1) and therefore tells David of Saul’s plan to have him executed, demonstrating loyalty to David rather than to his own father the king. Jonathan even constructs a plan to persuade Saul to change his mind about David, speaking well of him to Saul. According to Jonathan, David has been loyal to his master Saul; he is innocent of any crime; and his actions have profited Saul. Furthermore, Saul should not risk committing a serious transgression against his loyal servant David (vv. 4–5). As a result, Saul swears an oath by Yhwh not to have David killed, and Jonathan, after informing David of developments, brings him back into Saul’s presence and service.

Though lacking in treaty idioms such as “to cut a covenant” or “to love x as oneself,” 1 Sam 19:1–7 may hint at the existence of a treaty between Jonathan and David in its use of the idiom “to delight in” (*hāpēš bē-*). This expression, when used elsewhere, can suggest the favor of a suzerain: In 1 Sam 18:22, David is told that Saul, his lord, “delights in” him and that “all his servants love” him. Or it can suggest the loyalty of vassals, as in 2 Sam 20:11, where those who are loyal to David’s nephew and commander Joab and to David are told to pursue the rebel Sheba: “Whoever delights in Joab and whoever belongs to David, after Sheba!” Thus, the idiom’s use in 1 Sam 19:1 may suggest that a treaty is in the background, though the assumptions underlying it remain unclear. At the same time, a case can be made that the idiom may also have an emotional resonance in the context of 1 Sam 19:1, given several texts in which *hāpēš* means “to take pleasure in,” with friend or family member as the subject. An example is Ps 35:27, in which friends loyal to the psalmist are described as “those who delight in my vindication [*hāpēšē šidqī*]”; another example is Ps 109:17, where it is said of a disloyal friend or relative that “he did not delight in blessing,” with the implication that a loyal friend or family member would so delight. In both examples, it may be that an emotional component is implied for delighting, given the personal, emotional connection that may exist between friends or family members.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the idiom’s use in 1 Sam 19:1 could suggest an emotional bond between Jonathan and David, while at the same time it may also hint at a formalized relationship between the two men. At all events, it is Jonathan’s great delight in David—whatever its exact meaning—that clearly motivates his actions on David’s behalf in the narrative, including his choice to allow his fidelity to David to trump his loyalty to his father and king, Saul.

First Samuel 20:1–21:1 is certainly the most complex narrative treating the relationship of Jonathan and David. Aside from its various text-critical challenges, it appears to contain a later interpolation in vv. 11–17, 23, and 42 that reverses the treaty statuses of Jonathan and David assumed in vv. 1–10, 18–22, 24–41, and 21:1 and seems to share a common ideology with 23:14–18. I treat the core narrative first and then the interpolation. After fleeing from Saul, David meets Jonathan and protests Saul’s attempts to have him killed (v. 1). In this narrative, Jonathan seems unaware of Saul’s intentions—contrast 19:1–7—insisting that he would know if Saul wanted to do David harm. In v. 3, David suggests that Saul knows that Jonathan favors him and that Jonathan would “be grieved” (MT) or would “take counsel” with David (LXX) were he to find out about Saul’s desire to harm David, and that is why Saul has kept his intentions a secret.<sup>58</sup> David thereupon suggests a plan to discover whether Saul will act decisively against him (vv. 5–7) and demands that Jonathan act loyally (*’āsā hēsed*) with him, “for you brought your servant with you into the covenant of Yhwh” (v. 8). Jonathan then promises to tell David if he finds out that Saul intends to kill him (v. 9). Throughout the narrative of vv. 1–10, 18–22, 24–41, and 21:1, David uses idioms of subordination to describe his relationship with Jonathan (e.g., he refers to himself as “your servant” in vv. 7, 8) and he acts in a subordinate manner in Jonathan’s presence (v. 41, where he bows three times). Although the supplement of vv. 11–17, 23, and 42 also casts the relationship of Jonathan and David as a treaty and has Jonathan promise to report any malicious intentions of Saul to David (v. 13), it, like 23:14–18, imagines that treaty to be one in which Jonathan is subordinate to David. It is David whom Yhwh will cause to prosper, and in a reversal of 20:8, in which David demands that Jonathan be loyal to him, it is Jonathan who insists that David should never cut off his loyalty (*kārat hēsed*) to Jonathan’s house (v. 15).

Though replete with treaty language, 1 Sam 20:1–10, 18–22, 24–41, and 21:1, like 18:1, contain material that suggests an emotional bond between Jonathan and David. Verse 41 is of interest in this regard. After David comes out of hiding, he bows three times to Jonathan, an act indicative of his subordination; then **“each kissed the other and they wept together.”** These reciprocal ritual acts of affection suggest the existence of an emotional bond between the two men.<sup>61</sup> Kissing and weeping as ritual acts can have strong emotional resonances, as Gen 33:4 and Ruth 1:9, 14 indicate. These texts pair kissing with weeping in a context of strong emotion: the reunion of brothers in the case of Gen 33:4 and the parting of in-laws in Ruth 1:9, 14. Like Gen 33:4; 1 Sam 20:41 concerns a reunion, and like Ruth 1:9, 14, the actors are related by marriage. In Gen 33:4, as in 1 Sam 20:41, the subordinate party’s



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multiple acts of prostration before the dominant party precede an emotionally charged reunion. Yet in Gen 33:4, reciprocal, emotionally resonant ritual action (weeping) is preceded by a series of highly emotive acts undertaken by the dominant party alone: “Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, fell upon his neck, kissed him and they wept.” Although 1 Sam 20:41 assumes that Jonathan and David are bound by a treaty in which David is subordinate, the reciprocal ritual acts of kissing and weeping narrated in this verse strongly suggest a personal, emotional bond between the two men, a bond best described as a friendship. As I have argued previously, behavioral parity is a norm of biblical representations of friendship and biblical friendship vocabulary, even if equality of the parties in all respects is not. I observed elements of such behavioral parity in the Ruth-Naomi narrative, and it is assumed by the various texts that validate the reciprocation of that which is good to those who have acted appropriately (e.g., Ps 35:12–14). In 1 Sam 20:41, the behavioral parity is expressed through a series of reciprocal ritual acts (kissing and weeping), not unlike the reciprocal acts of comforting expected of the friend in Ps 35:12–14. The difference is in the timing: In 1 Sam 20:41, behavioral parity is enacted by both parties simultaneously (they kiss one another and weep together); in Ps 35:12–14, each party to the friendship is expected to play the role of comforter when his friend is in need, and the psalmist’s disloyal friends are castigated for failing to do so when he was in trouble.

First Samuel 23:14–18 is the shortest of the four Jonathan-David narratives under consideration. David, a fugitive from Saul’s court, receives Jonathan in Horesh. Jonathan assures David that there is nothing to worry about: “Fear not, for the hand of Saul my father will not find you! As for you, you will be king over Israel. I, myself, will become your second-in-command [*mišneh*] and Saul my father knows it.’ The two of them then cut a covenant before Yhwh.” The covenant they cut is obviously one in which Jonathan is cast as vassal and David as suzerain, given that David will be king and Jonathan will serve him as a royal official. It is not unlike the treaty between them in 20:11–17, where Jonathan is the subordinate party, though Jonathan’s role as David’s “number two” here is unique. As with 19:2 and 20:9, 12, 13, Jonathan is portrayed choosing to be loyal to David instead of his father Saul, but here Jonathan explicitly relinquishes his claim to the throne, imagining himself as David’s supporter rather than as successor to his father as king. This narrative clearly serves the purposes of apologists who wish to cast David as the legitimate successor to Saul, as many have pointed out. The heir to Saul’s throne, Jonathan, not only recognizes what is inevitable, but declares his enthusiastic support for it. In contrast to 1 Sam 18:1 and 20:41, this narrative contains nothing that necessarily suggests a strong emotional bond between David and Jonathan, nothing, in other words, that suggests the existence of a friendship, though as in 18:1 and 20:41, a treaty relationship between the men is assumed. It seems unlikely that Jonathan’s surrender of the throne to David and his support for David as a court officer are intended to be understood as anything other than demonstrations of political loyalty. In fact, they are acts that constitute the suzerainty treaty established between David and Jonathan according to v. 18.

It is likely that most if not all of the narratives of Jonathan and David presume a treaty relationship of some kind between the two men. In 1 Sam 20:1–10, 18–22, 24–41, and 21:1, David is subordinate to Jonathan; in 20:11–17, 23, 42, and 23:14–18, it is Jonathan who plays the role of vassal; in 18:1–4, the nature of the treaty is unclear, as it is in 19:1–7, assuming there is indeed a covenant presupposed in the latter text. In contrast, only a few passages unambiguously evidence a personal relationship that we might describe as a friendship: 1 Sam 18:1, on account of the binding of lives/selves, a nontreaty idiom of emotion as evidenced by its use in Gen 44:30–31; and 1 Sam 20:41, which speaks of reciprocal ritual acts of affection best understood as motivated by strong emotions. Thus, if we are to speak of a friendship in the narratives of Jonathan and David, we ought to focus our attention on 18:1–4 and 20:1–10, 18–22, 24–41, and 21:1, the larger narratives in which the evidence for a friendship occurs. Given that the relationship of David and Jonathan is unambiguously conceived as a covenant in these two passages, it seems best to conclude that the men are portrayed as having a friendship that has been formalized through covenanting, not unlike the friendship described in Ps 55:21, in which a disloyal friend is apparently accused of breaking a covenant with the psalmist: “He sent forth his hand against one with whom he enjoyed good relations [*\*šōlēm*], / breaking his treaty [*bērīt*].” That the treaty breaker is a friend is suggested by vv. 14–15, in which he is addressed directly as “a man like myself” (*’ēnōš kē’erkī*) and “my gentle intimate” (*’allūpī ūmēyuddā’ī*), one with whom the complainant made “sweet fellowship” (*namtīq sōd*). Furthermore, the disloyal friend is contrasted with “enemies” and “haters” whom the psalmist could resist and from whom he could hide himself, presumably because they are not trusted, in contrast to the disloyal friend. In Psalm 55, the treaty that formalizes the friendship appears to be one of equals, in contrast to that which is assumed by 1 Sam 20:41; as mentioned, 1 Sam 18:1–4, for its part, is unclear about the nature of the covenant. The formal inequality assumed by 20:41 may be due to Jonathan’s position as prince and royal heir. In any case, 20:41 suggests that a friendship need not be formalized with a parity treaty if it is to be formalized; it



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can be formally unequal and nevertheless be characterized by emotional engagement, behavioral parity, and even volition.

Thus, the two instances of the Jonathan-David friendship formalized through the treaty idiom are not unique in biblical texts. In Psalm 55, we have another example of a friendship formalized through the making of a treaty, as indicated by the reference to a violated covenant. Though formalization of friendship through treaty-making is clearly evidenced, there is no way to know how many examples of biblical friendship are to be understood as formalized in this way. It may be that such formalization is assumed by our authors to be commonplace or even universal, or conversely, quite rare and unusual. Without the presence of distinct treaty rhetoric (e.g., *kārat* or *hillēl bērit*), we cannot judge just how many of the friendships portrayed or referred to in biblical texts were thought to have been formalized as covenants. Why formalize a friendship through treaty-making? Perhaps such formalization, whether rare or commonplace, would have been thought to reassure both parties to a friendship that their mutual expectations would indeed be met, given the typical sanctions for covenant violation. An informal friendship, in contrast, would presumably not be understood to presuppose the same severe penalties.

#### Appendix: 2 Sam 1:26

In addition to 1 Sam 18:1–4 and 20:41, the two narratives that clearly suggest a friendship between David and Jonathan that has been formalized by a treaty, there is 2 Sam 1:26, a verse of David’s Lament over Saul and Jonathan in which David states with respect to Jonathan: “Your love for me was wondrous, surpassing the love of women.” This comparison of Jonathan’s love to the love of women (*’ahābat nāšîm*) does not suggest a treaty relationship, given that love comparisons in treaty contexts are constructed differently. Typically, the love of treaty partners is compared—“My father loved you, and you in turn loved my father”—**or covenant love itself is likened to another kind of love that requires fidelity**, for example, Israel’s loyalty to Yhwh in its “youth” was like that of a young bride to her husband (Jer 2:2). In contrast, the love of women is best understood as a type of sexual-emotional love, since women are not evidenced as partners in treaties and their love is typically associated with emotions and with actual or potential sexual activity, as in 1 Sam 18:20, 28; Hos 3:1; and Prov 5:19. Because of the comparison of Jonathan’s love to the love of women in this verse, I have argued elsewhere that it is the only text among those concerned with Jonathan and David that might plausibly be construed to suggest a homoerotic relationship between the men.<sup>75</sup> Yet, the reference in 1:26 to Jonathan as “my brother” likely **suggests a treaty of equals** or may refer to the in-law relationship of Jonathan and David presumed by prose narratives such as 1 Sam 18:27. If the text assumes a parity treaty as I suspect it does, we have in 2 Sam 1:26 another instance of the David-Jonathan relationship represented as a friendship—this time likely with homoerotic overtones—that has been formalized as a treaty relationship. Furthermore, in 2 Sam 1:26, David’s words evoke a strong emotional bond with Jonathan and acknowledge Jonathan’s love for him, in contrast to 1 Sam 18:1, where Jonathan’s “self” or “life” is said to be bound to the “self” or “life” of David but nothing is said of David’s feelings for Jonathan. Thus, 2 Sam 1:26 is not unlike 1 Sam 20:41, where the men enact reciprocal ritual acts of kissing and weeping that suggest a shared emotional engagement and commitment.

#### Three Brief Narratives of Friends

Though the stories of Ruth and Naomi and Jonathan and David have attracted more attention from commentators, several shorter narratives of friends are to be found in the Hebrew Bible, and these are also worthy of our attention for what we might learn from them about the narrative representation of friendship in the biblical text. In contrast to the more developed tales, these stories are brief, sometimes only a few verses in length. I discuss three such narratives: the stories of Job and his three comforters, Jephthah’s daughter and her companions, and Amnon and Jonadab.

#### Job and His Comforters

In Job 2:11–13, Job’s friends Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamatite learn of Job’s travails, consult with one another, and travel from their homes to be with Job:

When the three friends of Job [*rē’ē ’iyyôb*] **heard about all this misfortune [*rā’â*] which had befallen him, they came, each from his place:** Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamatite. They took counsel together to come to move back and forth for him and to comfort him. When they raised their eyes from afar, they did not recognize him, and lifted up their voices and wept. Each tore his garment and they threw dirt heavenward upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights and none spoke a word to him for they saw that (his) pain was exceedingly great.



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Job's three friends do precisely what friends are expected to do at the time of a calamity, a death, or an illness: **They join the sufferer and like the sufferer, they embrace mourning rites such as moving the body back and forth, strewing dirt or ashes on the head, weeping, tearing garments, and sitting on the ground.** Friends, allies, and others who participate in mourning rites with mourners are often referred to by the biblical text as “comforters” (*mēnaḥmîm*). According to Jer 16:7, comforters of one who is mourning the dead break bread with him “to comfort him concerning the dead” and cause him to drink from “the cup of consolation on account of his father or his mother.” One who comforts a sick friend embraces mourning rites, presumably in order to petition the deity to intervene on behalf of the sufferer and end his suffering (e.g., Ps 35:13–14). And those who have endured calamity also expect friends or allies to play the role of comforter (e.g., Lam 1:2). Job is mourning the deaths of his children and a variety of non-death-related calamities, including the loss of many of his possessions and his own affliction with disease (1:13–19; 2:7–8). These are referred to collectively as “all this misfortune” (*kol hārā'â hazzō't*) in 2:11 and prompt Job's three friends to join him, fulfilling all expectations.

Yet Job's three friends of 2:11–13 are represented quite differently both in the poetic dialogues that follow the prose prologue of chapters 1 and 2 and in the prose epilogue in 42:7–9. In the poetic core of the book, the three friends challenge Job regarding his innocence and elicit from him accusations of wrongdoing. They are referred to as “troubling” or “mischievous” comforters (*mēnaḥmê 'āmāl*, 16:2), indicating that they are not playing the comforter role appropriately. They are also called “worthless healers” (*rōpē'ê 'ēlîl*, 13:4), suggesting, like “troubling comforters,” that the friends do not offer the consolation comforters are expected to provide. In 19:21–22, the three are said to pursue Job instead of acting favorably toward him. Job even accuses them of causing him to suffer, “crushing” him with words and humiliating him, all acts associated with enemies rather than friends (19:2–3). In short, the three comforters of the poetic dialogues are, at least in Job's eyes, only marginally better than the disloyal friends mentioned in 19:13–14, who are estranged from Job and have forgotten him, and the “men of his council” in 19:19, who abominate him, having turned against him. Like these other friends, the three fail to fulfill expectations according to Job, even if they superficially embrace their appropriate role as comforter; voluble and critical in the extreme, their representation in the poetic dialogues contrasts with their portrait in the prose narrative of 2:11–13, where they do not say a word to Job on account of the degree of his suffering. Thus, the sensitive and loyal friends of the prologue are portrayed differently from the nonconsoling and even hypocritical friends of the poetic core.

In the prose epilogue, the three friends are rebuked directly by Yhwh for not speaking the truth concerning him, in contrast to Job; they are then ordered by Yhwh to make sacrifices to him for their own benefit. In addition, Job is to pray on their behalf in order to protect them from Yhwh's wrath (42:7–9). **Presumably, their misrepresentation of Yhwh consists of assuming that Job must be guilty of transgressions in order to have been afflicted in such a manner.** The words of Eliphaz in 4:7 are an example of their perspective on suffering as represented in the poetic core of the book:

Remember, who is the innocent one who has perished,  
And where are the upright destroyed?  
As I have seen [it], those who plow wickedness,  
And sow trouble, harvest them.

This is a conventional and commonplace viewpoint in wisdom texts, as scholars have often noted, and may well reflect the same set of ideas attributed to the three friends of Job by the writer of the epilogue. Yet interestingly, in the epilogue, the friends are not reproved by Yhwh for being poor comforters to Job or even for being his oppressors, as they are by Job himself in the poetic dialogues. **Nothing at all is said in the epilogue about their behavior toward Job. This suggests that the author of the epilogue does not share the perspective of Job of the poetic core—and likely that of the poet who composed it—on the behavior of Job's friends, but sees their faults differently. In a word, the three friends of the combined prologue and epilogue come across as loyal to Job, though misguided in their understanding of Yhwh's ways, while the three friends of the poetic dialogues are represented in a less flattering way, embracing the comforter role only superficially, failing to provide consolation as comforters should, and instead assuming an accusatory stance toward Job that is unjustified.**

How ought we to explain this contrast between the representation of the three friends of the prose prologue and epilogue on the one hand, and that of the three friends of the poetic dialogues that lie between them, on the other? The narrative prologue and epilogue are often viewed as a separate composition from the poetic core of Job, with either the poetic dialogues or the prose narrative deemed older. If the prose narrative is indeed later than the poetic core, as some scholars argue, the portrait of the three friends in 2:11–13 and 42:7–9 might represent an



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attempt by the author of the prologue and epilogue to ameliorate their representation, just as he evidently seeks to temper the severity of Job's losses by having his family and possessions restored to him (42:11–13) and the obscurity of the deity's decisions and actions by providing the Satan's challenge as the context for Job's tribulations (1:6–12; 2:1–6). Why would the narrator seek to portray the three friends in a better light? The prose writer may have found Job's strident responses to the friends in the dialogues too severe, given the conventional nature of their words, and therefore he sought to cast the friends more positively by underscoring their acts of loyalty and sensitivity as comforters in chapter 2. As many have noted, the author also portrays Job as the epitome of patience in suffering in the prologue, much in contrast to the angry, accusatory Job of much of the poetic core. It may be that the prose narrator seeks to present a more idealized portrait of both Job and his three friends, having found their portrayal in the poetic dialogues somehow not to his liking, perhaps because of their greater complexity and believability as characters.<sup>91</sup> Since we read the prologue first, our views of both Job and his friends are already under formation when we encounter them in the dialogues, effectively tempering their portrayal there; the epilogue, for its part, has the last word, with the friends rebuked by Yhwh for their lack of understanding with respect to him, but not for any failure of loyalty or sensitivity to Job.

#### Jephthah's Daughter and Her Companions

Female friendship is once again in view in the story of Jephthah's daughter and her companions, an episode of the larger Jephthah narrative. Jephthah, one of the judges, makes a rash vow: He will sacrifice the first thing to greet him when he returns home should Yhwh keep him safe and give him victory in battle against the Ammonites (Judg 11:30–31). When Jephthah arrives home after his triumph, his daughter, an only child, comes out to meet him, dancing and playing the hand drum (v. 34). Upon seeing her, Jephthah tears his garment, a mourning gesture that is sometimes used to acknowledge an anticipated calamity or death, for once a vow is made, it must be paid, as Jephthah acknowledges (v. 35). Jephthah's daughter, whose name is never provided by the narrator, is portrayed as a noble fatalist, accepting the inevitable, though she asks for a modest reprieve: "Let this thing be done for me: Give me leave for two months that I might descend the mountains (?) and weep over my virginity [*'al bēṭûlay*], I and my friends [*rē'ōtay/ra'yōtay*]" (v. 37). She does precisely this, returns, and is sacrificed in fulfillment of her father's vow. The pericope ends with a notation that it became a regular observance in Israel for women to commemorate Jephthah's daughter four days in the year.<sup>93</sup>

How Jephthah's daughter intends to spend her final two months of life is not without interest. The purpose of her traveling is to weep over her virginity (v. 37), which presumably means to bewail the fact that she will die without experiencing sexual intercourse with a man, as the narrator makes explicit in v. 39: "And as for her, she did not know a man." To die without knowing a man sexually means to die without bearing children, and this fact likely constitutes at least part of what Jephthah's daughter mourns when she bewails her virginity. Her mourning, however, is in company, as all mourning ideally ought to be, for she is accompanied by her female friends in her travels. In v. 37, Jephthah's daughter's friends are mentioned in such a way that the text implies that they, too, will weep over their friend's virginity. In the following verse, Jephthah's daughter is said to weep, though nothing is said about the ritual behavior of her friends. At all events, **the text seems to be suggesting that the friends play the role of comforter for Jephthah's daughter as she experiences her calamity.** Although the word "comforter" is not used by the text to describe them, they behave as comforters do: They are present with Jephthah's daughter, separating themselves from quotidian life with her; they embrace her mourning rites—they weep with her according to v. 37—not unlike comforters in any number of other texts. Yet these comforters are women comforting a woman who is experiencing a calamity, and this sets them apart from the male comforters of men mentioned elsewhere in the biblical text (e.g., 2 Sam 10:1–5; Job 2:11–13). If this understanding of the narrative is correct, the story enriches our perspective on the biblical representation of female friendship, as Ruth contains nothing comparable. It also enhances our understanding of the gendered dynamics of biblical mourning, particularly in the context of personal calamity. It may be that the text's authors and audience assume that a woman mourning a personal calamity expects the company and consolation of friends as much as any man does.

#### Amnon and Jonadab

The first chapter of the Absalom story in 2 Samuel 13 is a component of the larger narrative of Absalom's rise and fall (2 Sam 13–19). The chapter begins by noting that Absalom, son of David, had a beautiful sister named Tamar, who was loved by her half brother Amnon (v. 1). Though Amnon deems Tamar completely out of reach, his friend (*rēa'*) and first cousin Jonadab, described by the text as "an exceedingly worldly man," thinks otherwise. In response to Amnon's distraught state, Jonadab concocts an elaborate ruse to get Amnon and Tamar together: "Lie down on



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your bed and pretend to be sick. When your father comes to see you, say to him, ‘Let Tamar, my sister, come and feed me food and prepare the food in my sight in order that I might see and eat from her hand’ ” (v. 5). Amnon follows his friend’s advice and receives a visit from his father David, who orders Tamar to wait on her half brother. After she serves him food, Amnon rapes her and expels (*šlh* Pi) her from his house. Tamar, described as a “devastated woman” (*šōmēmā*), embraces mourning rites on account of her calamity and goes to her brother Absalom’s house and remains there, her marriage prospects likely diminished. Absalom, for his part, hates Amnon for what he did and plots to have him put to death. Two years later, at a shearing festival hosted by Absalom, Amnon is murdered by Absalom’s order, and David’s other sons who were also invited flee (vv. 28–29). When a false report reaches David that all of the princes have been killed by Absalom, Jonadab steps forward and reassures David that that is not the case; he then tells David of Absalom’s intent to kill Amnon from the day Amnon raped Tamar (v. 32). The sons of David arrive safely, just as Jonadab had promised.

**Jonadab plays a significant yet not easily understood role in this narrative. It is he who comes up with the plan to give Amnon access to Tamar and it is he who reveals to David—after the fact—Absalom’s longstanding intent to avenge the rape of his sister by having Amnon killed (vv. 32–33).** Why is it that Amnon’s friend Jonadab is privy to Absalom’s machinations? The narrative suggests that Absalom’s plan is a secret, not common knowledge, and the fact that Amnon allows himself—and is allowed by David—to attend the feast indicates both Amnon’s and David’s ignorance of the plan according to the storyteller. Is the narrator suggesting that Jonadab was also a confidant of Absalom? Or has he become one, after falling out with Amnon for whatever reason? Jonadab does not seem to embrace mourning rites when the court learns that Amnon has been killed, in contrast to David, his courtiers, and his sons. He also demonstrates no feeling upon hearing of Amnon’s death, reassuring David twice that “Amnon alone is dead” (vv. 32, 33). Though not a son of David, Jonadab is a close paternal relative, and it is likely that the story’s author and audience would have assumed that playing the role of comforter was incumbent upon him, as much as it is upon David’s courtiers, who are said to tear their garments and weep on learning the news (13:31, 36). Thus, it is possible to see in the text’s words and its silences a Jonadab who not only encourages his friend Amnon to pursue his baser impulses, but also does not remain loyal to him, withholding knowledge of Absalom’s plan to kill Amnon and not playing the role of comforter to David once Amnon has died, possibly because he is now Absalom’s friend and confidant rather than Amnon’s. That Jonadab would conceal Absalom’s plans from David is an act of striking disloyalty, particularly because Amnon is David’s heir.<sup>101</sup> Given all that remains unsaid in the text, this scenario is at best only a possibility, but if my reading has merit, it reveals a friend (Jonadab) who gets his friend (Amnon) into serious trouble and is not ultimately loyal to him or to his uncle and lord, David. If Jonadab really does eschew comforting David on account of Amnon’s death, by doing so he is publicizing his loyalty to Absalom, his dissociation from Amnon, and his distance from David, whose courtiers and relatives are expected to embrace his ritual stance. On the one hand, it is difficult to believe that Jonadab would dare to openly defy David in this way, but on the other, the text is silent about his embrace of mourning rites, leaving open the possibility. Furthermore, other relatives of David defy him openly in the narratives of his reign, including his sons Amnon and Absalom and his nephew Joab. Jonadab’s defiance may simply be part of a larger *topos*.

#### Conclusion

Narrative portraits contribute significantly to our understanding of friendship as it is represented in biblical texts. Prose representations of friendship frequently offer the reader named characters who are more fully realized than the anonymous friends mentioned in wisdom texts such as Proverbs and the Job dialogues, prophetic texts, or the psalms of individual complaint, friends who are often little more than one-dimensional types. In addition to richer characterizations, narrative renderings of friendship often provide us with data regarding the biblical representation of friendship that we would not otherwise have. For example, they tell us about some of the ways in which women’s friendships were conceived by biblical authors, something about which we know next to nothing from poetic sources. And from prose texts, in contrast to nonnarrative materials, we learn much about how biblical authors might imagine both friendships of people sharing most or all personal characteristics and friendships between those who differ with respect to wealth, social status, life stage, or some combination of these. Thus, narrative enriches our understanding of the dynamics of behavioral parity, an expectation of friendship in nonnarrative contexts (e.g., the psalms of individual complaint and wisdom texts) as well as in narrative, through detailed character development in particular narrative settings.

The contrast between the anonymous friends of many nonnarrative contexts and the more developed and often named friends of prose writing is quite striking. To bring this difference into relief, one might compare the unnamed



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betrayers of the supplicant in the psalms of individual complaint both to Jonadab of 2 Samuel 13 and to Ruth. Those who betray the complainant in Psalm 35 are said to seek his life, plan his undoing, pay back that which is evil instead of what is good, and rejoice at the psalmist's misfortune. In Psalm 38 disloyal friends stand at a distance from the suffering petitioner and appear to seek his life and pursue his undoing. In Ps 55:21 the ex-friend threatens the psalmist physically (he "sent forth his hand against one with whom he enjoyed good relations [*\*šōlēm*]"). Not only are these disloyal friends unnamed, but their behaviors are stereotypical and they are not portrayed as having any kind of complexity: They display no ambivalence about or hesitation in their hostile behavior and no inconsistency in their treatment of the complainant. In a word, they are all bad, all of the time, with no redeeming or complicating features.<sup>105</sup> To these flat, one-dimensional betrayers of trust we might first compare Amnon's friend Jonadab in 2 Samuel 13. Although sensitive to Amnon's emotional state and responsible for encouraging and facilitating Amnon's pursuit of Tamar, Jonadab appears to feel no regret at the news of Amnon's murder and expresses none ritually, though such is expected, perhaps because he has changed sides and now identifies publicly with his other first cousin, Amnon's half brother and the facilitator of his murder, Absalom. If this is the case, Jonadab's loyalty to Absalom even seems to trump his obligations to David, his lord and king. Thus Jonadab comes across as a complex, unpredictable figure who manifests both extremes of fidelity and treachery at once in his person. Ruth, like Jonadab, is named, in contrast to the anonymous betrayers of the sufferer in the psalms of individual complaint. We learn something of her personal history and much about her character from the narrative. But in contrast to Jonadab, Ruth is not a particularly complex character. Her behavior is consistently flawless, and she comes across as wholly predictable, without inner conflicts—even idealized. In short, she is more developed as an individual than are the ex-friends of texts such as Psalms 35 and 38, but less so than a complex character such as Jonadab.

Women's friendship, rarely mentioned outside of prose sources, is the focus of both the narrative of Ruth and Naomi and the story of Jephthah's daughter and her companions, and from these narratives we learn much we would not otherwise know about the ways in which female friends might be represented. Women are portrayed as friends by biblical authors, just as men are, and as in narratives about male friends such as Jonathan and David, technical friendship terminology is not always present in stories of women's friendship. Nonetheless, both the story of Ruth and Naomi and the narrative of Jephthah's daughter and her friends bring into relief features of biblical friendship seen elsewhere. The friendship bond between Ruth and Naomi, which develops after Ruth has fulfilled all familial obligations, is both voluntary and reciprocal, and manifestations of behavioral parity characterize it, along with other features common to the representation of biblical friendship (e.g., emotional bonding, loyalty, trust, and good will). Though not stated explicitly by the text, Naomi and Ruth express mutual affection, they seek one another's welfare, and each of them reciprocates that which is good to the other, as male friends ought to do according to a text such as Ps 35:12. Jephthah's daughter's companions, unnamed by the narrator though identified as "friends," respond loyally to her calamity; they accompany her on her two-month journey and seem to play the part of comforters, just as male friends are obligated to do for a man experiencing calamity or illness or when responding to a loved one's death according to texts such as Job 2:11–13 or Ps 35:12–14. Thus, both of these narratives of women's friendship suggest implicitly a set of friendship norms for women that are not unlike those evidenced for men in other texts.

Behavioral parity, in contrast to formal equality of social status, wealth, life stage, or other personal characteristics, is a broadly attested expectation of friendship across biblical texts, mentioned most frequently in the breach. Various passages suggest either explicitly or implicitly that the friend is expected to seek a friend's welfare (e.g., Ps 35:27), act favorably toward the friend (e.g., Job 19:21), be trustworthy (e.g., Mic 7:5), and reciprocate that which is good for the good received from the friend (e.g., Ps 35:12–14). Yet friendship vocabulary and nonnarrative representations of friendship, for all that they might tell us about the expectation of behavioral parity, say little about the differences in personal characteristics that might exist between friends. They also do not tell us much about the possibilities of friendship between social, material, or life-stage peers. In contrast, narrative enriches our understanding of the dynamics of behavioral parity by introducing friendships that are unequal in one or more ways as well as those in which no hierarchical dimension is suggested at all. Naomi and Ruth remain mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, even after their friendship commences, even if the narrative's emphasis is other than their formal status difference. Jonadab and Amnon are formally unequal, given Amnon's status as the king's son and heir. Although David is a rising military figure, Jonathan is heir to the throne; thus, they are not formally peers. The text also suggests differences in relative wealth between David and the royal court of Saul (e.g., 1 Sam 18:23). In addition, Jonathan and David are portrayed in a number of the narratives as unequal treaty partners, with Jonathan



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in the subordinate role in some texts (e.g., 1 Sam 20:11–17, 23, 42) and David the vassal in others (e.g., 1 Sam 20:1–10, 18–22, 24–41; 21:1). In contrast, other Jonathan-David narratives and 2 Sam 1:26 may cast David and Jonathan as equals in their covenant. For their part, Job and his three comforters are evidently peers in terms of social status, likely also in terms of wealth and life stage. Finally, Jephthah's daughter and her companions are presented without a hint of inequality among them.

Thus, in terms of personal characteristics, narrative representations of friendship suggest several possible combinations: friends who are unequal in most or all respects, friends who are unequal in some respects (e.g., in terms of social status or wealth) but equal in others (e.g., with respect to treaty status or life stage), and friends who are peers in most or all respects. Yet whatever the combination of personal characteristics, the same set of presuppositions about behavioral parity as evidenced in nonnarrative sources is suggested—mainly implicitly—by narrative representations of friendship: friends are expected to seek each other's welfare, support one another when times are bad, be loyal, and reciprocate appropriate behavior. Thus, even a friendship between people who are not peers in every respect requires behavioral parity. Just as the suzerain of a suzerain-vassal treaty has obligations to the vassal, so a friend who has greater social status or wealth owes his friend loyalty and other goods of friendship.

#### 4 Friendship in Ben Sira

The focus of my final chapter is the representation of friendship in the second-century BCE Hebrew wisdom text Ben Sira, known by the title the Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach, or Ecclesiasticus in many Christian Bibles. Ben Sira is of particular interest to me for a number of reasons: The work was composed in Hebrew, and a lot of the Hebrew survives; the author has much to say about friendship; he stands in the biblical wisdom tradition, like the authors of Proverbs and Job; and he writes from a Hellenistic context, thereby allowing us to assess the degree of the influence of Greek thought on his ideas about friendship. Furthermore, the work is a part of the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Old Testament and therefore properly biblical in the view of several major Christian communities, although its status among Jews and Protestants is noncanonical. Thus, Ben Sira is an appropriate place to bring to an end our inquiry into the representation of friendship in the Hebrew Bible. I begin with an assessment of Ben Sira's vocabulary and idioms of friendship, noting both continuities and discontinuities with earlier biblical sources. Then I consider Ben Sira's ideas about friendship in comparison with the ideas of earlier biblical texts, including those in the wisdom tradition (both traditional and skeptical). Finally, I evaluate the evidence that may suggest the impact of Greek ideas about friendship on Ben Sira.

#### **Ben Sira's Vocabulary and Idioms of Friendship**

Working mainly from the surviving Hebrew text and, secondarily, what can be reconstructed with confidence from the versions, I now turn to Ben Sira's vocabulary of friendship and the distinct idioms of friendship he employs. Not surprisingly, a number of the terms for a friend and the distinct idioms of friendship familiar to us from earlier biblical texts are also to be found in Ben Sira. Words for "friend" in Ben Sira include *'ōhēb*, *rēa'*, and *mērēa'*, with *'ōhēb* the most common—in contrast to earlier sources that tend to privilege *rēa'* over *'ōhēb*—and with *mērēa'* occurring rarely, as in earlier biblical texts. An ex-friend or false friend is called an enemy (*šōnē'*), not unlike in earlier materials. The expression *'anšē šēlōmēkā*, "those with whom you enjoy good relations," occurs once in Ben Sira (6:6 [A; Beentjes 6:5]): "Let those with whom you enjoy good relations be many, / But let your trusted intimate [*ba'al sōd*] be one in a thousand." It is more commonly used of friends in earlier texts (e.g., Jer 20:10; Ps 41:10), which also speak of friends communicating their good will to one another (*dbr šālōm*; Jer 9:7; Pss 28:3; 35:20). Ben Sira uses the verb *bāṭaḥ*. ("to trust") in regard to friendship (6:7 [A; Beentjes 6:6]) as well as the idiom "stand at a distance" (*minneged āmad*) for the disloyal friend (37:4 [B]; similarly 6:8 [A; Beentjes 6:7], with *āmad* alone), as do earlier biblical texts. He utilizes the expression "to turn against" (*hpk bē-*) in 6:12 (A; Beentjes 6:11) with reference to the disloyal friend, as does Job 19:19: "If you suffer misfortune, he will turn against you [*yahpōk bēkā*]." He insists that a friend should neither forget (*šākaḥ*) nor abandon (*āzab*) his friend (37:6 [B, D]), rare though attested idioms of friendship in earlier biblical texts. As in earlier materials, the particularly intimate friend may be described as a "friend who is as yourself" (*rēa' kēnapšēkā*; 37:2 [B]).

In addition to vocabulary and idioms of friendship shared with earlier biblical texts, Ben Sira associates a variety of expressions and words with friendship that are either not tied to friendship or not attested at all in extant earlier materials. Some of these usages are likely his innovations; others may simply be current in his environment. Perhaps most prominent among these is his use of the word *ḥābēr*, "companion," to refer to the friend. The word *ḥābēr* occurs occasionally in earlier biblical texts but not with reference to friends. In Ben Sira, by contrast, *ḥābēr* can be



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used to refer to the friend, as 6:10 (A; Beentjes 6:9) demonstrates clearly, through apposition: “There is a friend [*’ôhēb*], a companion of the table [*ḥābēr šulḥān*], / But he will not be found on a day of trouble.” After Sir 37:5 (B, D) states that the “good friend” (*’ôhēb ṭôb*) fights against the “outsider” (*zār*), the following verse (B, D) urges that the “companion” (*ḥābēr*) not be forgotten or abandoned in wartime, suggesting through parallelism that the *ḥābēr* and *’ôhēb ṭôb* are closely related, if not identical individuals. Furthermore, on several occasions, Ben Sira’s grandson, who translated the Hebrew text into Greek, appears to render *ḥābēr* as *philos*, “friend” (6:10; 37:6; perhaps 7:12 [A]). Nonetheless, on occasion Ben Sira seems to distinguish between the *ḥābēr* and the *rēa’*, as in 7:12 (A): “Do not plan wrongdoing against a brother, / Or likewise against a friend or companion [*rēa’ wēḥābēr*].” Though some interpreters have understood this to suggest a nonfriendship meaning for *ḥābēr*—for example, an “associate” or “companion” who is not a friend—this may be reading more in the text than is warranted. Rather than “a descending order of intimacy: brother, friend, companion (or associate),” as Skehan and Di Lella put it, it seems more likely that Sir 7:12 suggests that all three categories of person share the same implicit classification: intimates not to be wronged. Thus, the *ḥābēr* in a text such as Sir 7:12 may not be the equivalent of the *rēa’*, but he is still classified as an intimate, and therefore, presumably, a friend. How exactly he might be distinct from the *rēa’* unfortunately remains unclear. The idea of gradations in friendship is attested elsewhere in Ben Sira—as in earlier biblical texts—and may be suggested here as well if both *rēa’* and *ḥābēr* refer to types of friends, as I suspect they do. Understanding *ḥābēr* in Sir 7:12 to refer to a friend is consistent with its use in texts such as 6:10 and 37:5. What remains unclear are the differences in nuance among the terms *’ôhēb*, *rēa’*, and *ḥābēr* as Ben Sira uses them.

Aside from *ḥābēr*, a number of other friendship-related words and idioms occurring in Ben Sira either are not attested or have no clear friendship associations in earlier biblical texts. These include the expression *ba’al sôd*, “trusted intimate” (6:6 [A; Beentjes 6:5]), which is not unlike *mētê sôdî*, “intimates,” used of friends in Job 19:19; the verbs Hit *ndh*, “to remove oneself,” and Ni *str*, “to hide oneself” (6:11, *yitnaddeh*; 12, *yissātēr* [A; Beentjes 6:10, 11]), where earlier biblical texts most often have “stand at a distance” (*’amad minneged*) or “be far from” (*rāḥaq*) (e.g., Pss 38:12; 88:9; Prov 19:7); the idiom “to turn into (an enemy)” (Ni *hpk lē-*; 6:9 [A; Beentjes 6:8]; 37:2 [B, D]), used of friends in Ben Sira but not in earlier sources; the terms *’ôhēb ṭôb* (“good friend”; 37:5 [B, D]), *’ôhēb ’emûnâ* (“true friend”; 6:14–16 [A; Beentjes 6:13–15]), and *’ôhēb yāšān/’ôhēb ḥādāš* (“old friend”/“new friend”; 9:10 [A]); and the expression “like him/you” (*kāmôhû/kā*), used of the friend in 6:11, 17 (A; Beentjes 6:10, 16): “When times are good for you, he is like you”; “for like him, so is his friend.” Other terminology used of friends in Ben Sira but not in earlier biblical sources includes the friend as a “helper” (*’ôzēr*) in Sir 13:22 (A; Beentjes 13:21), a text that Corley argues “echoes” Prov 19:14, which has *rēa’*; the friend who supports (*smk*) his friend according to Sir 12:17 (A) and 13:21 (A); several terms for friends who share commensality (*ba’alê laḥmēkâ* [9:16 (A)]; *ḥābēr šulḥān* [6:10 (A; Beentjes 6:9)]; *’ôhēb mabbîṭ*. *’el-šulḥān* [37:4 (B)]); and the verb *nāṭaš*, “to abandon,” as in Sir 9:10 (A): “Do not abandon an old friend.”

Finally, some important words and idioms used of friendship in earlier biblical sources are not found in the extant Hebrew text of Ben Sira. Though the word *mēyuddā’*, “one who is known (to me),” is used of friends in texts such as 2 Kgs 10:11 and Ps 55:14, it is not attested in the Hebrew manuscripts of Ben Sira. Similarly, Ben Sira does not bear witness to the use of the word *’allûp*, possibly “gentle (one),” with regard to the friend (Jer 11:19; Mic 7:5; Ps 55:14). Reflexes of the verbal root *dbq*, “to cling to,” are lacking in Ben Sira’s friendship discourses (contrast Prov 18:24; Ruth 1:14), and the verb “to abominate” (*t’b*) and its derivatives, including the noun “abomination,” are not used to describe the behavior of unfaithful friends (contrast Ps 88:9; Job 19:19). Disloyal friends in Ben Sira are not said to “pay back that which is evil instead of what is good” or “pay back that which is evil” (*šlm* [Pi]/*šym/gml rā’â/ra’* [*taḥat ṭôbâ*]) as they are in Pss 7:5 and 35:12 (and likely in Ps 38:21 and possibly in Ps 109:5), even though disloyalty in friendship is a preoccupation of Ben Sira. Friends are not said to communicate their good will to one another (*dbt šālôm*), as they are in texts such as Jer 9:7; Pss 28:3; 35:20; disloyal friends are not said to be “far from” (*rāḥaq*) a suffering friend, as they are in Ps 88:9 and Prov 19:7. Words for the female friend are not attested (*rē’â*, *ra’yâ*; cf. Judg 11:37, 38), nor are friends described as “those who delight in my vindication” (*ḥāpēšē šidqî*), an expression used of friends in Ps 35:27, nor are they said to “pursue that which is good” (*rādap ṭôbâ*), as is likely the case in Ps 38:21. The idiom the “self” or “life” of x was bound to the “self” or “life” of y (*qšr nepēš*) is lacking in Ben Sira’s rhetoric of friendship, in contrast to 1 Sam 18:1, where it is used of Jonathan and David. Finally, hendiadys constructions such as “my loving friends” (*’ôḥābay wērē’ay*, Ps 38:12) or “my gentle intimate” (*’allûpî ûmēyuddā’î*, Ps 55:14) are not attested in Ben Sira. As with vocabulary and idioms found in Ben Sira but not in earlier biblical texts, words and



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expressions attested in earlier biblical materials that are absent from Ben Sira may reflect innovation on Ben Sira's part or simply current practice in his time and place.

#### **Ben Sira's Ideas About Friendship**

Along with continuities of vocabulary and idioms, Ben Sira shares ideas about friendship with earlier biblical sources. According to earlier materials and Ben Sira, love is a norm between friends and has both emotional and behavioral resonances. To be loyal and trustworthy are manifestations of such love and are an expectation of friendship, as texts such as Jer 9:3; Mic 7:5; Ps 41:10; and Sir 6:7 (A; Beentjes 6:6), 22:23, and 27:17 make clear. Offering active support in times of need rather than making oneself inaccessible or forgetting the friend is a specific way in which friends are thought to be loyal in both Ben Sira and earlier biblical texts. Ben Sira elaborates upon the loyalty theme found in older texts through his particular emphasis on helping and supporting the friend in time of need and his use of the rhetoric of help (*ʿzr*) and support (*smk*). He may well have borrowed this rhetoric directly from earlier texts such as Pss 3:6; 37:17, 24; 54:6; 119:116; and 145:14, which speak frequently of Yhwh as "supporter" and "helper" of the suffering petitioner, if the association of this rhetoric with friendship was not already established in his environment. If Ben Sira did innovate in this manner, he may have done so in order to enrich his treatment of loyalty in the context of friendship. As in earlier biblical texts, behavioral parity is a norm of friendship, with loyalty and trust ideally expressed reciprocally. Just as one should be loyal to a friend in difficult times, so should the friend be constant when one suffers misfortune. The norm of behavioral parity is, as in earlier texts, most often suggested implicitly, frequently in contexts in which disloyalty is the focus (e.g., 6:8–13 [A; Beentjes 6:7–12]; 37:1–4 [D, partially B]; 13:21–23 [A]), though also in passages in which Ben Sira urges appropriate behavior (e.g., 22:23; 37:5–6 [B, D]). As in earlier texts such as Deut 13:7; Prov 17:17, and Prov 18:24, friends and family members share an implicit common classification in Sir 7:18 (A), in this instance suggested by parallelism: "Do not trade a friend for money, / Nor a [] brother for the gold of Ophir." Here, brother and friend belong to a single class of people whom one should value more than material wealth.<sup>30</sup> In 7:19, Ben Sira adds the wife to the class of people to be embraced and not rejected, just as Deut 13:7 classifies the wife and intimate friend with other close family members: "Do not spurn a skillful wife, / For the value of her favor exceeds that of pearls." Other ideas shared by Ben Sira and earlier biblical texts include the notion that friends are "like" their friends, as in Ps 55:14, where the friend is described as an equal, literally, "a man like me" (*ʿēnōš kēʿerkī*), and in Sir 6:11, 17 (A; Beentjes 6:10, 16) and, by implication, in 13:15–16 (A; Beentjes 13:14–15). Finally, commensality as a component of friendship is witnessed in both Ps 41:10 and Sir 6:10 (A; Beentjes 6:9), 9:16 (A), and 37:4 (B), including the idea that the friend benefits from one's hospitality. In Ps 41:10, the friend eats the psalmist's food; Sir 9:16 speaks of one's dining guests (*ba ʿālê laḥmēkā*), who should be righteous people.

More interesting perhaps are ideas Ben Sira expresses about friendship that are not attested, or at least are uncommon, in earlier biblical texts. One such notion is that friends provide well-timed guidance to their friends: In the words of Sir 40:23, "Friend and companion lead [*nhg*] in a timely manner." Presumably, this statement refers to the sage advice a sensible friend might provide, a topic about which earlier texts are mainly silent.<sup>34</sup> The completion of this verse offers yet another idea, one that is unattested in earlier material: that a capable wife is superior to the helpful friend and companion: "But better than both is a skillful wife." Although the wife is occasionally classified implicitly with the intimate friend and close family members in earlier biblical texts (e.g., Deut 13:7) and elsewhere in Ben Sira (7:19 [A]), she is never said to be their superior. If direct comparisons are made in earlier materials, they are between friend and male relative (e.g., the brother), as in Prov 18:24 or 19:7, and in some instances, the friend is deemed the superior intimate, as in Prov 18:24: "There is a friend who clings more closely than a brother." It is remarkable that Ben Sira, who has many positive things to say about loyal friends, ultimately ranks even the most helpful of them below the skillful wife.

Another idea witnessed in Ben Sira that is apparently absent from earlier materials is the notion that reconciliation between estranged friends is sometimes possible. Although earlier texts speak frequently of disloyal friends and the damage they might cause, nowhere is the possibility of reconciling with them discussed in any clear way, as I noted in Chapter 2. In contrast, Ben Sira speaks of the possibility of reconciliation several times. According to 22:21–22, he who draws the sword or speaks against a friend (literally, "opens the mouth") can still achieve reconciliation, but he who reveals a secret dooms a friendship. Ben Sira 27:21 is similar, stating that "there is reconciliation [*diallagē*] for contention [*loidorias*]"—meaning that after a falling out there is the possibility of making up—as long as the split was not occasioned by the revelation of confidences (*mustēria*). Clearly, for Ben Sira, the



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exposure of confidential information is an unforgivable failing in a friend, something he speaks about frequently, as others have noted.<sup>40</sup>

Yet another theme absent from earlier texts but explored by Ben Sira is material generosity to friends who are evidently not in need. In 14:13 (A), Ben Sira urges his readers to practice such liberality: “Before you die, do good [*hêtēb*] for a friend, / Give him that which you possess.” Preceding this statement, Ben Sira declares that one ought to be generous with oneself as well: “If you have it, be good to yourself” (14:11 [A]). Earlier biblical texts suggest that nonmaterial support of friends is expected, as I have discussed, even if the expectation is communicated implicitly (see, e.g., Pss 35:27; 38:12; 88:19). In addition, some earlier texts imply that a poor man is entitled to expect material support from his friends (Prov 14:20; 19:7), but this is different from the belief that one ought to be materially generous to friends who are not poor. In 22:23, Ben Sira encourages his audience to be loyal to a friend in need, presumably meaning provide him with material support when he is short on resources. Here, he may be developing what is implicit in Prov 14:20 and 19:7. In any case, the generosity envisaged by Ben Sira is evidently material in 14:11, 13 and 22:23, although 22:23 speaks of particular circumstances (poverty), while the statements in 14:11 and 13 are noncircumstantial and therefore rather different from what is found in earlier biblical texts.

Another difference between Ben Sira and earlier materials is Ben Sira’s explicit emphasis on assigning appropriate value to the friend. As I have mentioned previously, Ben Sira urges readers not to undervalue the friend or brother in 7:18 (A), as they are advised not to reject a skillful wife in 7:19, for these are worth far more than money or other valuable possessions. Friend, brother, and wife form an implicit class in this passage: intimates who ought to be valued above material wealth. The sentiments of Sir 6:15 (A; Beentjes 6:14) are similar, though the formulation is different; here, the “faithful friend” is said to be “beyond price” and the good he provides immeasurable.

Finally, for Ben Sira, a “good friend” is a fighting friend (37:5–6 [B, D]), an understanding absent from earlier biblical materials dealing with friendship:

A good friend [*’ôhēb tōb*] makes war with an outsider [*zār*],  
Before enemies he will grasp a shield.  
Do not forget a companion [*hābēr*] in battle,  
And do not forsake him through (the division of?) your spoil.

Scholars debate whether the passage is meant to be understood literally or metaphorically. My own preference is to understand it literally, as advice to the soldier. In any case, it seems likely that Ps 35:1–2 has influenced the formulation of Sir 37:5, as others have noticed. In Ps 35:1–2, it is Yhwh who is called upon to fight for the sufferer; in Sir 37:5, the “good friend” is characterized as one who fights for his friend. Thus, older material concerning Yhwh is apparently drawn upon to formulate the novel image of the fighting friend, just as earlier texts portraying Yhwh as a support and help to sufferers are likely a source used to enrich the image of the friend who helps and supports his friend in time of need (e.g., 13:22 [A; Beentjes 13:21]). The same pattern seems likely for the image of the friend as helpful leader or guide in Sir 40:23, as I have discussed (see n. 34). In contrast, the idea of Sir 37:6 that the friend should not abandon or forget his friend is not novel but shared with earlier biblical texts such as Prov 27:10 and Job 19:14, as I have noted previously. In fact, the assertion that the friend should not forsake his friend is expressed in a style not unlike that of Prov 27:10. Thus, Sir 37:5–6 perpetuates certain earlier ideas and vocabulary relating to friendship and, at the same time, likely modifies—or reflects modification of—other earlier ideas not originally related to friendship in order to apply them to the friend. In addition to the impact of earlier biblical texts such as Ps 35:1–2 on the formulation of Sir 37:5–6, the text likely also betrays Greek influence, as I suggest in the next section.

Not unlike some vocabulary and idioms extant in earlier materials, a number of ideas associated with friendship in biblical sources antedating Ben Sira are missing or mainly absent from Ben Sira. In contrast to texts such as the narrative of Jephthah’s daughter and her companions (Judg 11:34–40) and the book of Ruth, Ben Sira has nothing to say about female friendship. In this the book is close to earlier wisdom materials, which tend to present friendship as a bond between men. Friendship formalized by a treaty, a phenomenon evidenced in texts such as 1 Sam 18:1–4; 20:41; and Ps 55:14–15, 21, is neither mentioned nor hinted at in Ben Sira. Nor is the role of the friend as “comforter” in contexts of mourning, calamity, or petition, so central to texts such as Judg 11:37, 38; Ps 35:13–14; Job 2:11–13; 13:4; 16:2, as discussed. As with vocabulary and idioms of friendship, it is difficult to know when Ben Sira is innovating with respect to ideas about friendship and when his presentations more likely reflect shared or even common usage in his social setting.

#### **Evidence of the Influence of Greek Ideas on Ben Sira’s Friendship Ideology**



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Given that Ben Sira lived and wrote in a Hellenistic context, it should come as no surprise that he was very likely influenced to at least some degree by Greek notions of friendship. Our challenge is to identify where such influence might be confidently discerned and its possible sources (literary or oral), questions about which there has been much debate and little agreement. In order to address these questions, I begin by identifying apparent borrowings that are as easily or more easily explained as ideas shared in common with earlier biblical materials. Thus, if an idea about friendship is attested in both Greek literature and earlier biblical texts, I shall not assume that its presence in Ben Sira is the result of borrowing. Greek materials may have exercised an influence on Ben Sira, but if earlier biblical parallels are extant for a particular idea, Greek influence cannot be established with any confidence. In contrast, in cases in which the influence of earlier biblical materials cannot be ascertained but parallels in Greek thought are evidenced, we can be more confident of the possibility of Greek influence of some kind.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that Ben Sira himself may or may not be directly responsible for one or another apparent borrowing. I begin my assessment with four examples of ideas shared in common by Ben Sira, earlier biblical texts, and Greek materials.

A number of ideas about friendship expressed by Ben Sira are found both in earlier biblical materials and in Greek literature. That wealth multiplies friendships and poverty erodes them is noted in Prov 19:4: “Wealth adds many friends, / But as for the poor man, he is separated from his friend.” Ben Sira 13:21 (A), likely elaborating on Prov 19:4, adds a specific circumstance—misfortune—and contrasts the experience of rich and poor: “A rich man who totters finds support in a friend, / But a poor man who totters is driven from friend to friend,” suggesting rejection of the poor man by his friends. The following verse, Sir 13:22, speaks of the rich man’s numerous “helpers,” likely building upon the reference to the rich man’s “many friends” in Prov 19:4, as Corley argues. Going beyond Prov 19:4; Sir 13:22 adds the idea that the rich man is popular even when his words are despicable and the poor man is rejected even when his speech is sensible. The statement in Sir 13:22 that “there is no place” for the poor man, even if he is wise, may build on the claim in Prov 19:4 that the poor man “is separated from his friend.” Theognis, for his part, states that the rich will have many friends and the poor few, not unlike Prov 19:4 (lines 929–30). Might Theognis have also influenced Ben Sira either directly or indirectly? Although such influence is possible, it cannot be established with any confidence, given the likely impact of Prov 19:4.

Another example of an idea common to Ben Sira, earlier biblical sources, and Greek materials is the notion that behavioral parity or reciprocity is a central building block of friendship. Aristotle expresses this in no uncertain terms: In an ideal friendship, “in every respect each friend gets from the other things that are the same as, or similar to, the things that the other gets from him—which is in fact what ought to belong to friends” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.4 1156b 34–35). He goes on to state that in the two other, inferior types of friendship—that of utility and that of pleasure in his theorization—the same kind of reciprocity should apply. In Ben Sira and earlier biblical texts, behavioral parity is also assumed to be a norm of friendship generally, though it is usually communicated implicitly rather than explicitly, in contrast to Aristotle, and is often spoken of in the breach. An example of this is the complaint in Ps 35:12 that ex-friends have paid back the psalmist that which is evil instead of what is good, a claim that implies that good treatment in exchange for manifestations of beneficence is the norm. In Sir 37:5–6 (B, D), the “good friend” who fights for his friend against the “outsider” stands in parallel with the “companion” (*ḥābēr*) who should not be forgotten in battle, suggesting implicitly a reciprocal understanding of friendship’s obligations. As in earlier biblical texts, and in contrast to Aristotle, the norm of behavioral parity is conveyed implicitly in Ben Sira. That behavioral parity is so central to friendship in earlier biblical materials suggests that we not be overly hasty to assume Greek influence on Ben Sira’s notion of reciprocity in friendship.

A third example of an idea attested in Ben Sira, earlier biblical texts, and Greek literature is the notion that some friends will prove to be unreliable or actively disloyal at a time of crisis when loyalty is expected. Psalm 35:15 speaks of disloyal friends who rejoice when the psalmist stumbles; Ps 38:12 mentions friends who stand at a distance from the suffering petitioner; Ps 41:10 recalls the once trusted friend who “eats my food” but has acted in a hostile manner; and Job 19:14 states that Job’s friends—literally, “my intimates,” *mēyuddā’ay*—have forgotten him in his time of need. For its part, Sir 6:8–13 (A; Beentjes 6:7–12) speaks of the friend with whom one eats “who will not be found on the day of trouble,” the friend “who will turn himself into an enemy,” and the friend who “will hide himself from you” when things go awry. Warnings about such friends are paralleled in Theognis (e.g., lines 643–44, 697–98) as scholars such as Middendorp, Sanders, and Corley note. In fact, that false friends remove themselves at times of misfortune is a common theme throughout Greco-Roman literature.<sup>61</sup> Cicero speaks of those who abandon their friends in their distress; Seneca, for his part, refers to people who run when confronted by their friend’s adversity.



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Given the prominence of the topos of the disloyal friend in earlier biblical materials, its presence in a text such as Sir 6:8–13 comes as no surprise and militates against the assumption that the idea was derived from Greek thought, where the theme is also well attested. Sanders argues that Ben Sira nonetheless drew upon Theognis to elaborate upon the inherited theme of the disloyal friend, pointing to close parallels in language between Theognis and Ben Sira, for example, as regards table fellowship. Yet Ps 41:10, a text that Sanders does not mention, also speaks of an unfaithful friend who ate the psalmist's food, as I have noted; it may in fact be the source for Ben Sira's statement about the disloyal friend who shares meals with his friend. In short, although Sanders is critical of Middendorp for overstating his case, Sanders, too, may have been too quick to assume Greek influence, at least with respect to the table fellow as disloyal friend.

A fourth case of overlap between Ben Sira, earlier biblical texts, and Greek materials is the conception of the friend as somehow related to, or an extension of, the self. Deuteronomy 13:7 mentions the intimate friend "who is as yourself" (*re'ākā 'āšer kēnapšēkā*), and Ps 55:14 speaks of the friend who is "a man like me" (*kē'erkī*). Ben Sira, likely building on Deut 13:7, mentions a "friend who is as yourself" (*rēa' kēnapšēkā*) in 37:2 (B), deploring his transformation into an enemy. He also speaks of the friend who is "like you" (*kāmōkā*) when times are good but who removes himself when misfortune strikes (A; 6:11 [Beentjes 6:10]) as well as the "loyal friend" (*'ōhēb 'ēmūnā*) whose own friend is "like him" (*kāmōhū*) (A; 6:16–17 [Beentjes 6:15–16]). The idea that the friend is a "second self" or "another self" is common to Greco-Roman discourse on friendship, beginning with Aristotle. Is this idea the same as the biblical notion that the intimate friend is "as yourself" or "like you"? Though similar, the ideas are not exactly the same, and, like the close biblical parallels, the difference cautions against assuming Greek influence in this instance.

In contrast to ideas attested in Ben Sira, earlier biblical texts, and Greek sources, there are other notions about friends in Ben Sira that are not found in earlier biblical materials but are paralleled in Greek texts, some of which antedate the second century BCE. In addition, some of these ideas find parallels in Egyptian wisdom, as several scholars have noted. I focus on four such ideas: that friends ought to be tested, that flatterers are not truly friends, that there is a type of friend who fights for his friend, and that the number of one's friends ought to be limited. It is among these examples that the possibility of Greek influence is most seriously to be considered, particularly if Egyptian parallels are lacking.

Although testing the friend to determine whether he is trustworthy is not mentioned in earlier biblical materials, testing in other biblical contexts is a relatively common theme. God tests Israel, and Israel, for its part, tests God (Exod 15:25; 16:4; 17:2, 7; 20:20; Deut 33:8). Yhwh tests individuals (Gen 22:1; Ps 26:2), and individuals might also put Yhwh to the test (Isa 7:12). In addition, people might test other people (1 Kgs 10:1). Yet in Sir 6:7 (A; [Beentjes 6:6]), care and a healthy skepticism are urged when making friends, and friends must prove themselves through a process of testing: "If you acquire a friend, through testing [*bēnissāyōn*] acquire him, / And do not be quick to trust him." As is often pointed out, testing of friends and being slow to trust them are prominent themes in Greco-Roman discourses on friendship. Aristotle speaks of testing friends (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.4 1157a 21–22), as do Xenophon, Isocrates, Theognis, and Menander. Such testing is a prominent theme explored by Roman authors such as Cicero (*On Friendship* 17, 20) and Seneca (*Epistles* 3.2, 9.9) as well. Some passages advise testing when a new friend is to be embraced, not unlike Sir 6:7 (e.g., Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.6.1; Seneca, *Epistles* 3.2); other texts speak of ongoing testing after a friendship is established (e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.4 1157a 21–22); and still others speak of testing in both contexts (e.g., Cicero, *On Friendship* 17, 20). Ben Sira's focus on testing at the point of a friendship's genesis is a commonplace in classical sources and may well reflect the influence of Greek thought, although Egyptian influence is also a distinct possibility, as Sanders and others have pointed out.

Earlier biblical treatments of friendship have nothing to say about flatterers, in contrast to Ben Sira, who describes the many helpers who rally to and praise a rich man, even if his words are unworthy: "A rich man speaks and his helpers are many, / His repellent words are called beautiful." Furthermore, Ben Sira states that when a rich man speaks, "all are silent, his understanding [*šīklô*] they exalt to the clouds" (A; 13:22, 23). Ben Sira's evocation of the flatterers of the wealthy is striking and parallels treatments of flattery in Greco-Roman sources in a number of respects. These often distinguish flatterers from genuine friends and value frankness (*parrēsia*) in a friendship rather than disingenuous praise. In fact, Cicero states that nothing is more inimical to genuine friendship than flattery (*On Friendship* 25). Aristotle, for his part, identifies the flatterer as a man who tries to be agreeable to gain a financial or material advantage (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.6 1127a 7–10). Because most men love honor, says Aristotle, most love flattery: "for a flatterer is a friend who, if he is not inferior, pretends to be so and to love more than he is loved"



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(*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.8 1159a 15–17). Although Ben Sira’s image of the flatterer emphasizes his disingenuousness, it also suggests implicitly the flatterer’s embrace of inferiority, an act motivated perhaps by an eye to the rich man’s potential material largesse. The distinction between flatterer and friend, often stated explicitly in classical sources, is at best implicit in Ben Sira.<sup>76</sup> Given that flatterers do not appear in earlier biblical texts concerning friendship and that Ben Sira’s evocation of them shares characteristics in common with their representation in classical sources, it is quite possible that Ben Sira’s treatment has been influenced by Greek ideas.

The image of the fighting friend developed in Sir 37:5–6 (B, D) is unlike anything in earlier biblical materials dealing with friendship and very likely reflects the influence of both Greek thought and earlier biblical ideas and rhetoric in combination. Corley may be correct that in the “good friend” who fights the “outsider” in Sir 37:5, “there seems to be a reference ... to the Greek idea” of the *symmachos*, rendered “ally,” “comrade-in-arms,” or “helper” by Corley. In order to support this claim, Corley cites parallels from Demosthenes and Xenophon. But what of the *hetairos*, “companion,” who is not infrequently described as a *philos* in Greek sources? The *hetairos* is often mentioned in martial contexts, and, as Konstan points out, Patroclus is said to be Achilles’ “dearest companion by far.” Interestingly, LXX uses *hetairos* in Sir 37:5 along with *philos* in a combination where the Hebrew (B, D) has *’ôhēb ṭôb* (“good friend”). It is certainly possible that Ben Sira had the *hetairos* in mind when he spoke of the “good friend” who fights the “outsider.” In any case the translator seems to have thought so, assuming that his Hebrew *Vorlage* was not unlike that which survives in extant manuscripts. As I discussed earlier, I believe the image is meant to be taken literally rather than metaphorically, in contrast to many other interpreters. I also suspect that a combination of Ps 35:1–2, a text that describes Yhwh fighting for the suffering psalmist, and earlier ideas and rhetoric of nonabandonment of the friend contributed to Ben Sira’s portrayal of the fighting friend, along with the Greek idea of the *hetairos* or, alternatively, the *symmachos*.

Earlier biblical texts have nothing explicit or implicit to say about the ideal number of friends one should have, and even a text such as Prov 18:24, which recognizes different kinds of friends (both “friends for friendly exchanges” and the intimate friend), does not address their number in any specific way. In contrast, Ben Sira states that although one’s friends (*’anšê šālôm*) should be many, one’s “trusted intimate” (*ba’al sôd*) should be one in a thousand (A; 6:6 [Beentjes 6:5]). Like Ben Sira, there are Greek texts that consider the ideal number of friends, and these often distinguish between different types of friends. Aristotle argues that one’s friends ought to be limited to the maximum number of those who can live together and are friends with one another; he further notes that it is not possible to be an “ardent friend” (*philon sphodra*) to many at the same time and that even friends for pleasure and utility should be limited in number (*Nicomachean Ethics* 9.10 1170b 29–1171a 20). Thus, Aristotle balances several practical considerations in his treatment. Theognis (lines 73–75) and Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 2.6.27) urge few friends, as Corley notes. If *’anšê šālôm* in Sir 6:6 refers to friends, as I believe it does, Ben Sira’s teaching is not that one should have few friends; it is that one should have only a few intimate friends. Whether my understanding of this passage, or that of Corley and others, is correct, Ben Sira’s interest in the appropriate number of friends one should have may reflect concerns with the ideal number of friends common in Greek sources. In any case, this is a topic that earlier biblical sources leave unexplored, and Ben Sira’s treatment may reflect Greek influence.

#### Conclusion

Ben Sira’s vocabulary and idioms of friendship as well as his ideas about friendship are both continuous and discontinuous with the vocabulary, idioms, and ideas of friendship evidenced in earlier biblical texts. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no evident privileging of wisdom sources—either traditional or skeptical—over other earlier texts when Ben Sira draws upon inherited materials. As in older biblical texts, Ben Sira makes use of nouns, verbs, and idioms of friendship such as *rēa’* (“friend”), *’ôhēb* (“friend,” “lover”) *’iš/’enôš šālôm* (“one with whom I enjoy good relations”), *bāṭaḥ*. (“to trust”), *minneged ’amad* (“to stand at a distance”), *rēa’ kēnapšēkâ* (“a friend who is as yourself”), *šākaḥ* (“to forget”), and *’azab* (“to abandon”), favoring some (e.g., *’ôhēb*) over others. Terminology that is rarely if ever associated with friendship in earlier biblical discourse is extended to the realm of friendship (e.g., derivatives of *’azar* [“to help”] and *sāmak* [“to support”]; the term *ḥābēr* [“companion”]; expressions such as *ba’al sôd* for the intimate friend). Ben Sira makes use of modified versions of earlier terms (e.g., *’ôhēb ṭôb*, “good friend”; *’ôhēb yāšān/ḥādāš*, “old/new friend”; *’ôhēb ’emûnâ*, “true friend”). At the same time, he eschews some words and idioms that are relatively commonplace in earlier sources or occur in important friendship discourses. The friend is not referred to as *’allûp* (possibly “gentle one”) or *mēyuddâ’* (“one who is known [to me]”). Ben Sira never speaks of friends “clinging” (*dbaq*) to their friends, in contrast to Prov 18:24; nowhere are derivatives of the root *t’b*, “to abominate,” used with respect to the behavior of disloyal friends, in contrast to texts such as Job 19:19; the idiom



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“to pay back that which is evil (instead of what is good)” (*šlm* [Pi], *šym* or *gml ra’â/ra’* [*taḥat ṭôbâ*]) is not to be found in Ben Sira’s discourses on friends; nor does Ben Sira use hendiadys constructions such as “my loving friends” (*’ôhâbay wērē’ay*, Ps 38:12) in his discussions of friendship. No particular pattern of continuity or discontinuity with earlier biblical sources may be discerned in Ben Sira’s use of the nouns, verbs, and idioms of friendship; he might draw upon or ignore the vocabulary and expressions of earlier wisdom texts (both traditional and skeptical), prophetic materials, the psalms of individual complaint, legal materials, or narrative texts. Two examples will serve to illustrate this lack of a pattern, specifically with regard to inherited wisdom texts: Although Ben Sira urges his audience not to abandon or forget friends (37:6 [B, D]), as does Prov 27:10 (“Do not abandon your friend or the friend of your father”), and—implicitly—Job 19:14 (“My intimates have forgotten me”), he disregards or rejects idioms derived from the verbs “to cling to” (e.g., Prov 18:24) and “to abominate” (e.g., Job 19:19) in his friendship discourses, even though these occur in important passages dealing with friendship in earlier wisdom materials. As noted, it is often not clear whether one or another of his usages suggests innovation on his part or simply reflects what is current in his environment.

Similar patterns apply to Ben Sira’s ideas about friendship. Earlier notions are reproduced in Ben Sira with little or no change. Love between friends is an expectation, has both emotional and behavioral resonances, and is made manifest through acts of loyalty and demonstrations of trustworthiness, as in Jer 9:3; Ps 41:10; and Sir 6:7 (A). Behavioral parity is assumed to be the norm of friendship and is often suggested implicitly in contexts in which failed friendship is at issue (Ps 35:12–14; Sir 22:23; 37:1–4 [D, partially B]). As in earlier materials such as Deut 13:7; Prov 17:17; and 18:24, friends share an implicit common classification with family members in texts such as Sir 7:18 (A). Ideas manifest in earlier biblical sources are also elaborated and extended in Ben Sira. The book’s particular emphasis on helping and supporting friends in time of need in its discourses on loyalty in friendship is an example of this, with the rhetoric of help (*’zr*) and support (*smk*) possibly borrowed directly from earlier texts that speak of Yhwh’s help and support of sufferers (e.g., Pss 37:17, 24; 54:6). Gradations in friendship also appear to be more developed than in earlier texts such as Prov 18:24 and 19:4, although the differences in nuance in Ben Sira’s use of terms such as *’ôhēb*, *rēa’*, and *ḥābēr* remain unclear. Ben Sira expresses a number of ideas that are not attested or are rare in earlier biblical materials. These include the friend or companion as leader (Sir 40:23), the capable wife as superior to the sensible friend or companion (Sir 40:23), and the possibility of reconciliation between estranged friends (e.g., Sir 22:21–22; 27:21). Although earlier texts such as Prov 14:20 and 19:7 speak of material support for poor friends and Ben Sira mentions this (Sir 22:23), he also urges his audience to extend such material largesse to friends in general (Sir 14:13 [A]), an idea absent from earlier texts concerned with friendship. Finally, several important ideas attested in earlier biblical sources regarding friendship are absent from Ben Sira. The possibility of female friendship is not acknowledged, the idea that a friendship might be structured as a treaty is not attested, and the role of friendship in settings of mourning, calamity, and petition is not mentioned. As with Ben Sira’s vocabulary and idioms of friendship, his ideas concerning friendship display both continuities and discontinuities with those of earlier biblical materials, and no particular configuration of continuity or discontinuity may be discerned. Ideas from the psalms of individual complaint, prophetic texts, prose narrative, and poetic wisdom materials are adopted by Ben Sira (e.g., material support for poor friends [Sir 22:23], as in Prov 14:20; 19:7), while other earlier notions of friendship are not embraced, including ideas manifest in wisdom texts (e.g., comforting the friend at the time of calamity and death [Job 2:11–13; 13:4; 16:2]). Whether Ben Sira’s choices represent innovation on his part or mirror usages common in his time and place is often difficult to determine.

The possibility of Greek influence on Ben Sira’s thinking about friendship is much debated, and no broad consensus exists regarding either the extent of Greek influence or the mechanisms by which Greek ideas might have been communicated. Unlike some scholars, I believe the best that one can do is to estimate the likelihood of Greek influence on a case-by-case basis. Nonetheless, I have identified several potential examples of the influence of Greek thought. None of these has a parallel in earlier biblical texts, and only one has a close analogue in Egyptian wisdom. It may well be that Greek influence is to be discerned in Ben Sira’s discourse on testing the new friend and being slow to trust him, in his portrayal of flatterers, in his image of the fighting friend, and in his notion that one should have few intimate friends, although the testing theme and its rhetoric are also evidenced in Egyptian wisdom, as Sanders and others have noted. Even in the few cases in which Greek influence of some sort is plausible, it is not easy to determine the manner in which it might have been exercised or whether Ben Sira himself is responsible for one or another apparent borrowing.

Conclusion



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### Lie#5: All I Need is God, Who Needs Friends.

I begin my concluding remarks with a comparison of the representation of friendship in a number of distinct biblical literary types. Friendship is portrayed in the Psalms, particularly those of individual complaint; in legal materials such as Deut 13:7; in non-psalmic poetic texts such as “David’s Lament over Saul and Jonathan” (2 Sam 1:26); in prophetic passages such as Jer 9:3 and Mic 7:5–6; in prose narratives such as the stories of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Job and his three comforters, Amnon, Absalom, and Jonadab, and Jephthah’s daughter and her companions; in pre-Hellenistic wisdom collections—both traditional and skeptical—such as Proverbs and the poetic sections of the book of Job; and in the Hellenistic wisdom collection Ben Sira. Friendship is represented both in biblical poetry and in prose narrative. Some of the texts of interest to us may be dated with confidence (e.g., Ben Sira, to the second century BCE), but most are difficult if not impossible to date. Ben Sira is not infrequently dependent on earlier biblical texts (both wisdom—traditional and skeptical—and nonwisdom); other texts in our purview display little or no evidence of dependence on earlier materials. Our texts sometimes share vocabulary, idioms, and ideas; sometimes they do not. The friends portrayed range from flat, one-dimensional types without any individuality to complex, strikingly singular people who may be conflicted and whose behavior is not necessarily consistent or predictable. We can chart the characteristics of friendship shared in common across literary types and bring the differences among those types into relief. In order to get a sense of the configurations of vocabulary, idioms, ideas, and portrayals pertaining to friendship across our sources, I focus my discussion on several important ideas about friends, with reference to vocabulary and idioms of friendship where relevant. I then consider the range of ways in which friends are portrayed in various biblical texts.

The classification of friends with family members is a broadly attested idea in biblical materials. It is evidenced across a number of literary types, including prose narrative (Exod 32:27), legal materials (Deut 13:7), prophetic poetry (Jer 9:3; Mic 7:5–6), psalms of individual complaint (Ps 38:12) and other psalms (Pss 15:2; 122:8), traditional wisdom (Prov 17:17; 18:24; 19:7), skeptical wisdom (Job 19:13–14), and Ben Sira (Sir 7:12, 18 [A]), which shares characteristics with traditional wisdom but is distinct in a number of ways, as I have discussed. Such classification is accomplished by means of explicit comparison, as in texts such as Prov 18:24 and 19:7, or, more commonly, implicit common classification. Implicit common classification of friends with family members may be achieved by means of the employment of a single list of intimates that includes friends, as in Deut 13:7, or, more frequently, through the use of parallelism either in poetic texts such as Jer 9:3; Psalm 15; Job 19:13–14, or Sir 7:12, 18 (A) or in prose narratives such as Exod 32:27. Such shared classification of friends and family members is rare in narrative because narrative seldom employs parallelism in the manner of Exod 32:27. In contrast to most prose, this narrative text has a parallelistic structure, suggesting a common class of intimates that includes both family members and friends: “Pass and return through the camp, from end to end, slaying each his brother, each his friend, each his relative.” Explicit comparison and implicit common classification of friends and family members often privilege relatives as paradigmatic intimates to whom friends might be likened, and this tendency is evidenced in a number of different literary types. Examples include Prov 18:24, “there is a friend who clings more closely than a brother,” and Deut 13:7, a text that includes the intimate friend in a list of familial intimates, suggesting implicitly that the close family members are paradigmatic intimates and the intimate friend is comparable to them. In contrast, comparison of family members to friends, a commonplace among some groups in contemporary Western societies, is unknown in biblical materials.

The assumption of behavioral parity as a requirement of friends, like family members, is also a widely attested idea, expressed both explicitly and implicitly, sometimes through the use of distinct idioms. We find the expectation of behavioral parity expressed in texts such as Ps 35:12–14 and 38:21 (seemingly with reference to both friends and family); Job 19:19; and Sir 6:8–13 (A), 22:23, and 37:1–4 (D, some B). It is expected even if friends are formally unequal, as in 1 Sam 20:41, where David bows three times to Jonathan before they embrace, or in the book of Ruth, whose central character Ruth is Naomi’s daughter-in-law and a generation younger than Naomi. In some texts, the behavior in question is ritual in nature, as in Ps 35:12–14 (comforting at the time of personal calamity or illness) or 1 Sam 20:41 (reciprocal acts of affection [kissing and weeping]); in others, the behavior does not clearly have a ritual dimension (e.g., Ps 38:21, paying back that which is evil instead of what is good; Job 19:19, abominating in return for love). Most texts do not seem to distinguish between the expectations of family members and friends, requiring behavioral parity from both equally (e.g., Ps 38:21). Proverbs 19:7, however, seems to have higher expectations for family members, whose failure to be loyal is less easily explained than the same deficiency in friends, perhaps because relatives are thought by the author to be the paradigmatic intimates. The expectation of behavioral parity is sometimes communicated through the use of distinct idioms such as the expression *šlm* (Pi), *šym* or *gml rā’ā/ra’*



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[*taḥat ṭōbbā*], “to pay back that which is evil [instead of what is good],” as in Pss 7:5; 35:12; 38:21, and 109:5, although such idioms are not broadly attested across biblical literary types, in contrast to the idea of behavioral parity itself. The assumption of behavioral parity in friendship is not in the least surprising, given the importance of reciprocity in the larger context of social and even cultic relations according to biblical texts. Not only are friends, family members, and treaty partners expected to reciprocate good treatment; Yhwh himself states that his *modus operandi* is characterized by reciprocity: “Those who honor me I will honor and those who despise me will be diminished.”

The idea of the exceptional friend is known across several literary types. He appears among close family members in Deut 13:7; he is explicitly compared to the brother and found to be his superior in Prov 18:24; she is evoked in great detail in the book of Ruth; and in Sir 37:2 (B, D), his transformation into an enemy is the cause of grief (or, is a judgment) “approaching death.” The exceptional friend may be described as one who is “as yourself” (Deut 13:7; Sir 37:2 [B]); he may be said to “cling [*dābēq*] more closely than a brother” (Prov 18:24); alternatively, he may be called a “good friend,” a “true friend,” or a “trusted intimate” (*baʿal sōd*) (Sir 6:6, 14–16 [A]; 37:5 [B, D]). The idea of the exceptional friend suggests implicitly an assumption of gradations of friendship, for the exceptional friend can be exceptional only if other friends are not. Gradations of friendship are evidenced explicitly in the comparison of the exceptional friend to “friends for friendly exchanges” in Prov 18:24; Proverbs 19:4 suggests the idea of friends attracted by wealth, who might be ranked lower than other friends (e.g., the “friends for friendly exchanges” of 18:24) by the writer, although nothing is said explicitly about this. Ben Sira uses a variety of terms for friends, including several terms for the exceptional friend as I have mentioned, though unhappily, it is difficult to get a sense of how exactly Ben Sira might rank each type of friend (e.g., how the *rēaʿ* might compare to the *ḥābēr* in Sir 7:12 [A]). Thus, although the notion of the exceptional friend is strongly articulated in a variety of biblical texts, gradations of friendship, where they are evidenced, are less clear in their details.

Nonetheless, the gradations of friendship evidenced in a number of biblical sources might be profitably compared to Aristotle’s classification of friends, for both similarities and differences are apparent. Aristotle provides a detailed theory of friendship, identifying and ranking three distinct types: friendship of the good, friendship motivated by utility, and friendship with the goal of pleasure (*Nicomachean Ethics* 8.3–4). Although Aristotle’s three types of friendship differ from those suggested by biblical texts in a number of ways, there are characteristics in common. The “friends for friendly exchanges” of Prov 18:24 might be similar to Aristotle’s friends who seek out pleasure; the friends who flock to the rich man in Prov 19:4 are evidently not unlike Aristotle’s friends who have utilitarian aims. The exceptional friend of Prov 18:24 is apparently preeminent among friends primarily because of his loyalty, intimacy, and, possibly, proximity (he “clings more closely than a brother”); the exceptional friend of Deut 13:7 and Sir 37:2 (B) is outstanding most likely on account of his intimacy (he is “as yourself”). The quality that distinguishes Ben Sira’s “good friend” of 37:5 (B, D) is clearly his loyalty, and the same can be said of Ruth. In contrast to exceptional friendship as understood in these biblical texts, where loyalty or intimacy seems of most concern, the primary quality that distinguishes Aristotle’s preeminent form of friendship is shared virtue or excellence (*aretē*), which will give rise to trust, pleasure, and even utility.

Failed friendship is a topos across much of biblical literature, with disloyal friends present most prominently in the psalms of individual complaint, but also in the Job poetic dialogues (e.g., 19:13–14, 19); Proverbs (e.g., 19:4, 7); prophetic texts such as Mic 7:5 and Jer 9:3–4, 7; and Sir 6:9–11 (A) and 37:2 (D, B). Various idioms are used to describe the behavior of unfaithful friends (e.g., they “stand at a distance,” “abominate,” or “pay back that which is evil instead of what is good”), and they might be accused directly of failing to fulfill obligations (e.g., as comforters in Job 13:4 and 16:2). Failure in friendship might be attributed to the friends themselves, as in Ps 35:12–14, or to Yhwh, who is said to use unfaithful friends as a tool to punish the sufferer in some psalms of individual complaint (e.g., Ps 89:9). Disloyal friends are not infrequently mentioned with unfaithful relatives (e.g., Jer 9:3; Mic 7:5–6; Ps 38:12; Job 19:13–14), just as the exceptional friend might be classified with close familial intimates in other texts. Some passages contrast disloyal friends with faithful friends (Ps 35:26–27, implicitly). The theme of failed friendship, prominent in certain types of biblical literature, is infrequently attested in biblical prose narratives, which often portray idealized friendships, for example, Job and his three comforters in the Job prologue or Jephthah’s daughter and her companions. An apparent exception to this pattern is the story of Jonadab and Amnon in 2 Samuel 13. Jonadab’s behavior in this narrative manifests extremes of both loyalty and disloyalty toward his friend and cousin Amnon, and he appears eventually to abandon Amnon, attaching himself instead to Absalom, Amnon’s half brother who orchestrates his murder. If my interpretation of Jonadab’s behavior is correct, we are certainly justified in



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describing the Amnon-Jonadab friendship as a failure, characterized ultimately by Jonadab's disloyalty, even if no idioms of failed friendship are present in the text (e.g., "pay back that which is evil instead of what is good").

Friends are evoked in a variety of ways in biblical materials. The friends of the psalms of individual complaint and a number of wisdom and prophetic texts might be described as one-dimensional and completely lacking in individuality and complexity. They are unnamed and are usually characterized as disloyal in every respect, displaying stereotypical behaviors. They threaten the sufferer's life, plan to wrong him, fail to reciprocate that which is good, and rejoice at his stumbling (Ps 35). They are untrustworthy and speak lies (Jer 9:3–4; Mic 7:5). They forget the friend and even abominate him (Job 19:14, 19). Loyal friends, though rarely mentioned in these texts, are also relatively flat, lacking in individuality. In Ps 35:27, they are described as those who delight in the psalmist's vindication. In contrast to these friends, some texts portray friends who possess somewhat more individuality, although they, too, lack genuine complexity. These friends, who appear mainly in narrative contexts, often have names, indicating a degree of individuation. Sometimes we know details of their histories. But their behavior is predictable, and we would not be wrong to describe them as idealized. Here I am thinking of characters such as Ruth and Job's comforters in the Job prologue. Ruth is a good example of this second type of friend. She is as much the flawless friend as she is a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. Her behavior is consistent, she displays no inner conflicts, she is generous to a fault, and she's never self-pitying or hostile to anyone. In a word, she may have a name and a history, suggesting individuation to some extent, but she is completely predictable and lacks complexity. In contrast to characters such as the friends of Psalm 35 and Ruth, several texts portray complex, highly individuated friends who are not predictable in their conduct, who display personal growth, who are, in a word, interesting characters. Naomi is one example, Jonadab another, David a third. I shall speak of Naomi here. Where Ruth is consistently flawless in her conduct, Naomi's behavior is difficult to predict as the story develops. She displays growth over time, transforming herself from a rather self-pitying complainer who takes Ruth for granted into an energetic agent of change whose advice and actions secure a future for both Ruth and herself. She is, in short, a foil for Ruth. In the biblical evocation of friends, narrative is the primary vehicle for constructing well-developed, complex, and interesting friends, friends who are otherwise lacking in biblical representations of friendship. We find examples of somewhat individuated friends in prose as well.

The relationship of the emotions to friendship is a challenge to assess, and simplistic, maximalist readings of our texts are to be avoided, given that verbs such as "to love" and "to cling to" are used not only of the relations of friends to one another and family members among themselves, but of treaty partners as well. This suggests the possibility of a range of nuances for these idioms, including political overtones in covenant contexts. Use of such idioms in a treaty setting may or may not tell us anything about the personal feelings of treaty partners, who may well feel no affection and harbor no genuine concern for one another, as I have discussed. Given the overlap of vocabulary and idioms of friendship and those of covenanting, how might we identify examples of the representation of friendship in which emotional bonding is clearly suggested? This is a critical question, given that the presence of evidence of genuine feelings of affection in a voluntary association is the most cogent way to establish the existence of a friendship as opposed to another kind of relationship that might, like a friendship, draw upon friendship vocabulary and idioms or suggest the assumption of behavioral parity (e.g., a treaty relationship between allies). In my view, the best way to argue convincingly that the portrayal of a friendship suggests an emotional dimension is to identify idioms or behavior in the description of the characters that cannot be explained in any other way.

A case in point is 1 Sam 18:1–4. The text states that the "self" or "life" (*nepes*) of Jonathan was "bound" to the "self" or "life" of David; that Jonathan "loved" David "as himself"; that Jonathan and David cut a covenant "when" or "because he loved him as himself"; and that Jonathan removed his garment and gave it to David, along with his weapons and other personal items. The word *rēa'* with the meaning "friend"—as well as other terms for "friend"—are not used of Jonathan and/or David here or elsewhere in the David-Jonathan narratives, nor are they to be found in 2 Sam 1:19–27, David's Lament over Saul and Jonathan. Nonetheless, there is reason to describe 1 Sam 18:1–4 as a text narrating the beginning of a friendship, albeit one that is formalized through the idiom of treaty-making. Although it might seem at first blush that loving someone else as oneself conveys emotional content, this cannot be assumed, given that the idiom is used in treaty settings to communicate loyalty and 1 Sam 18:1–4 is manifestly a treaty setting, as indicated by the mention of Jonathan and David cutting a covenant. As I have mentioned, Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, requires his vassals to swear that they will love Ashurbanipal, his son and heir, as they do themselves. In other words, the vassals bind themselves by oath to be loyal to their overlord's son when he comes to the throne.



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Given such parallels, it would be difficult to argue convincingly that the idiom “to love *x* as oneself” is necessarily intended to communicate anything about anyone’s emotional state. But such is not the case with the statement that the “self” or “life” (*nepeš*) of Jonathan was “bound” to the “self” or “life” of David. As I have pointed out, this idiom occurs only one other time in the Hebrew Bible and not in the setting of a treaty. In Gen 44:30–31, it is used to describe the relationship of Jacob to his youngest son Benjamin, whom he is said to love in Gen 44:20. In contrast to the idiom to love someone as oneself, the binding of selves or lives appears to have unambiguous emotional resonance. In Gen 44:30–31, it conveys the love of a father for a favorite son, a love so intense that the son’s demise would result in the death of the father. A similarly intense emotional resonance is therefore possible for the idiom when it occurs in 1 Sam 18:1, suggesting the potential for a profound emotional bond between male friends, a phenomenon that is also evidenced by 1 Sam 20:41, with its reciprocal ritual acts of affection between David and Jonathan. An emotional resonance is also evident in texts such as Deut 13:7–12; Prov 18:24, and Sir 37:2 (B), which suggest the intimacy of the exceptional friend, who is described as a friend who is “as yourself” or a friend “who clings more closely than a brother.” Furthermore, Sir 37:2 (B) characterizes the transformation of the friend “who is as yourself” into an enemy as a cause of grief or as a judgment “approaching death,” suggesting a significant emotional component to the relationship.

Evidence suggests that at least some biblical friendships have been formalized by a treaty. Such formalization is indicated by the presence of distinct treaty language (e.g., idioms such as “to cut” or “to violate a covenant” [*kārat/hillēl bērit*], or “to love *x* as oneself”) in combination with clear evidence of a friendship (e.g., a voluntary association characterized by some degree of emotional engagement). Friendships formalized by a treaty include the friendship of the psalmist and his friend who is described as “a man like me” and “my gentle intimate” (*’allūpī ūmēyuddā’ī*), with whom the complainant made “sweet fellowship,” but who is also said to have “violated his covenant” (Ps 55:14, 21). Here, distinct friendship terminology and an idiom suggesting personal intimacy are employed in combination with an unambiguous treaty idiom. A second example of friendship formalized by treaty is Jonathan and David’s friendship as narrated in 1 Sam 18:1–4, with demonstrable emotional engagement indicated by the binding of selves or lives and the treaty indicated by the use of the idiom “to love *x* as oneself” and the mention of Jonathan and David cutting a covenant. Yet another example from the David story is 1 Sam 20:41, the narrative in which David bows three times to Jonathan before “each kissed the other and they wept together.” Here, David’s bowing indicates the subordination of a vassal, while reciprocal ritual acts of kissing and weeping suggest both emotional engagement and behavioral parity enacted ritually. Second Samuel 1:26 also likely bears witness to a friendship formalized through a covenant, in this case a treaty of equals, as suggested by David’s use of the term “brother” for Jonathan. I believe this text suggests a strong emotional bond between the men, likely with homoerotic overtones, as indicated by the comparison of Jonathan’s love to the love of women.

How common are friendships formalized by a treaty in biblical texts? Unhappily, there is no way to know. I have identified several such friendships on the basis of the presence of both unmistakable treaty idioms and strong indicators of a friendship in the texts describing them. It is possible, however, that biblical texts assume that the formalization of friendships is a broader phenomenon even though treaty idioms are not always present in depictions of friendships. As I have discussed, the purpose of formalizing a friendship through covenanting may have been to reassure each party that his expectations would be met, given the severity of typical curses directed at treaty violators.

How do women’s friendships compare with those of men? Our main sources representing female friendship are the book of Ruth and the story of Jephthah’s daughter and her friends (Judg 11:37–38). As with narrative portrayals of particular male friendships (e.g., that of Jonathan and David), the technical terminology of friendship familiar from psalms of individual complaint, wisdom texts, and prophetic sources is mainly absent from prose representations of women’s friendships. Nonetheless, narratives of women’s friendships emphasize characteristics of biblical friendship seen in other texts concerned with the friendship of men (e.g., friendship as a voluntary association, mutual feelings of affection, loyalty, behavioral parity). Like male friendships, the friendship between Naomi and Ruth is portrayed as a voluntary association. There is evidence in the Ruth story of an emotional bond shared by both parties to the friendship (e.g., Ruth 1:14 in tandem with 3:1). Although Ruth and Naomi are not said explicitly to pay back that which is good (*tōbâ*) for good treatment received, the two certainly seek one another’s welfare and reciprocate generous treatment, thereby manifesting behavioral parity as male friends are expected to do according to other biblical sources. Jephthah’s daughter’s friends are loyal and remain with her at the time of her calamity, accompanying her on her journey before her death. They appear to play the role of comforter for her, joining in her



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mourning—they weep with her according to Judg 11:37—just as male friends would be expected to do for their friend at a time of personal catastrophe, illness, or the death of a close family member (e.g., Job 2:11–13; Ps 35:13–14). Not unlike some male friends, Jephthah’s daughter and her friends appear to be peers in every respect; as with other friendships between men, Ruth and Naomi’s friendship is characterized by some formal differences (in this case, generation and status [mother-in-law/daughter-in-law]). Although friendship between women is not well represented in biblical materials, the stories of Ruth and Naomi and Jephthah’s daughter and her companions suggest implicitly a set of norms for friendship that are not dissimilar to those we can reconstruct for male friends according to a wide range of biblical sources. One difference, however, between the representation of women’s friendships and men’s friendships is a lack of evidence for formalization in women’s friendships. From my perspective, this is hardly surprising, given that women are not portrayed in biblical texts as treaty partners.

One combination of friends that is not attested in biblical representations of friendship is friendship between men and women. This may be because the relationships of women and men, with the exception of those between female and male family members, are most often cast in sexual, or at least erotic, terms. On the infrequent occasions when friendship terminology is used in contexts describing the erotic or sexual relations of women and men, as in the Song of Songs, it appears to function, like the familial terminology in that text, to enrich the poet’s rhetoric metaphorically, adding yet another axis of emotional intimacy to the portrait of the relationship of the male and female lover, as I argued in the Introduction. I believe that the same is true of texts such as Jer 3:4, in which Yhwh is cast as Israel’s husband and addressed by Israel as both “my father” and “the friend [*’allûp*] of my youth.” In both examples, the poet draws upon the rhetoric of friendship and of familial relations in order to create a more emotionally complex relationship between male and female lovers or husband and wife. But these texts tell us nothing about constructions of friendship or familial relations in themselves. Just as familial relationships are routinely represented as nonsexual and nonerotic, so are friendships, and this may explain why friendships between women and men are unattested in biblical texts. There may be exceptions to the nonerotic, nonsexual pattern of representing friendships (e.g., 2 Sam 1:26), but these do not invalidate the pattern itself.

Neither the technical vocabulary of friendship nor its representation in different types of biblical literature suggests that friends need be peers in all respects. Various texts suggest in fact that inequality of wealth, social status, life stage, treaty status, or other personal characteristics does not preclude the establishment of a friendship. The wealthy may have friends who are not well-to-do (Prov 19:4, by implication); friends may differ with respect to social status (Ruth and Naomi, Jonadab and Amnon), treaty status (David and Jonathan), or life stage (Naomi and Ruth). In some cases, friends might be equals in most or all respects (e.g., Jephthah’s daughter and her friends; the psalmist and his friend in Ps 55:14–15, 21; Job and his three comforters); in other instances, friends are peers in some respects but unequal in others (David and Jonathan); and some friends might be equal in few respects (Naomi and Ruth are both widows, but Naomi remains Ruth’s mother-in-law and is a generation older than Ruth). Nonetheless, all biblical friendships evidently share the assumption of behavioral parity, whether this is suggested implicitly or stated explicitly. Whatever the differences between friends, all friends must reciprocate that which is good (*tôbbâ*) to their friends through various manifestations of loyalty. Like friends, fictive friends are not necessarily peers in most or all respects. The “friend of the king” is likely not the king’s equal in any way but possibly life stage, just as the vassal is mainly not a peer of his suzerain, even though he might be called his suzerain’s friend (Isa 41:8; EA 288). But as with friends who are unequal, suzerains and vassals are expected to treat one another appropriately, demonstrating loyalty and honoring their treaty partners (see, e.g., Exod 20:6 par. Deut 5:10; 1 Sam 2:30; and 2 Sam 19:6–8 for the suzerain’s obligations).

What does the diachronic dimension add to our portrait of biblical friendship? Comparison of friendship in earlier materials with friendship in Ben Sira allows for the development of a diachronic perspective. We see earlier biblical ideas reproduced without significant change (e.g., regarding the expectation of behavioral parity or friends sharing an implicit common classification with family members) as well as developed and extended (e.g., regarding gradations of friendship). Rhetoric familiar from earlier texts is frequently employed and sometimes elaborated. We also see new ideas that seemingly appear for the first time in biblical materials, some possibly of Greek origin (e.g., the “good friend” as fighting friend), as well as vocabulary and idioms absent from earlier biblical texts (“good friend,” “true friend”). Some earlier ideas make no appearance in Ben Sira (e.g., women’s friendship, friendship formalized by treaty), and some earlier vocabulary and idioms are absent (e.g., “to pay back that which is evil [instead of what is good]”). Although it is possible to identify differences between Ben Sira’s ideas about friendship and his vocabulary and idioms of friendship on the one hand and the ideas, vocabulary, and idioms of earlier biblical texts



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on the other, it is often difficult or impossible to determine instances in which Ben Sira himself is innovating and instances in which he is not. In some cases, he may simply be reproducing ideas, vocabulary, or idioms that were current in his early-second-century BCE Palestinian environment but not current earlier, or avoiding earlier ideas, vocabulary, or idioms because they are not in use in his own time and place. That he uses the word *ḥābēr* of the friend in 37:6 (B, D) is likely not his innovation, given the similar usage in Eccl 4:10, another biblical text of Hellenistic date. In contrast, Ben Sira's avoidance of the earlier biblical idiom "to pay back that which is evil [instead of what is good]," whatever its motivation, and his use of the novel expression "good friend" may well be his innovations, though it is difficult to determine this in any convincing way. Although we cannot be certain when Ben Sira is innovating and when he mirrors vocabulary, idioms, and ideas of his context, embracing a comparative perspective allows us to form an impression of a number of the ways in which the ideas, idioms, and vocabulary of biblical friendship developed in the late first millennium BCE.

Biblical friends are distinct social actors enjoying a special, even privileged, status. Although they are often compared to relatives explicitly or implicitly, sharing many of the same expectations (e.g., loyalty, behavioral parity, mutual affection), and though friends, like relatives, might be more emotionally intimate with one another or less so, the relationship of two friends differs fundamentally from that of two family members related by blood in that it is voluntary and more easily terminated. In addition, friends do not share a number of the obligations incumbent upon certain relatives (e.g., the role of Levir or redeemer). The importance of friendship in the Hebrew Bible, something seldom acknowledged by biblical scholars, comes into relief not only from the commonly attested comparison and shared classification of friends with family members, but also when we consider how friendship is deployed fictively to characterize treaty relationships that are entirely political. Just as two kings in a treaty might describe themselves as fictive kin (e.g., "brother," "father," "son"), underscoring by so doing the central importance of familial relations in the world of the biblical text, they might also refer to one another as "friend," suggesting the significance of friendship as a social phenomenon. That friends are compared to family members but rarely if ever cast as fictive kin themselves also highlights the distinct place of friendship in biblical society, as does the phenomenon of relatives as friends. At the same time, however, biblical texts suggest that friendship, though it is important, ranks below familial relations, communicating this through the consistent pattern of comparing friends to family members but never likening relatives to friends. Thus, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that friendship matters more to the authors of the Hebrew Bible than is typically acknowledged by specialists, but that the Hebrew Bible's paradigmatic social relationships are familial.

What does the Hebrew Bible's representation of friendship contribute to the contemporary, incipient, cross-disciplinary theorization of friendship? It constitutes yet another data set to consider, not only enriching our understanding of the representation of social relationships in antiquity, an area of research that has been overly focused on Greco-Roman evidence up to the present, but also providing additional ancient material to those who study friendship cross-culturally from the perspective of a variety of disciplines. Contemporary, cross-disciplinary attempts to theorize friendship often begin with Aristotle or cite him early on, as if Aristotle's views were somehow definitive for antiquity. An example of this is Ethan J. Leib's *Friend v. Friend: The Transformation of Friendship and What the Law Has to Do with It*. Yet such work would be considerably enriched if it took other ancient sources such as the Hebrew Bible into account as well, given that biblical perspectives and Aristotle's views differ in a number of respects (e.g., what characterizes the preeminent form of friendship [typically loyalty and intimacy in biblical texts versus shared virtue or excellence (*aretē*) according to Aristotle]). For Leib in particular, biblical friendships formalized by treaty and, presumably, subject to treaty sanctions would have provided a very interesting adumbration of or even a model for his own argument that contemporary U.S. law ought to recognize friendship formally and, along with legal institutions and public policy, "be oriented toward promoting and facilitating friendships." As Leib himself acknowledges, there is nothing quite like this in Aristotle.<sup>13</sup>

Examples of how biblical representations of friendship could contribute to contemporary, cross-cultural theorizing of friendship from the perspective of a single discipline also abound. Consideration of the biblical evidence might have given pause to social scientists such as Steven M. Graham and Margaret S. Clark, who acknowledge "cross-cultural differences in friendship" but nonetheless theorize that "friends are expected to be mutually responsive to one another's welfare by providing help" although "such responsiveness ought to be given voluntarily and it should occur on a noncontingent rather than a tit-for-tat basis." This is certainly not the assumption of a text such as Ps 35:12–14, where the sufferer castigates friends who did not come to his aid in time of need, although he had been there for them when they were sick, as I have discussed in detail. Others, such as Bettina Beer, have also



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sought to theorize friendship cross-culturally from the perspective of a single discipline, arguing that it is an “informal social relationship.” Once again, consideration of the biblical evidence calls such a generalization into question, given the association of friendship with covenant-making in at least some instances.

Much more could be said about how biblical data might contribute to contemporary interdisciplinary and disciplinary theorizing of friendship. As others seek to understand friendship cross-culturally, I urge them to engage with the rich materials of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>16</sup>

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#### FRIENDSHIP: *FOREVER FRIENDS*

Amidst national unrest and personal tragedy, Ruth and Naomi developed a deep, lasting friendship that embodied God’s love. The Hebrew word *chesed* means lovingkindness and describes a relationship bound together by love, loyalty, and commitment. Naomi prayed for God’s *chesed* toward her devoted daughter-in-law (Ruth 1:8). Naomi praised God for His *chesed* (Ruth 2:20), and Boaz praised Ruth for her *chesed* (Ruth 3:10).

Friendships that last are built on *chesed*—unconditional love, undying loyalty, and unending commitment. Other examples of devoted friendships are embodied by David and Jonathan in the Old Testament (1 Sam. 18:1–3) and Elizabeth and Mary in the New Testament (Luke 1:39–56). **Christian women are called to build lasting friendships that will endure throughout life and extend into eternity.** Ruth, whose name means “friendship,” became Naomi’s *forever friend* (Ruth 1:16, 17).

See also notes on Commitment (Matt. 16); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Eph. 4; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Love (1 John 3); portraits of Naomi (Ruth 1); Ruth (Ruth 2)<sup>17</sup>

19

Friendship

18:24

***There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.***

PROVERBS 18:24

**WISDOM IS WHEN WE OUTGROW our misconceptions about how life should work, and we learn how God actually built life to work, and work well.** That takes us way beyond petty rule-keeping. Something deeper happens. God’s wisdom enters our hearts and changes us within, so that as we grow, we know intuitively what to do and what not to do, what will work and what won’t. Wisdom is skill for living when there is no obvious rule to go by. That is what the book of Proverbs is for—gospel wisdom for complicated lives.

A major area where wisdom helps us is friendship. So much is at stake in our friendships. And so much of friendship is a matter of feel. God has wisdom for us today about the nuances of real friendship. But it all begins with God himself.

God is our Friend through Christ. In fact, friendship began within God. It’s who God is—Father, Son, and Spirit in eternal, powerful interactions of love. The heart of God is friendship reaching out.

We get an insight into our own hearts from the Assyrian king Adad-Nirari II (911–891 B.C.). He looked at himself and said: “*I am royal, I am lordly, I am mighty, I am honored, I am exalted, I am glorified, I am powerful, I am all-powerful, I am brilliant, I am lion-brave, I am manly, I am supreme, I am noble.*” My guess is, he did not have many friends. Self-important people don’t. Now, God also made much of “I am” (Exodus 3:14). But what did the real “I Am” do with all his mighty being? In that passage God said, “I will be *with you*” (Exodus 3:12). That is a friend. A friend is there for *you*.

Jesus said, “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). Back in the Old Testament, it was an honor to be called “the servant of the Lord.” That privilege did not belong to just anybody. The prophets, for example, were the Lord’s servants (Jeremiah 35:15). But it is an even higher honor to be the Lord’s friend. The Bible says, “The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11).

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<sup>16</sup> Olyan, S. M. (2017). *Friendship in the Hebrew Bible* (J. J. Collins, Ed.; pp. 81–116). Yale University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible*. Thomas Nelson.



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Nobody else could get that close. But now, because of Christ, you and I have been drawn in. In that spirit, the Apostle John sent greetings from one church to another this way: “Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them” (3 John 15). God is befriending us, including us, drawing more and more people in. Friendship began in Heaven, not on earth, and is coming down to earth through the gospel today. The wisdom of Proverbs guides us into the strong friendships God is creating. God is saying to you right now, “Let’s be friends. And let’s win more friends—wisely.”

#### What Is a Friend?

Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love,  
but a faithful man who can find? (Proverbs 20:6)  
A friend loves at all times,  
and a brother is born for adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)

A faithful friend who loves at all times—**that person is rare.** “A faithful man *who can find?*” A brother is stuck with you. A brother is obligated to be some kind of safety net. That is what family is for. But a friend chooses you. When someone loves you at all times, good and bad, and they don’t have to but they choose to—that person is a friend. A true friend is rock-solid. How many people like that do you know, compared with those who smile and make promises and create expectations but do not follow through? Human nature without the power of God is shallow *and self-congratulatory*: “Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love.” But when you find a true friend, prize him. The gospel creates those rare people. The Bible says that the people of God “keep their promises even when it hurts” (Psalm 15:4, NLT) and “show themselves to be entirely trustworthy” (Titus 2:10, NLT). When God gives you a friend like that, tested and true, cherish that friend. Never let him or her go.

The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.

Doesn’t Jesus love us with that absoluteness? The Bible says, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (John 13:1). And not because we deserve it. As soon as Peter denied Jesus that third time, the Lord turned and looked at him (Luke 22:61). Peter had proclaimed his own steadfast love: “I’ll never deny you.” All the disciples did (Matthew 26:35). And they all let him down. When Peter saw the Lord looking right into his face at that moment of utter betrayal, he finally saw himself. He knew that Jesus saw his failure and still loved him, and that friendship smote his heart. The King James Version says that our risen Lord is even now “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15). He does not despise us for our weakness. He is touched. That is how a friend feels. It’s why we love John Newton’s hymn:

Could we bear from one another what He daily bears from us?  
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother loves us, though we treat Him thus.  
Though for good we render ill, He accounts us brethren still.

That is friendship. Total acceptance. Total forgiveness. A true friend knows who you really are and does not walk away. But there is more.

Iron sharpens iron  
and one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)  
Faithful are the wounds of a friend;  
profuse are the kisses of an enemy. (Proverbs 27:6)

This is also part of a true friend—not only an all-accepting constancy but also a blunt honesty. Proverbs 24:26 says, “Whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.” Real friendship is like sharpening the blade of a sword, the proverb says, because God wants every one of us to be sharp for him. By ourselves we become dull and blunted and lose our edge. Every one of us needs a friend who will not flatter us but will refine us. These proverbs are not meant to unleash reckless mouthing-off and self-appointed critics who think you really need their opinions. But these proverbs are about a true friend in your life who is making you better by respectful confrontation. The Bible says, “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24). A real friend will provoke you and challenge you. You will not agree with everything your friend says, but you will want to listen.

We all need that. Our various family backgrounds left every one of us at least a little weird. So we need an honest friend from outside the tightly knit family to round us out. Every one of us needs to go to another person and



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say, “Help me see myself. Help me get sharper for Christ.” And if no other person in your church is good enough to play that role for you, the problem is you. If you do not know anyone well enough yet to trust them at that level, are you seeking that person out?

You must pursue this because, in one sense, you do not need a friend. Biologically you do not need a friend. Financially you can thrive without a friend. And as busy as we are these days, unless we are seeking Christ, friendship will end up at the bottom of the to-do list. But you cannot become wise without a Christian friend speaking into your life. It can be painful. But the wounds of an honest friend are faithful to help you grow.

There is something more here in these two proverbs. I wonder if you see it. When iron sharpens iron, it creates friction. When a friend wounds you, it hurts. So, do you see? There is a difference between hurting someone and harming someone. There is a difference between someone being loved and someone feeling loved. Jesus loved everyone well, and some people felt hurt. They were not harmed by him. They were loved by him. But they felt hurt. So they crucified him. If we don’t understand this, then every time we feel hurt we will look for someone to blame and punish. We will make our emotional state someone else’s fault. We might spread that version of events to other people in slander. But the truth is, a friend will inevitably hurt you with words that are respectful, true, and blunt. If you will receive it, you will grow in wisdom. The Beatles were right: “I get by with a little help from my friends.”

How Can Friendship Go Wrong?

Whoever covers an offense seeks love,

but he who repeats a matter separates close friends. (Proverbs 17:9)

We disappoint our friends. We don’t want to, but we do. So there will always be offenses. The wise person covers them with forgiveness, the way God does: “Blessed is the one ... whose sin is covered” (Psalm 32:1). Why doesn’t God keep embarrassing us with our failures? Because he wants our friendship. He covers our sins through Christ. It’s what we do too, because we want our sinning friend more than we want payback. That is the mind of Christ.

Gossips do not understand that. Gossips do repeat a matter—not that they dredge it up over and over again. The word translated “repeats” means to mention the offense a second time. Just one repeat. So that person who sinned against you—did he admit it and ask your forgiveness? Then drop it. Don’t mention it even one more time. You have regained a close friend! See the word “close”? A gossip can destroy a friendship that is close and has taken years to build through hard times. But now the gossip, the nag, the finger-pointer intensifies the offense to the point of alienation. God wants us to think carefully about what we say. It doesn’t matter if what we feel like saying is factually true. Is it helpful? Is it creating a better future? What matters is the impact our words will have. We are constantly creating the conditions we will be stuck with five minutes from now. So how do we create the future we want? We keep remembering that all our sins have been forgiven by God and forgotten by him forever. He is creating those new conditions where we sinners can *live* again. Okay. Now we know how to treat each other.

Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense,

but a man of understanding remains silent. (Proverbs 11:12)

The scenario here is one person in a power position, someone who is in the right, looking down on someone else, making him feel small. But a wise man knows that it is not enough to be right. Even if we are right, God wants us to humble ourselves with restraint. Don’t answer every insult. Silence can preserve a friendship, a partnership, a marriage, a church.

Let your foot be seldom in your neighbor’s house,

lest he have his fill of you and hate you. (Proverbs 25:17)

Friends need time together, and friends need time *not* together. As Kenny Rogers sang, “You gotta know when to hold ‘em and know when to fold ‘em.” In Heaven there will be a gazillion people, every one of them will like you, and they will never get tired of you. But until we are there, we are all weak enough that it is wise to ask ourselves when enough is enough. Benjamin Franklin said, “Guests, like fish, stink after three days.” My dad understood that. Whenever he came to us for a visit, it always seemed too short. When he left, we wanted more. It added eagerness to our friendship.

A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city,

and quarreling is like the bars of a castle. (Proverbs 18:19)

The beginning of strife is like letting out water,

so quit before the quarrel breaks out. (Proverbs 17:14)



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Drive out a scoffer, and strife will go out,  
and quarreling and abuse will cease. (Proverbs 22:10)

It is so hard to stop a fight once it starts. No one ends up happy and satisfied. Everyone feels injured and misunderstood. And then what do we do? Typically, we retreat into the castles of our minds: “Quarreling is like the bars of a castle.” We bolt the door so tightly, only God can get through. How do we avoid going into that dark and lonely place? When the Christians in Corinth were suing each other, Paul got right to the point: “Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7). If we are willing to lose the argument, we might win the friend.

Sadly, sometimes this doesn’t work. Some people are impossible. For some people, facts don’t matter, truth doesn’t matter, fairness doesn’t matter, finding a win-win doesn’t matter. They are unsatisfiable. What then? “Drive out a scoffer.” That makes a church safe for sinners who do want to grow and change.

But who is a “scoffer”? The Bible says, “Scoffer is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride” (Proverbs 21:24). A scoffer is above everybody else—or so he thinks. He will not listen and fit in. So, what can you do when the scoffer is too superior to recognize common ground? Drive him out—and everyone else will breathe a sigh of relief. This is what elders are responsible to do in a church. The Bible says to church elders, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him” (Titus 3:10). There comes a definite point when the troublemaker is shown the door. And if the elders chicken out, they then share in the sin and the destruction.

#### How Can Friendship Be Revived?

Do not say, “I will repay evil”;  
wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you. (Proverbs 20:22)

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat,  
and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,  
for you will heap burning coals on his head,  
and the LORD will reward you. (Proverbs 25:21, 22)

God has brought some of us into the study of the book of Proverbs just for this. There is so much injury today, so much sin, so much brokenness. Here is what God wants you to know: The best revenge is love. Whoever is mad at you—if you will relieve the pangs of his hunger, you will increase the pangs of his conscience. You might bring him to repentance. You might save his very soul. Isn’t that reward enough? Paul quotes this proverb in Romans 12:20. He makes the point clear: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). Your hateful enemy expects you to be hateful in return. It’s how the whole world works. But love will surprise that person the way Jesus keeps on surprising us. We treat him poorly, but he keeps on treating us like royalty, and it melts our hearts. Maybe you’ve seen the 1951 sci-fi movie *The Thing from Another World*. One of the members of an Arctic research team betrays all his comrades and nearly gets them killed. But when the report is filed by radio back to headquarters, the man speaking tells the story as if the offender had been the hero. All the other team members standing around, listening in, are saying, “Way to go.”

When Christ calls in his report on your life, he does not mention a single one of your betrayals. He absorbed them all into himself at the cross. What he says about you is his own heroism. He gives it to you freely. He loves us, his enemies, to make us his friends. If your former friend, now your enemy, can be won back, the love of Christ is the only way. His love is the only power in the universe that can change a human heart.

#### Who Is Our Truest Friend Always?

A man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

You might have many pseudo-friends who will let you down, even when everything is on the line. But you can also have one Super-Friend who sticks closer than a brother. When the Apostle Paul was put on trial before Caesar, all his friends hightailed it. But it was okay with Paul. He was not even angry. Why? “The Lord stood by me and



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strengthened me” (2 Timothy 4:17). Proverbs 18:24 is saying, real friends are not found in quantity but in quality. And no one offers us higher quality friendship than Jesus Christ.

When he laid down his life for his friends at the cross, he was forsaken, though he was loyal, so that we would never be forsaken, though we are disloyal. He was the offended brother, but he opened the castle of his heart. We put our feet frequently in his house, but he never wishes we would go away.

C. S. Lewis, in his essay on friendship, says that a new friendship starts out like this: “What? You too? I thought I was the only one.” Friends do not need to be alike. They just discover how much they have in common. Guess what you have in common with Christ? *Everything you care about the most*. He cares about you. He cares about your sin. He cares about your future. He thinks about you. He understands you. He loves you. You are not alone. He is here. You can receive him now.

Will you let the eternal friendship begin for you today?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ortlund, R. C., Jr. (2012). [\*Preaching the Word: Proverbs—Wisdom that Works\*](#) (R. K. Hughes, Ed.; pp. 165–172). Crossway.



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