

The Jersey Effect

True Friendship Frankton – 10/12/14

Scripture: 1 Sam 20.35-42 Jonathon and David part ways, but remain close friends

Proposition: Lives are perfected in Relationship with others.

Remember, we are in a series that's the reason for your wearing your jerseys today, and for the next several weeks. The series is titled: The Jersey Effect, and it comes from a book of the same name by Hunter Smith. [SLIDE] Hunter was the Indianapolis Colts punter during the 2006-7 NFL season, the one when the Colts won the Super Bowl. Yes, Hunter the punter. Hunter is a devout Christian and even though he's retired now, he still lives in Zionsville. He wrote his book by inviting several players and coaches that he knew were Christian to write to him and tell him the effect wearing a pro football jersey had on their lives. Tony Dungy, Tarik Glenn, and Ben Utecht are some of those men whose stories are in the book. Hunter's purpose for writing the book was to write about the effect that wearing the jersey can have on a pro athlete, and also about the impact a pro player can have because of his jersey. You might be surprised to find out about the struggles all of these men had, even though they were successful professional athletes, adored by so many people. We're looking at their struggles and how we struggle with the same things, and how, with God's help, we can overcome those struggles.

Clyde Christensen [SLIDE] was not a player for the Colts during their Super Bowl winning year – he was the wide receiver's coach. He has also been the Offensive coordinator and is currently the quarterback coach. He was coaching at Clemson University when his best friend in the world, Tony Dungy, hired him to come to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and be one of Tony's assistant coaches. They had met many years earlier at a camp for underprivileged kids in South Carolina and had molded a great friendship ever since. Hunter wrote about one particular event that characterized Clyde Christensen for him. The Colts were playing the Atlanta Falcons in an exhibition game before the 2005 season and they were playing it in Tokyo, Japan – a place neither of them had been before. The day before the game, a day when Hunter usually didn't do much so he could rest that punting leg of his, Clyde talked him into taking a walk through Tokyo and seeing the sights. It was hot and they walked all day talking about everything under the sun. That was Clyde. His job was important, but life came first.

So let's talk about Clyde Christensen and his relationship with Coach Dungy. Back about ten years before that Super Bowl win, Tony and Clyde started reading the Bible together. They would read individually and then get together to talk about what that day's passage said to them. They wanted to be on the same page in the bible, in their life, and on the field. And they started talking walks together (that's probably where Clyde's walk with Hunter germinated). In every city before every game, they walked together. Yes, they would talk about the game plan for the upcoming game, but they talked about much more than that. They talked about life and faith. They talked about being husbands and dads in a profession that takes so much time away from the family. During one of the walks, they came up with the idea of All Pro Dad – a program that strengthens families and has impacted millions of people across the country. They spent a lot of time together, and that's one of the requirements of building a great relationship – spending quality time together.

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Lives are perfected in relationship with others. And [SLIDE] relationship is the key to influence. It's about how you use the jersey you wear.

So, Coach Dungy and Clyde had been friends for many years before the Super Bowl. Their wives were good friends. Their kids were good friends. Clyde's kids were a little older than Tony's, so he would warn Tony about what phase was coming up in child rearing. Clyde's remembrance of the Super Bowl starts at the end of the game. After the game was over and the Colts had won, the Lombardi trophy was given to the Colts as a sign of their victory. Clyde remembers watching Tony Dungy lift up that trophy - and he was so happy for his long-time, very close friend. They had been through a lot together. Together, they had buried Tony's parents. Together, they had buried Tony's son. Together they had been fired from Tampa Bay and forced to restart in Indianapolis. And now together, they had won the Super Bowl.

There was no greater pleasure for Clyde that evening in a rain soaked Miami stadium than to see his best friend hoist the Lombardi trophy. Not because of the trophy itself, but because his best friend was holding it. After all they had been through, Clyde felt great that Tony had finally accomplished what he set out to do. And they had been through a lot together: as I said earlier Tony's parents aging, getting sick and passing, Tony's son James dying unexpectedly about 14 months previously, losing their jobs at an organization they loved (Tampa Bay), all the playoff losses with the Colts they endured together, all the losses to New England they had lived through, all the criticism about Tony's coaching style and how it was never going to win the big one. Now that was all in the past. That moment of watching Tony hold the trophy left Clyde all choked up. Clyde wrote that he knew what Tony was thinking of - at least part of the time he held the trophy - his son James and how Tony wished he were here.

Clyde wrote that he would always remember Tony holding that trophy. But he would also remember another thing from that night. After the on-field celebration came the locker-room celebration. Then Tony and Clyde went back to the hotel before the official Super Bowl winners' party. They met with their families and they had devotions. They talked about the journey and all the moves God made in their lives. They thanked God for all the rough spots that had brought them there. They knew life wasn't about wins and losses on a football field. It is always bigger than that. It is about the journey about the highs and the lows. It's about understanding that even though your situation changes, God doesn't change. His faithfulness never changes. And that's true whether you are burying a son or holding a Lombardi trophy.

After hearing these few snippets from the book, I hope you can get some sense of just how deep a friendship Clyde Christensen and Tony Dungy have. I think it may be a friendship of Biblical proportion, just as Jonathon and David's friendship was in 1 Samuel. Jonathon was the oldest son of King Saul and David was the youngest son of Jesse the shepherd. Both men were soldiers. You know David's acts as soldier - he was a great military leader and a great infantry soldier in his own right. Meanwhile, as the king's son, Jonathon was in the army, and he was good at what he did. At one point, Jonathon snuck into the camp of the Philistine army with only his armor bearer in tow and killed 20 Philistine soldiers. The resulting chaos spread throughout the camp and soon the whole Philistine army was headlong in flight. But Jonathon is best known as being David's closest friend - much like Clyde Christensen and Tony Dungy.

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These two spent years in the palace together as they matured. They first met when David killed Goliath and soon was brought back to the palace to play the lyre for Saul. Later, scripture says that: [SLIDE] *And Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself.* [18.3] Their friendship was solid even after Saul suggested that David would take his throne – a throne that would have rightly been Jonathon’s. Jonathon interceded for David on numerous occasions and once even risked his life for him. Today’s passage of scripture recalls one of the last meetings between these two great friends. David was sure Saul was trying to kill him; Jonathon didn’t think so. They concocted a scheme where David would miss a festival meal at Saul’s table. Jonathon would give a false reason for David’s absence, and the reaction of Saul would tell Jonathon whether or not Saul was out for David’s blood. David missed the meal, Jonathon gave the made-up reason and Saul threw a fit confirming to Jonathon that Saul wanted David dead. Our scripture this morning is of their parting that day. Here’s what it says: [SLIDE] *Both of them were in tears as they embraced each other and said good-bye, especially David.* [20.41] True friendship to the very end. In fact, after Jonathon was killed in battle, David rescued his body to be brought back and buried in Israel.

True friends: Jonathon and David. True friends: Clyde Christensen and Tony Dungy. True friends: Hunter Smith and John Hefton. John grew up in Texas in the same area that Hunter did. One of Hunter’s first memories of John was when John’s father passed away when John was ten – too young an age to lose a dad. They weren’t really friends yet, but Hunter’s mom went to see John’s mom and express her condolences. John was sitting on the couch in the living room and was in as much pain as any ten year old would be who just lost his dad. Hunter didn’t say much to him, but as they were leaving, Hunter’s mom told him to go say something to John. There sat John on the couch with his eyes closed as if he were just trying to survive. Hunter walked up and hugged John and whispered, “Bye.” Little did he know then that they would form a lasting friendship even vowing to marry sisters so they could be brothers-in-law. (They didn’t marry sisters, but they married girls who were as close as sisters and the four have still remained close today.)

Hunter describes these close friendships we have talked about today as [SLIDE] sacred companionships. There not just friendships. Everyone has friends: work friends, school friends, church friends, etc. But sacred companionship goes deeper. It’s iron sharpening iron, spiritual accountability and refinement. It’s challenging one another to be more Christ-centered in our lives. It’s more than thinking of one another as important. Friends are important. Sacred companionship is about friendships, marriages, dating relationships and so on, where people see value in one another because Christ died for them. There’s a higher purpose that goes far beyond importance. There’s a spiritual calling. When two people are for each other, they share the heart to see each other experience a full life rich in the things that God would measure as riches.

In John 15, Jesus said after calling the disciples his friends, said this: [SLIDE] *You didn’t choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit,* [SLIDE] *so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.* [15.16] You can break that verse down into three pieces. [SLIDE] Number one: choose a friend based on your ability to impact that person (I chose you.) [SLIDE] Number two: choose a friend with a goal to make them more successful (more fruitful in Jesus’ words). [SLIDE] And Number three: choose a friend with the intention to make a lifelong impact (lasting fruit).

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You see, there was an interesting dynamic Jesus had in his friendships. He had relationships with the multitudes and the masses. He fed thousands. He sent out the seventy-two and so on. Then he had his smaller group of close friends, his twelve apostles. Then he had his three lieutenants: Peter, James, and John. And even smaller than that: the one whom Jesus loved: John. Perhaps John was his earthly sacred companion. He still had other friends, but if he would have had to choose one, it would have been John. This is Jesus' pattern of relationships. And it proves Clyde's point that we need people in our lives who are close to us. Jonathon and David had each other. Tony and Clyde had each other. Hunter and John had each other. I hope you have someone in your life like these folks. And I hope you are that someone in another person's life.