

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, February 24, 2019**  
**Rev. Dr. David Thompson**

**Do people come into our lives for a reason?**

Text: “The evil you planned to do to me has by God’s design been turned to good, that He might bring about the deliverance of numerous people.” Genesis 50: 15-21

A pastor was locked out of her car. She had been given a coat hanger by her friend to break in, but she did not know how.

She bowed her head and asked God to send her help. Within five minutes a beat-up old motorcycle pulled up with a dirty, greasy, bearded man, who was wearing an old biker skull cap on his head.

The pastor thought to herself, “God, this is who you sent to help me?” But she said to herself, “I know God sends people into our lives for a reason”, and so she decided to be thankful anyway.

The man dismounted and asked if he could help.

She said “Yes, my daughter is very sick. I stopped to get some medication and I locked my keys in the car. I need to get home to her. Please can you use this hanger to unlock my car?”

He said “Sure!”

He walked over to the car and in less than a minute the car was open.

The pastor hugged the man and through her tears she said “Thank-you so much!! You are a very nice man!”

The man replied, “Lady, I am not a nice man. I just got out of prison today. I was in prison for car theft and have only been out for about an hour.” The pastor hugged him again and then cried out aloud “Oh thank-you God! You sent me a professional!”

Perhaps you have lost a spouse through separation, or divorce or death and you are really at a loss to understand why. Did they come into your life for a reason? Could it be that the relationship ended for a reason, perhaps because the first reason was over? If so, is this a process possibly connected to divine providence?

If you are a person of faith and we lose a friendship of someone we really loved, we want answers. I have had a wonderful friendship come suddenly to an end. And I had a hard time dealing with it because it was very painful. But if I could see that perhaps that person was someone that God sent into my life for a purpose, then I could deal with it better, especially when it ended.

There is a very popular quote circulated on the internet that says that people come into our lives for a reason, for a season or a lifetime.

Alvin Romer writes: “When someone is in your life for a reason, they have come to assist you with a difficulty, to provide guidance or support or to help you physically emotionally or spiritually. They may seem like a Godsend and they are. Then without any wrongdoing on your part, or at an inconvenient time, this person will say or do something to bring the relationship to an end. Sometimes they will die or fade into anonymity. What we must realize is that their work is done.”

One of the greatest stories ever told in sacred literature is the story of Joseph.

Joseph’s brothers resented him because he was gifted, he was conceited, and he was his father’s favorite. That combination led to a decision of his brothers to kill him and blame the death on a wild animal. His brother Reuben intervened and asked them to sell him to slave traders who took him to Egypt. In Egypt Joseph eventually rose to second in command under the Pharaoh.

In that position Joseph developed a strategy to defend against famine. He created large store houses and stored corn for 7 years of plentiful harvests. Then the famine came and then everyone who had not prepared for the famine became dependent upon the large store houses in Egypt. including Joseph's brothers and his father in Canaan.

Hearing there was corn in Egypt, they came to buy corn and encountered Joseph, but failed to recognize him. When he revealed himself to them, they expected no mercy. But Joseph was a great spirit and forgave his brothers saying that the evil they had planned for him, God had turned for their good and the good of numerous people.

In other words, Joseph had come into their lives for a reason- actually to save their lives and the lives of countless others. Let's note too that Joseph's brothers were in his life for a reason. He would never have got to Egypt without them and the Middle East would never have been saved from a deadly famine.

Romer also argues that people come into our lives for **a season**.

"They may only be there for a short period of time based on premeditated agendas; they may have motives not condoned by you, or because your turn has come to share with them in growing or learning new initiatives for the future. They may introduce you to new routines and techniques that you have never experienced. But they usually give you an unbelievable amount of joy. Believe it, it is real. But only for a season...they move on. Why does this happen?"

This situation usually deals with those that are going through changes, can't cope with certain situations that cause them to step outside of comfort zones, or are unwilling to take chances. Other seasonal folk readily recognize their own kind and will not hesitate to cut you loose.

Joseph had seasonal people in his life. His slave master Potiphar had a wife who began a relationship with Joseph, most probably as a friend. But then one thing led to another and she wanted more than just a friendship and when he could not give her a sexual relationship, she cut him loose with a vengeance. She falsely accused him and off to jail Joseph went.

In jail Joseph came across another seasonal friend, the butler to the Pharaoh. The friendship grew around Joseph's ability to interpret dreams and the Butler promised to remember Joseph before Pharaoh. But when his jail term was over and the butler was reinstated, the butler forgot Joseph. But when the Pharaoh had dreams that needed interpretation the butler thought of Joseph and used him when he needed him. He was a seasonal friend.

Have you ever had someone who needed your skill sets or your talents and then when they had got what they wanted out of you, cut you loose or walked out of your life? These are the seasonal folks, but even they are in our lives for a reason. For Joseph would not have got to the Pharaoh without the butler's testimony.

Romer's third category is **friends for life**.

He says that life time friendships are harder to recognize for the moment but with time they can be the best choice you can make. Life time friends teach us life time lessons, things we need to build on in order to have a solid emotional foundation. They accept you for who you are, do not prematurely judge you, do not have inhibitions about taking chances to better the relationship, and surely feel that compatibility is something assessed as we go, not at the spur of the moment. They don't adhere to conditions and will be there for you at the zero hour.

As Romer says:

"There has got to be something that you can learn from this type of person. Our job is to accept the lesson, love the person and put what you have learned to use in all other relationships and areas of your life. This is the type of love God has for us. He says that we need to thank all the people we have met in our life time who have lent us their ears, allowed us to belong and gave us love and let us love them back."

In the Bible one of the best examples of a friendship like this is the relationship between David and Jonathan. At the risk of his life Jonathan is faithful to David at the zero hour. He truly loved David and sacrificed his position as heir apparent to the throne. He died as David's best friend and the keeper of David's secrets.

David did not forget Jonathan but raised up Jonathan's only relative from poverty to prominence after Jonathan's death. David knew that Jonathan was a friend for life!

I have been blessed to have friends for life. For me they make the world go around. They are very precious indeed! Do you have friends like this? If so, thank God for them! They are the spice of life!

People often say that a true friend for life is relatively rare, perhaps only 3 or 4 in a life time.

But where the problems arise in my experience is this: We mistake a friend for a reason or a friend for a season, for a friend for life. It can happen in a marriage. That special someone we fell in love with and married and then after a few years or perhaps before that, we discover, to our dismay, that our lover is a friend for a season and no more.

Suddenly they are gone from our lives. And then, if we have thought that they were a friend for life, we can, because of our deep grief, go into victim-hood. Don't go there! That is not a destination.

When a friendship comes to an end it is a great time to look at the **spiritual** side of things.

Was this person a friend for a reason? What did we learn from them, for even our enemies can be our best teachers. Did they come into our lives to teach us where our boundaries needed to be? Did they come into our lives to steer us away from a course of action that would have been tragic in our future? What did we learn from them before they moved on?

Joseph's brothers did not look at things spiritually. Joseph was a nuisance they needed rid of. They were not into learning lessons or seeing any reason for Joseph's life. But he was there with a divine purpose for them.

But let's note Joseph's response. He was a friend for life!

He did not give up on his brothers. He did not do the victim thing but persevered wherever he was. Joseph had boundaries which he enforced with his brothers when he could, but he was also fair. He did the right thing by them and the whole Middle East. He chose to love at the zero hour!

I think that is what God is like. God loves us for LIFE!

Jesus had friends that came into his life for a reason and for a season. When it came to the zero hour, they all bailed.

Jesus did not bail but loved them to the end.

Interestingly Jesus's women friends did not bail. They were there while he died till the very last and were the first at the tomb on the day of resurrection.

I think it normal to have a friend for a reason. It is normal to have friends for a season. It is also a privilege to have or be a friend for life!

Friendships for life can give us the richest experiences of being fully alive! These friendships are about love, laughter, being there through thick and thin, staying beside a person in a situation of conflict, when all appears lost.

I often wonder what the world would be like if every person would do one act of friendship every day? What would our cities be like with random acts of kindness on every hand? What would our schools and universities be like if we made it a priority to brighten someone's day, to be a friend when no one else cares?

Pauline Burgard, known as Polly to the children, was a school bus driver. She had an eight-year-old on her bus every day. His name was Charlie and if there was trouble, he was always behind it. No matter how Polly spoke to him either gently or firmly Charlie would never say a word. He would just stare at her with his big gray eyes.

Polly found out that his father was dead and that he did not live with his mother, so she decided to cut him some slack.

She thought this boy needs a friend and so every day when she passed him by in the aisle, she would gently touch him on the shoulder to let him know that she cared. There was never a response, only the big gray eyes would stare.

At the end of that year on the bus the kids gave Polly a plaque which read: **To the best bus driver ever!** Pauline placed it on the dashboard and on top she placed a small tin heart that a little girl had given her. On the heart were the words: "I love Poly and Polly loves me".

On the next day to the last one of the year, Polly was delayed by the principal of the school. The children had all boarded the bus, but Polly noticed that the little tin heart was missing from the top of the plaque.

"Does anybody know what happened to the tin heart that was up here?" she asked.

Total silence on the bus!

Then one boy piped up and said "Charlie was the first one on the bus. I bet he took it!"

The other children all formed a chorus: " Yeah he did it, search him!"

Charlie spoke and said, "I don't know what you are talking about." Standing up he took a few pennies and a small ball out of his pockets, saying "See I don't have it."

Polly asked him to come forward. Charlie's eyes glowered. She stuck her hand into one pocket. Nothing. Then she searched the other pocket. Then she felt it- the familiar outline of the small heart. Charlie stared at her, those big grey eyes asked for no mercy. He was expecting the usual from the world he had always known.

Then Polly decided to do something that would make her a friend of this small boy for life.

She was about to pull it from his pocket when she stopped herself. A still small voice inside her seemed to whisper, "Let him Keep it!"

"It must have fallen off before I got here" she said to the kids. "I'll probably find it at the bus depot."

Charlie never said a word.

That summer Charlie moved away, and she lost contact with him.

Eventually she retired but a dozen years later she was in Kansas City when a balding man approaching middle age accosted her and said, "Are you Polly?"

She recognized the big grey eyes immediately. "Charlie?" She said.

He told her he was living in Montana and doing well. Then to her surprise he hugged her and after he had let her go, he pulled something from his pocket that he had carried everyday of his life: an old key chain with a little heart on it which said " I love Polly and Polly loves me"

And then he said; "You were the only one who kept on trying."