

Soul Friends: Judgment vs. Curiosity

2 Samuel 12:1-9

One of my favorite TV series from a few years ago was **Ted Lasso**. This is the story of an American football coach, Ted Lasso, who is unexpectedly hired to manage a struggling English Premier League soccer team, despite having no experience coaching the sport. The team's new owner, Rebecca, hires Ted as a ploy for revenge against her ex-husband, Rupert. She secretly hopes Ted's inexperience will lead the team to failure.

Instead, Ted's **unwavering kindness**, positive attitude, and focus on helping his players grow as people—rather than just winning games—win over Rebecca, the team, and the skeptical British public.

There is so much wisdom in this show about friendship and kindness. One such piece of wisdom comes from a pivotal scene when the owner's ex-husband challenges Ted to a game of darts. As Ted prepares to throw the winning dart, he shares the simple, yet profound philosophy that guides his life: https://youtu.be/i_FofLSherM

“Be curious, not judgmental.”

What a powerful reminder for us about this essential quality in **soul friends**. Most of us don't have the ability to see our actions and motivations objectively. We have our own fears, self-justifications, and experiences that prevent us from accessing the well of our inner wisdom—our soul. We need friends who are not judgmental, but who are **curious**, who can help us get curious about that inner wisdom. Soul friends are the people who help us find our way when we have lost our way.

I learned years ago under the leadership of Parker Palmer that, “When the going gets rough, **turn to wonder**. Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry. Ask yourself, 'I wonder why they feel/think this way?' or 'I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?' Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.” One of the core principles Palmer teaches is that each of us has an **inner teacher**. Yet, we need others to help us listen to that voice.

Judgment often puts up a barrier. Curiosity and wonder often build a bridge to our inner teacher. Judgment ends the conversation, while wonder opens the door to new possibilities. If we really want to be transformed and healed, we need to hold spaces of wonder to help us access the deeper wisdom of God implanted in our souls.

The Soul Friend's Parable: Nathan and David

In today's Bible story, we hear a great example of a soul friend helping King David listen to his inner teacher. King David was a man after God's own heart, a beloved king, and a hero. But somewhere along the way, he neglected his "day job" as king, took an afternoon stroll on his roof, and saw Bathsheba. In a tragic series of events, David abused his power, committed adultery, got Bathsheba pregnant, and then had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed on the battlefield to cover his sin.

No one dared to question the King's personal decisions. King David had turned out just like the other kings of the other nations, abusing his power for personal gain.

But the redemption in this story comes through a soul friend. **Nathan** was the court prophet, part of the system of checks and balances to hold the King accountable to God. The prophet was allowed to speak truth to power. But Nathan's approach was unique. It embodied the importance of friendship and connection instead of just information sharing or high moral judgments.

Let's listen to 2 Samuel 12:1-9

and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds, ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare and drink from his cup and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared that for the guest who had come to him." ⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶he shall restore the lamb fourfold because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

⁷Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your bosom and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah, and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

The way Nathan helped King David see the truth is a great example for us because he did not confront David directly. Instead, he spoke to him through a **parable**—a story about a rich man who steals a poor man’s only lamb. This allowed David to lower his defenses and become outraged by the injustice.

Nathan’s approach was profoundly **relational**. He knew David was a shepherd before becoming a king, so a story about sheep would resonate in his soul. The story did not turn the issue into a moral discussion about adultery or deception; it did not approach David as an object to be judged. Nathan brought the struggle home for David in order to help him discover the truth for himself. David already knew the laws of his faith. What he needed was someone who could **guide him back to his soul’s wisdom**.

This story reminds us of the importance of having someone or some community in our lives who can guide us on the journey of faith, especially when we find ourselves stuck or struggling. These are not people who judge us or try to put us down by telling us how to behave. Instead, they are there to help us embrace the greater truth of our lives and our true selves.

In his book, *Reaching Out*, the writer and teacher Henri Nouwen asks, “How do we know that we are not deluding ourselves... that we are not just listening to the voice of our own imagination?... We need a guide, a director, a counselor who helps us to distinguish between the voice of God and all other voices.”

One of the ways to practice wonder in our friendships and conversations is to ask **open and honest questions**: <https://youtu.be/2EbyAgvY250>

Parker Palmer gives us clear guidelines: An open honest question...

- ... is one to which the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer.
- ... assists a person to explore their concern rather than satisfying your curiosity.
- ... is simple, open and straightforward.
- ... often begins with *what, when, where, who, or how*.

I invite you today to think about how you can be that curious presence for someone else. Who are the people in your life that God has called you to love unconditionally and to journey with on the path of faith and life? Maybe you are someone in need of such a friend. Who might that person be for you?

When we choose **curiosity** over **judgment**, we choose to build a bridge rather than a wall. We choose to believe in the potential of the soul, just as Ted Lasso chose to believe in the potential of his team and his owner. We choose the way of Nathan, the way of love, and the way of God.

I invite you now to take a moment of quiet reflection. If you are comfortable, close your eyes or lower your gaze. Let us turn our attention inward, seeking the wisdom of Jesus when he commanded us in the Sermon on the Mount: “**Judge not, that you be not judged.**” (Matthew 7:1)

Take a deep breath. As you exhale, let go of the external noise of the world and the chatter of your own mind.

Think about the word “**Judge.**” Where does that impulse live in your body? Is it a tension in your jaw? A tightening in your chest? Just acknowledge it, without judging it.

Now, recall our theme: **Curiosity over Judgment.**

When you hear a person, a situation, or an idea that you immediately want to label—as wrong, as foolish, as beneath you—pause.

Instead of judgment, invite **Curiosity**.

- I wonder what their experience has been?
- I wonder what fear is driving their actions?
- I wonder what my reaction reveals about me?

Breathe in the spirit of **kindness and wonder**, the spirit that allowed Nathan to reach King David’s soul, and the spirit that guides us to the unconditional love of God.

May we always remember that the space between us is meant to be a bridge, not a barrier. May we be soul friends to one another, choosing **curiosity** so that we may see the spark of God in every human soul. Amen.