

Week 7: David's Covenant with Jonathan

Hook



Main Point: The bond of true godly friends is stronger than family.

June 8 is National Best Friends Day! Break into small groups and choose your favorite friendship in each of the following areas:

Movies

Sports

Television

Literature

Your own life

Q: Out of all these categories, which is your favorite? Why?

Q: How would you describe a godly friendship? List the qualities on the board.

RECAP: In this section of our study (weeks 5–7), David was living in Saul's palace as part of Saul's family. He had married Saul's daughter, Michal, and made a friendship covenant with Saul's son and heir, Jonathan. David also led Saul's army and played music to soothe him when he was being attacked by a harmful spirit. For the last two weeks, we have seen Saul's murderous jealousy of David grow and seen great contrasts

in character and faithfulness between Saul and David as well as between Saul and his own son, Jonathan.

This week, we'll see Saul's murderous jealousy come to a head and Jonathan's loyalty put to the test. Will he choose his friendship with David or his loyalty to his father? Even more importantly, will he choose what is right over what is most beneficial to himself and his family?

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1 Samuel 20:1–17 and re-read 1 Samuel 18:1–5 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jonathan loved David as himself; they made a covenant of friendship.

Q: Why did Saul hide his intentions to kill David from Jonathan?

Q: How did Jonathan include the Lord in his covenant with David?

Earlier in the story, Saul told Jonathan, along with all his servants, that he wanted to kill David. But Jonathan spoke privately to his father, pleading David's innocence, and Saul changed his mind (1 Samuel 19:1–7). Then a harmful spirit came upon Saul again, and he sought again to kill David. Saul even sent men to David's house to lie in wait to kill him (19:8–10). Michal knew about this plot and helped David escape (19:11–18), but apparently Jonathan didn't know that his father had gone back on his word and was seeking to kill David again. When David came to Jonathan, pleading his innocence again, Jonathan claimed that Saul did nothing without telling him, big or small (20:2). But David promised that Saul really was trying to kill him and was intentionally hiding it from Jonathan because he knew how much Jonathan loved David (20:3).

What an awful position for Jonathan to be in! But he immediately sided with David and said he would do whatever David wanted (20:4). This was not only because Jonathan loved David so much, but also because he knew David had done nothing wrong (19:1–7; 20:1). He trusted David's character and integrity above his father's. He said he would still ask his father, to make sure (20:12), but if he found out it were true, he would side with David and help him escape, even if it was dangerous for himself (20:13).

A few chapters earlier, the story tells us that Jonathan and David became very close friends immediately after David conquered Goliath, describing their relationship with beautiful imagery. "The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (18:1). "Soul" in Hebrew is *nephesh*, the life of the person. The word refers to the aspects of sentience, that which animates us and gives us life.¹ The *nephesh* isn't just the spirit; that would be *ruach*. It's the whole being of a person. It's a person's whole life, whole self.

So, Jonathan's whole self was "knit together"² with David's whole self. The perfect illustration is right there in the word "knit." Pieces of yarn are woven together. This is how David and Jonathan's relationship was. They were so close that their lives were interwoven, interconnected. Their individual yarns together formed a whole new thing, a stronger thing that was more useful together than alone. Their whole selves were so interwoven that Saul could not pull them apart.

In this original friendship covenant (18:1–5), Jonathan gave David his robe, armor, sword, bow and belt. The gifts were both personal (Jonathan’s personal armor) and practical (David could use them in battle). This was a covenant between a royal and his vassal, but it was also a deeply personal symbol of brotherhood.

When David told Jonathan that Saul was trying to kill him, Jonathan made another covenant with him (20:16). Jonathan pledged to help David escape and asked, “Do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever” (20:15). The word for steadfast love, *chesed*, is the word used of God’s love for Israel – “lovingkindness.” It is unconditional kindness that comes from covenant loyalty, whether the person “deserves” that love or not. It is undeserved mercy, kindness and grace. It’s Yahweh’s great *chesed* that keeps Him faithful to Israel even though they are unfaithful to Him.³ *Chesed* is used abundantly in many psalms, but most famously in Psalm 136, in which the refrain “His steadfast love endures forever” is repeated after every line. Jonathan asked David to show this kind of love for Jonathan’s family, and we will see David follow through on that covenant promise later (2 Samuel 9).

These passages say Jonathan loved David “as he loved his own soul” (18:1; 20:17). This is the mark of a deep friendship of *agape*, selfless love. Loving someone so much that you want for them all the things you want for yourself (joy, peace, prosperity, etc.), *just as much as* you want them for yourself. When they get promoted or engaged, you are genuinely happy for them, even if it’s something you wish you had but don’t. You seek their good and look out for their best interests, even making sacrifices in your own life to do what is best for them. That’s the *agape* love of God. It’s the love of a deep friendship like Jonathan and David’s, but it also the kind of love Jesus called us to have for *all* our neighbors, not just our closest friends (Mark 12:31; Luke 10:25–37).

Jonathan and David’s covenant friendship was based on their mutual love of the Lord. In this second covenant, Jonathan used the name of Yahweh six times in six verses (20:12–17). Both men were faithful to the Lord and recognized that faithfulness in each other. This is why Jonathan chose to be loyal to David over his father. He had a lot to lose by helping David, but he was a man of virtue, integrity, faith and trust in the Lord.⁴

Q: Describe a friendship you have had that was closer than family. Why were you so close? How did that person act as family for you?

Q: Why is it important for Christians to have deep friendships with other believers?

Q: What would it look like to be in an “iron sharpens iron” friendship, one that was based in your mutual love of the Lord and helped each of you grow in your faith?

1 Samuel 20:18–34 and Psalm 15 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jonathan saw his father’s true colors and chose David over him.

Q: Why did Saul react with such violence to Jonathan?

Q: How is Jonathan’s “fierce anger” different from Saul’s anger?

Jonathan devised a plan to uncover Saul’s true motives and feelings toward David, and the plan worked. Saul showed his true colors. Not only did he say he wanted to kill David, he also lashed out in anger against Jonathan. Instead of calling Jonathan “my son” as he had earlier in the story (14:39–42), Saul now called him “the son of a perverse, rebellious woman” (20:30). We don’t know much about Jonathan’s mother, Ahinoam, but it’s unlikely she was actually “perverse and rebellious.” Saul was still married to her, and she was a noble queen as far as we know. He was most likely saying this the same way you might say to your spouse, “*Your* son got in trouble at school today,” except it wasn’t a joke. He was violently serious. In Saul’s mind, it must be her fault that Jonathan turned out this way, because *no son of his* would betray his father like that!

Saul appealed to Jonathan with three powerful motivators:

- Shame – You’re bringing shame to yourself (20:30).
- Guilt – You are bringing shame to your mother who bore you (20:30). This is what is means by “your mother’s nakedness.”
- Greed/pride/ambition – As long as David lives, you will never be king (20:31).⁵

Jonathan must have felt he was bringing shame on himself, and of course he would desire to be king, but still he chose loyalty to David because of David’s innocence (20:32). Jonathan was the kind of person David later wrote about in Psalms, the kind of person who can dwell in God’s presence: “He who ... does what is right and speaks truth in his heart ... who honors those who fear the Lord; who swears to his own hurt and does not change ... He who does these things shall never be moved” (Psalm 15). Jonathan did what was right even though it would cost him his relationship with his father and possibly the throne. He kept his word even when it hurt himself. And he honored the one who feared the Lord (David) rather than the one in power who was not walking with the Lord.

When Jonathan didn’t acquiesce to Saul, Saul hurled his spear at him, just as he had done to David (20:33). And Jonathan rose from the table “in fierce anger” (20:34). But Jonathan’s anger was righteous anger. He had done no wrong and Saul had disgraced him (20:34). And Jonathan would respond righteously with his anger, too. He didn’t try to attack Saul or raise up a rebellion against him; he fasted and grieved (20:34). Jonathan’s actions were righteous, even when he was attacked unfairly.

Q: What is difference between righteous and unrighteous anger? How can you know your anger is righteous?

Q: What does it look like to respond with righteous anger when we’re mistreated? How can we have the wisdom and strength to respond righteously?

1 Samuel 20:35–42 and Psalm 16 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jonathan helped David escape, and they both wept.

Q: Why did David and Jonathan weep together?

Jonathan completed the plan, using secret signals to let David know that Saul was indeed out to kill him (20:35–38). It is significant that when the boy left, Jonathan was alone in the field and unarmed. If David really wanted to take over the throne as Saul had accused, he could have killed Jonathan and started a coup right then and there. But Jonathan completely trusted David. He knew David had no such intentions.⁶

Instead, David did the opposite. He bowed before Jonathan three times, the greatest number of times anyone in the Bible is depicted as bowing to someone else in a single encounter. In the ancient world, multiple prostrations were a common way of expressing submission, service and loyalty to an authority. Even though David had been anointed king and knew it was his eventual destiny, he bowed before Jonathan as his superior. But Jonathan responded with a kiss, the greeting of a respected peer.⁷

David and Jonathan wept together. They knew their lives would never be the same. Though their covenant bound them forever, they would no longer see each other every day, live in the same place, or enjoy the physical and emotional closeness of being brothers in the same family and warriors fighting on the same side. The text adds that “David wept the most,” reiterating to the reader that David never had any intention of hurting Jonathan or Saul, no matter what Saul said.

David also was the one leaving his whole world behind. He didn’t know what his life would look like from this point on, but he had to walk in trust of the Lord. He had been anointed king and told that was his future destiny, but things looked bleak at this moment. He was losing his best friend, his wife, his home, his place in the palace and the army – his whole identity. Yet, he knew he had the Lord. As he wrote in Psalm 16, “The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup” and “You are my Lord, I have no good apart from you ... In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” He didn’t know what would happen, but he knew who had him in His hand. He wept at the loss but walked ahead in faith.

Jonathan said, “Go in peace,” which was a typical sendoff when two people were separating for an extended time. But in this moment, as David was being pursued by Saul, it meant even more. David would not experience physical peace on the run, but he would have the peace that comes from trusting the Lord.

Q: Describe a time when you knew you were doing the right thing, but it was hard to do. How did you know it was the right thing? How did you trust in the Lord?

Q: Describe a time when you felt as though God was all you had left. How did your relationship with the Lord help you through that? What did you learn?

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Took

Main Point: The bond of true godly friends is stronger than family.

According to a 2019 survey of 2,000 Americans, the average adult has 16 “friends”: three friends for life, five people he or she really likes and would spend time with one-on-one, and eight folks he or she likes but doesn’t spend time with one-on-one or seek out.⁸ The pandemic forced many to come to terms with the number and depth of their friendships, many sinking into deep loneliness. In an April 2020 study, 53 percent of Americans reported feeling lonely or isolated within the past week.⁹

Q: Are you satisfied with the number of deep friendships in your life? How many of these friendships reflect the qualities of a “godly friendship” that your group listed on the board in the Hook section of this lesson?

Q: How might you go about developing godly friendships such as David and Jonathan’s?

Q: What opportunities might your LifeGroup create to help develop and strengthen these relationships?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about how hard this whole situation must have been for Jonathan. How must it have felt for him to have to turn against his father to choose what was right? Think back to times in your life when doing the right thing was hard. How did you find the strength to do it? How did it grow your faith? What else did you learn?

PRAY: Pray Psalm 15 out loud over yourself as a proclamation prayer, praying for the Lord to make it true in your life. Ask God to give you the strength to walk blamelessly and do what is right, even when it’s hard. Pray it boldly and firmly, so that you really feel like you “shall never be moved.” You can even pray it multiple times until you feel that boldness and courage.

ACT: Make a friendship covenant.

If you don’t already have an accountability partner. Reach out to a godly friend whom you respect and admire for his or her faith and integrity. If you haven’t already, invite that person into an accountability partnership with you. It doesn’t have to be as formal

as the covenant between David and Jonathan, but it should be an intentional decision to deepen your friendship by having conversations about your faith, encouraging each other, holding each other accountable, and “sharpening” each other.

If you already have a “sharpening” relationship with someone, write him or her a letter or e-mail telling what you appreciate about him or her and how that person has helped you on your faith journey so far.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we’ll move into the next section of David’s life – David on the run (weeks 8–17). As we watch David live in the wilderness, in caves, and even with their Philistine enemies, we will see the ongoing contrast between Saul and David. We will see David continue to be the bigger person as Saul continues to operate out of fear.

¹ Francis Brown, R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson Academic, 1994).

Nephesh is not something limited to human beings, as some of us think of “souls” being limited to only humans. It is used to describe both human beings and animals.

² Francis Brown, R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson Academic, 1994).

³ Francis Brown, R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson Academic, 1994).

⁴ Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

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⁷ Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁸ <https://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/american-number-actual-friends-study-determines>

⁹ <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/covid-loneliness-crisis-fight-dr-nicole-saphier>