

The Bond of Friendship

Printed Text • 1 Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1-7

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: SUMMARIZE Jonathan’s plan to protect David; APPRECIATE how the bonds of covenant friendship can endure the challenges of outside forces; and EXAMINE whether our own relationships reflect the honesty and loyalty God calls us to experience.

In Focus

Chanel and Breana became fast friends during their first years as undergraduates studying journalism. Chanel wanted to be a news anchor, and Breana was a promising producer.

They were both hired at the television station in their hometown after college graduation. Chanel and Breana loved working together and always had each other’s back—both personally and professionally—in their hostile work environment. Chanel was amazing from the beginning, and many of her co-workers felt threatened by her godly confidence and skill. Last year, Chanel was offered the chance to cover a big story about the new ultra-conservative candidate for governor. The head producer was openly critical and harsh of Chanel’s efforts. It almost seemed like he purposefully picked her to cover the race so he could set Chanel up to fail.

Breana saw what was happening and decided to do everything she could to help Chanel prepare for the interview with the gubernatorial candidate. It was a difficult situation for Breana because helping her friend would require extra time and energy in her already busy schedule. In addition, her support for Chanel is also a test of her loyalty to the head producer, who was very influential at the station. Breana knew the head producer could make the rest of her days at the station difficult if he found out, but she thought her friendship with Chanel was more important. Much to the head producer’s dismay, Chanel did a great job with the story and gained favorable ratings with the network.

How do you determine whether to risk your own comfort for the sake of a friend or loved one?

Keep in Mind

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Samuel 18:1, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. House bayit (Heb.) — In this lesson means household or family

B. Deal ‘asah (Heb.) — To put in order, to attend to

Say It Correctly

Goliath. guh-LAHY-uhth

Jonathan. JON-uh-thuhn

Philistine. fi-LIH-steen

KJV

1 Samuel 18:1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

5 And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

19:1 And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David.

2 But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself:

3 And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee.

4 And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good:

5 For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the Lord wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?

6 And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the Lord liveth, he shall not be slain.

7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

NLT

1 Samuel 18:1 After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathan loved David.

2 From that day on Saul kept David with him and wouldn't let him return home.

3 And Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself.

4 Jonathan sealed the pact by taking off his robe and giving it to David, together with his tunic, sword, bow, and belt.

5 Whatever Saul asked David to do, David did it successfully. So Saul made him a commander over the men of war, an appointment that was welcomed by the people and Saul's officers alike.

19:1 Saul now urged his servants and his son Jonathan to assassinate David. But Jonathan, because of his strong affection for David,

2 told him what his father was planning. "Tomorrow morning," he warned him, "you must find a hiding place out in the fields.

3 I'll ask my father to go out there with me, and I'll talk to him about you. Then I'll tell you everything I can find out."

4 The next morning Jonathan spoke with his father about David, saying many good things about him. "The king must not sin against his servant David," Jonathan said. "He's never done anything to harm you. He has always helped you in any way he could.

5 Have you forgotten about the time he risked his life to kill the Philistine giant and how the Lord brought a great victory to all Israel as a result? You were certainly happy about it then. Why should you murder an innocent man like David? There is no reason for it at all!"

6 So Saul listened to Jonathan and vowed, "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be killed."

7 Afterward Jonathan called David and told him what had happened. Then he brought David to Saul, and David served in the court as before.

The People, Places, and Times

Jonathan. Jonathan was the oldest son of King Saul and rightful heir to the throne of Israel after Saul's death. He was a courageous warrior who by God's intervention defeated a Philistine army camp with only the help of his servant who went with him to the battle. Jonathan became David's closest friend, and after dying in battle in the same war his father Saul was killed in, David cared for Jonathan's descendants in the palace

Background

In the previous chapter (1 Samuel 17), David had accomplished a feat that not even the strongest and most experienced soldiers in Israel could do. He had just killed Goliath of Gath, the strong man of the Philistines. The Philistines had mustered their armies to battle against the armies of Israel. Goliath, a skilled nine-foot soldier, fully armed with every kind of military weapon and regalia, had come out and challenged all of Israel. He dared them to choose one person among their forces to a one-on-one combat against him. Whoever won, the other person and his nation would serve him and his people. For forty days, Goliath defied the whole of Israel, their army, and their God. No one in Israel had the guts to face this man. But David, a young and inexperienced youth, volunteered despite being dismissed by Goliath, King Saul, and even his older brothers. Armed only with a shepherd staff, five smooth stones and a sling (a common distance weapon at the time) in his hand, David stepped forward to face Goliath. Armed foremost with "the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel" (v. 45), David defeated and killed Goliath and he gave victory to Israel. The Philistines fled and Israel pursued and slaughtered them.

After the victory, David returned. Abner, King Saul's commander, brought David with Goliath's head to King Saul. Amazed, the king asked David about his family background. David answered, "I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite" (17:58).

At-A-Glance

1. Friends' Covenant is Crafted (1 Samuel 18:1-5)
2. Friends' Covenant is Challenged (1 Samuel 19:1-3)
3. Friends' Covenant is Confirmed (1 Samuel 19: 4-7)

In Depth

1. Friends' Covenant is Crafted (1 Samuel 18:1-5)

David has just given a speech to explain to Saul who he is, where he comes from, what he has been through, and most importantly how he has had faith in God. It would be much like David sharing a testimony of his triumph over Goliath, acknowledging that only God could have caused a young shepherd boy from an unimportant family to have victory over the giant champion who had threatened the armies of Israel. Jonathan is so moved by David's testimony of courage and faith that he felt like he was meeting his long lost twin. Jonathan had also single-handedly gone to battle against the Philistines and seen God give him triumph over them (1 Samuel 14). King Saul is so impressed with David that he makes him a prince in his house; David moves from the sheep's pasture to the palace in an instant.

Jonathan was so moved that he felt like David was his kindred spirit, and wanted to make their bond of friendship and brotherhood official by cutting a covenant to always protect and show love for one another. Jonathan then gave David the royal clothes off his own back, prophetically acknowledging that God has called David to be royalty alongside him. Jonathan himself was next in line for Saul's throne. David and Jonathan are young men who make a covenant of friendship and kinship with one another; although they were not born blood relatives, they would live and protect each other as though they were one blood and spiritual brothers from that day forward. Jonathan's love for David foreshadows the words and actions of Christ: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

2. Friends' Covenant is Challenged (1 Samuel 19:1-3)

Some time later, Saul called together his servants and Jonathan, his son, because he had become jealous of David's popularity with the people. David has at this point led many successful battles against Israel's enemies and has become the talk of the town. Although Saul receives the glory for the victories as king of Israel, David's growing popularity has begun to make Saul so insecure that he tried to put David in higher ranks, which meant riding out in front of troops and more likely to be killed.

Saul was upset that despite his attempts to place David in harm's way, God keeps delivering and protecting His anointed. Saul plots with his servants and Jonathan, who all love David, to kill David. Jonathan, however, has made the covenant with David to protect him as though he was protecting himself, a relationship Saul no doubt knew about. Jonathan informs David of the plot and tells him to hide while Jonathan tries to talk Saul out of his murderous thoughts. The tension is real for Jonathan between siding with his father, his own blood, or siding with his covenant brother and the will of God. Jonathan chooses what is right before God and protects his best friend David.

3. Friends' Covenant is Confirmed (1 Samuel 19:4-7)

Jonathan takes the opportunity to spend time with his father near the field where David is hiding in order to talk him out of trying to kill David. Jonathan makes two important arguments about why killing David is against God's will. First, David is an innocent man; he has done nothing to threaten Saul and killing him would be spilling innocent blood, which is against the will of God. Second, David has been a faithful servant who has brought glory to God and Saul by leading Israel into battle. To kill him would be standing against someone whom God has clearly anointed to bring glory to Himself. Saul listens to Jonathan and decides not to have David murdered. He then swears a very serious oath in God's name that he will not kill David, and David was restored to serving in Saul's house. Sadly, Saul quickly broke his oath before God and tried to have David killed later. But as the oath proclaimed, David was not killed as long as God lives, which is of course eternally. David died of natural causes later in life rather than being killed in battle despite his many wars. God protected him even more than his friend Jonathan had protected him.

Search the Scriptures

1. What inner difficulty did Jonathan face as his father Saul plotted to kill David?
2. In what ways does God show that David is His anointed servant?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Have you ever been in a position where you were willing to make a sacrifice for someone whose relationship you really valued? How did you make the decision?
2. What are the qualities of a true friendship? What are situations where your friendships have been tested?

Liberating Lesson

In our society today it is increasingly common for people to lack healthy friendships or for adults to state they have very few close friends. With the rise of social media and globalization, the average U.S. American working multiple jobs for longer hours, and time spent tending to family and home, it is even more likely that people lack supportive friends with whom they can spend time. The U.S. Surgeon General has stated many times that one of the biggest health threats of our current era is isolation. This reality calls us as Christians to reexamine the lesson from David and Jonathan and take seriously the need for positive friendships. Jesus taught His disciples that friendship was one of the deepest relationships they could have with Him (cf. John 15:15). How can we as Christians seek to be friendly, build friendships, and maintain them? How can we follow Jesus in love, care for ourselves and one another, and model to the world how to build healthy relationships? With many people in our communities seeing relationships built only on necessity, power, pleasure, or convenience, it is important that we as believers build friendships that protect one another, consider others before ourselves, and demonstrate God's love.

Application for Activation

This week consider the friendships in your life and the friends who have healthy relationships with God and positive relationships with you. Think of ways to invest in those friendships. Spend time with a friend, whether in person or with a simple phone call. If you do not recognize any friendships like that, ask God to send you supportive friends who have healthy boundaries and

can help you grow in Christ. Remember to cultivate your friendships and be a friend—the responsibility is on you to do so and to show the love of Christ.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

1 Samuel 18:1-5, 19:1-7

18:1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

Chapters 18 and 19 continue the narrative of 1 Samuel 17. The phrase, “And it came to pass,” the Hebrew *hayah* (HAW-yaw), which means “it happened” or “it follows” used here as emphasis, begins chapter 18. The conjunction “and” connects the last verse of the preceding chapter as a continuation of the story. It appears that this conversation is not just a short question-and-answer discussion as the preceding verse (17:58) tends to indicate. It is rather a protracted conversation between the two, King Saul and David, with a number of people present. What David had done is no secret (the news has spread everywhere); Captain Abner, who led the troops and witnessed the battle, had come to report back to Saul with his bodyguards. The king’s advisers and members of his advisory board must have come together to celebrate and congratulate Saul for the victory. Any victory won in a battle was always attributed to the sitting king. This one was no different. David had won the battle, but King Saul took the glory (18:6). What David did so thrilled and amazed the king that he wanted to know more about him, his family background, and whose son he was. Saul and David had previously met before David went to fight Goliath (17:31–39). David had probably given the history of his family and further explained in detail what happened and how his faith in the Lord helped accomplish what he did (see 17:37, 45–17) to the audience present.

Among those present at this briefing is King Saul’s first son, Jonathan, who logically was to be the heir to his father’s throne. We first met Jonathan in 1 Samuel 14; he is an amazingly courageous young man of faith “who initiated a one-man war against the Philistines” (14:6). It is thought that David and Jonathan were similar in many ways. They were about the same age. They were both

very courageous young men with great faith in the living God; both had genuine relationships with the Lord God of Israel. Jonathan is so fascinated by David's story and his recent accomplishment that his soul was attracted to David. The word "knit" is the Hebrew qashar (KAW-shar), which means to "join or bind together" or to "league together." Soul is the translation of the Hebrew nephesh (NEH-fesh), which refers to the mind, spirit, or the total person. The soul is the seat of emotion. That means both Jonathan and David were spiritually and emotionally attracted to each other. There was an immediate, strong bond of love between the two, and Jonathan's love was so strong that the narrator adds the clause, "and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." We will discover later that Jonathan and David's love for each other was as strong as two brothers' love. Lamenting later over Jonathan's death, David calls him "my brother" (2 Samuel 1:26). This is not a sexual love, but the love for a kindred spirit. That's how strong and genuine their love and friendship was.

2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. 4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

After learning all about David and his family, King Saul decided to keep David, and would not let him return to his father's house. The Lord instantly changed David's status from a poor shepherd boy to a prince at the king's palace to serve in the king's household. Throughout his reign as king, Saul and Israel engaged in bitter wars with the Philistines, so Saul had the habit of drafting strong and brave men whenever he saw one (14:52). Jonathan and David made a covenant to seal their trust and friendship with each other.

The word "covenant" is a translation of the Hebrew berit (beh-REET), which means treaty, alliance, or league. Used together, the phrase "made a covenant" more literally means to "cut a covenant" because it is made by passing through pieces of flesh. God cut a covenant with Abram (Abraham) by instructing him to offer several three-year-old animals in a sacrifice and cut them in half (Genesis 15:9–10). God required Abraham and his descendants to circumcise by cutting the foreskin of every male child on the eighth day after birth as a covenant with Him (Genesis 17). This is still practiced in the Jewish and many other cultures today. Jonathan's rationale for making the covenant with David was "because he loved him as his own soul," reemphasizing what was said earlier (vv. 1, 3).

To show the authenticity of his commitment of friendship to David, Jonathan stripped himself of all his princely regalia and armor and gave them to David. These included his robe and garment, his sword, bow and girdle. He put them on David. Beyond demonstrating his genuine friendship, Jonathan seems to recognize that David is the one the Lord has chosen as Israel's next king (20:16–17, 42; 23:16–18). He happily relinquished his hopes for the throne in respect to God's choice—David. The robe is usually a symbol of authority. Jonathan's action symbolized passing or bestowing of the royal authority, which rightly belonged to him, on David. This symbol was common among the Old Testament Jews. We know that Joseph's coat was a symbol of his authority (Genesis 37:3, 23). Before his death, Aaron removed his priestly garment and put it on his son, Eleazar (Numbers 20:22–28). Elijah placed his mantle on his successor, Elisha, as a symbol of transfer of authority (1 Kings 19:19–21).

Jonathan and David demonstrated genuine love and friendship. It has been observed that their friendship is one of the deepest and closest recorded in the Bible. Above all, their friendship was based on their commitment to the Lord, not just to each other, and it lasted to the end. This type of love foreshadows Christ's love for us: He gave up His own life so that we might live, became poor so that we might be rich, and set aside His position so that we might be in right position with the Father.

5 And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

David now lives in the royal palace; he is fully submitted to Saul and obediently serves him. He acts with wisdom in whatever work assigned to him. He is successful in everything he does, and Saul promotes him and "set him over the men of war." This likely meant he was put in charge over a section of the army, because Abner was still the commander of the army. David, though still very young, rose quickly in ranks. "All the people," from the troops to Saul's servants, accepted him as their commander. David became very popular among the people, and they praised him.

The women went out to welcome Saul; they sang and danced with joy in his honor. But their song: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (18:7) infuriated Saul. Envy and jealousy set in; David was becoming more popular than Saul. One would think that Saul's motive for promoting David (v. 5) was good, and that he was happy for David's victory over Goliath. But Saul's actions seem to indicate the opposite. Saul's promotion of David was diabolical. Army commanders in those days didn't command from behind, rather they led in front of the troops. That was why all the people accepted him (v. 5). It therefore can be reasoned that Saul's motive was to put David at harm's way so that he would be eliminated (see 2 Samuel 11:14-17). But David "behaved himself wisely" (Heb. sakal, saw-KAL), which means circumspectly, insightfully, prudently, or cautiously. He went wherever Saul sent him with wisdom and caution (v. 5). Because David was becoming more popular than he, Saul became envious and angry. Saul also knew and was nervously afraid that David would one day replace him as king instead of his own son. Consequently, he tried several times and in many ways to kill him (18:11, 17, 27). Saul's attempts to kill David (more than fourteen times) occupy a great part of the rest of the book.

19:1 And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David. 2 But Jonathan Saul's son delighted much in David: and Jonathan told David, saying, Saul my father seeketh to kill thee: now therefore, I pray thee, take heed to thyself until the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide thyself: 3 And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where thou art, and I will commune with my father of thee; and what I see, that I will tell thee.

Although David is obedient and serves him sincerely, Saul is unhappy with him—David is becoming more popular. Saul's mind was so filled with hatred for David that he wanted to eliminate him. But all his attempts to do so himself failed, so he tried to solicit help from his son, Jonathan, and the servants. Saul probably called together his aides, his court attendants, and

Jonathan to a secret meeting. The only agenda was the assassination of David. Fortunately he called the wrong group of people—his servants who liked and accepted David’s leadership, and Jonathan, David’s best friend who loved David as himself and made a covenant with him for protection (18:1–4).

Saul was backing the wrong horse, because his son Jonathan delighted much in David and his servants loved David (18:22). Why would Saul ask Jonathan to kill his best friend? It sounds strange that he would ask Jonathan to do such a criminal act, knowing full well the relationship between the two. Probably he thought that Jonathan would be as envious as he and kill David so that Jonathan would be heir to the throne. Or probably he was asserting his parental privilege and authority or God’s commandment (Exodus 20:12). When hatred, envy, and jealousy take control of a man’s mind, he loses all his senses. That is unfortunately what happened with Saul. Filled with envy and hatred, he lost common sense. He had forgotten how irrevocable and binding covenants are; Jonathan had made one with David. Rather than tow the same road as his father, Jonathan devised ways to save David’s life. He informed David of Saul’s diabolical plot to kill him and warned him to be careful.

It was already evening, and Jonathan asked David to be cautious and hide until the next morning (19:2). Jonathan probably was not sure who among the king’s servants would comply with the king’s orders, though they accepted David (18:5). He therefore asked David to go into a secret place and hide himself till the next morning. In addition to instructing David to hide, Jonathan devised another plan to save David’s life. He planned to go the next morning and chat with his father concerning David. He tells David, “I will go and meet my father in the field near where you are hiding; and I will speak with my father concerning you; after I will let you know the outcome of our conversation.” That’s what friends are for—loyal to and protective of each other. A friend is one who has the interest of another at heart even when when a man’s will conflicts with God’s will and purpose. Jonathan knew that David was God’s chosen heir to the throne; eliminating David would mean putting Jonathan on the throne, which plausibly belonged to him. But such thought was far from Jonathan; he wouldn’t be a party to challenging God’s plan. For Jonathan, family pressure could not come between him and David or God’s will. Additionally, Jonathan greatly “delighted” (Heb. *chaphets*, KHAW-fates’) in David. That means he was “pleased with” and “took pleasure” in having him as his friend. Therefore he would never do anything to tarnish that relationship. Moreover, such a wicked act would mar his relationship with God.

4 And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good: 5 For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?

As he promised, the next morning, Jonathan approached his father to intercede on behalf of David. He spoke well about David to him and pleaded with him not to harm David. Jonathan presented two arguments why it was wrong to harm David. The first was that David was innocent and didn’t deserve to die. The second was that David had been good to Saul and served

him faithfully. Indeed David helped make Saul who he was—he won many battles against Saul’s enemies.

Jonathan reminded his father the many victories the Lord wrought through David. He reminded Saul how David risked his life and faced the Philistine and “the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel.” The Philistine referred here was Goliath of Gath, whom all of Israel dreaded, but was defeated by David.

The expression “he did put his life in his hand” means that David took a great risk when he faced Goliath, but God granted Israel victory. Saul witnessed it and invited David to serve in his house and even promoted him (18:5). Then Jonathan went further and asked another question that was difficult for Saul to answer given his present state of mind. Jonathan said something to the effect, “Why then should you murder an innocent man like David, without a cause? There is no reason for it at all!”

6 And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain. 7 And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

After reasoning with his son Jonathan, Saul seemed to listen and he concurred with him. He swore an oath not to harm David. Using a common formula of making a serious pledge, Saul promised Jonathan using the name of the Lord, “As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.” Using this formula, “as the Lord lives” makes such an oath binding. The Israelites believe that Yahweh is eternal—He lives forever and is unchallengeable, therefore any promise made in His name was taken seriously and was binding. It is comparable with cutting a covenant. Therefore Saul made a solemn and solid promise to Jonathan that nothing would harm his friend David. He was right because God protected David throughout his life—he was never slain, but died peacefully of a natural cause (1 Kings 2:1–10). But as the rest of the book will reveal, Saul’s oath was an empty promise; he would make several attempts to slay David, but continue to fail. Saul was never a trustworthy person. He was well known for breaking promises and he did the same in this case (1 Samuel 14:24, 44).

Meanwhile, Jonathan trusted his father and called David to tell him how everything went with his father. Believing that all had been settled and David would be safe in the house, Jonathan invited David back home and he served Saul as he did before. Jonathan and David’s love and friendship epitomize the type of friendship that ought to exist between friends and members of Christ’s church. It is a type of Christ’s supreme example of love, which He demonstrated by coming down, humbling Himself, and relinquishing His position as God to take the form of man and servant, and die on the cross to save us from sin and death (Philippians 2:6–8).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

1 Samuel 18:10-16

TUESDAY

1 Samuel 18:20-24, 28-30

WEDNESDAY

1 Samuel 19:8-12

THURSDAY

1 Samuel 20:12-17

FRIDAY

1 Samuel 20:18-23

SATURDAY

1 Samuel 20:35-42

SUNDAY

1 Samuel 18:1-5, 19:1-7