

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: David, Jonathan, and Saul's Jealousy

1 Samuel 18:1-19:24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The aim of this lesson is to set two hearts before the class as living lessons. In Jonathan, students should see the beauty of covenant love: a love that does not grasp for position, that gives sacrificially, and that remains loyal at great personal cost. In Saul, they should see, with sobering clarity, the anatomy of envy, how it begins as a small inward grudge and grows, when fed, into hatred and violence. The contrast is deliberate, and it presses every one of us to ask which heart is forming in us.

Lead the class into honest self-examination. Envy is one of the quietest and most respectable of sins. It rarely announces itself; it hides behind reasonable-sounding complaints and comparisons. Help students name it in its early stages, the curdled feeling when another is praised, the reflexive search for a fault, the inward subtraction from someone else's joy, before it grows. And hold out the hope that God, who guarded David, can also guard and cleanse our hearts as we confess and walk in the Spirit.

Finally, lift the class to Christ. Jonathan's willingness to lay aside his royal claim and pour himself out for his friend is a faint but real echo of the One who, being in the form of God, emptied Himself for us. Let the study end not merely in moral resolve but in worship of the Christ whose self-giving love both rebukes our envy and gives us a new heart to love as He loved.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does the covenant friendship of Jonathan and David (1 Samuel 18:1-4) reveal about the nature of godly, self-giving love?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 18 opens immediately after David's triumph with one of the tenderest descriptions of friendship in Scripture (verses 1-4): "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David." This is not mere fondness or shared interest. It is a deep, covenantal bonding of two lives. Jonathan loved David "as his own soul," the very standard the law sets for loving one's neighbor.

The detail that follows is extraordinary when we remember who Jonathan is. He is the son of Saul, the heir apparent, the man whose throne David will one day occupy. By every worldly calculation, David is Jonathan's rival. Yet Jonathan makes a covenant with David and seals it by stripping off his own robe, his garments, even his sword and bow, and giving them to David. The

robe especially is the symbol of his royal status. He is, in effect, handing over the trappings of his own claim.

This is self-giving love that does not grasp. Jonathan does not see David as a threat to be managed but as a friend to be honored, even at the cost of his own advancement. Where the world says, "Protect your position; guard your turf," Jonathan says, in effect, "I would rather love you well than keep what is mine." His open hand is the exact opposite of his father's clenched fist.

For the church, Jonathan is a portrait of the love Scripture commands: a love that "envieth not" and "seeketh not her own" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). It costs him something real, and that is precisely what makes it love. Sentiment is cheap; covenant loyalty that lays down its own rights is the genuine article. We are meant to look at Jonathan and ask whether our love for others is willing to cost us anything.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant love is a knitting of souls, a deep loyalty, not mere fondness (1 Samuel 18:1, 3).
- Jonathan loves David despite having the most to lose from David's rise.
- Giving his robe symbolizes laying aside his own royal claim for his friend's sake.
- True love does not grasp or compete; it honors and gives (1 Corinthians 13:4-5).
- Genuine love costs something; Jonathan's open hand contrasts with Saul's clenched fist.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class to describe what made Jonathan's love so remarkable given his position.
- Discuss the difference between sentiment and covenant loyalty that costs us something.
- Consider where our love for others stops short the moment it would cost us our own advantage.

Question 2

Student Question:

When has loving someone well required you to give up something you valued, as Jonathan surrendered his robe and his claim, and how did you respond?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jonathan's love invites a personal question, because covenant love is not admired from a distance; it is imitated at a cost. The robe Jonathan handed over was more than cloth. It was his future, his status, his claim. To love David that well, he had to hold his own ambitions loosely. That is the hard, beautiful center of real friendship and real Christian community.

Most of us love easily until love requires surrender. We will support someone right up to the point where their flourishing might dim our own. Jonathan crossed that line freely. He decided

that David's good was worth more to him than his own promotion, and he acted on it. The question for us is whether our love has ever actually cost us anything we wanted.

Think concretely. Have you ever stepped back so someone else could step forward? Have you ever celebrated a promotion, a recognition, or a gift in another that you secretly wished were yours? Have you given time, money, or opportunity to someone with no return to yourself? These are the robe moments, the places where love is proven by what it lays down.

It is worth noticing that Jonathan's self-giving did not impoverish him; it ennobled him. He is remembered forever for this love. When we hold our rights loosely for the sake of another, we lose nothing that matters and gain a Christlikeness that lasts. The fear that giving will leave us empty is a lie that envy tells.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant love is meant to be imitated, not merely admired.
- Real love is tested at the point where another's flourishing might cost us our own.
- Robe moments are the concrete places where we lay something down for another.
- Self-giving does not impoverish but ennobles; we lose nothing that truly matters.
- Envy whispers that giving will empty us; love proves the opposite.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each person to recall a time loving someone required real surrender.
- Discuss the everyday robe moments where love is proven by what we lay down.
- Consider the fear that giving will leave us empty and how Jonathan's life answers it.

Question 3

Student Question:

How does the text trace the progression of Saul's envy from a song to a glance to a spear (1 Samuel 18:6–11), and what does this reveal about how sin grows?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now the text turns to Saul, and it does so with chilling precision (verses 6–9). It begins with a song. The women come out to meet the returning army "with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick," and they sing, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." It was a celebration of victory, but Saul could only hear the comparison. The praise of another felt like a theft from himself.

Verse 8 records the inward turn: "Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him." He reasons, "they have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?" The seed of envy has been planted,

and it instantly begins to imagine the worst, projecting onto David an ambition that David never showed.

Verse 9 gives the haunting summary: “Saul eyed David from that day and forward.” Watch the progression in the verses that follow. The very next day an evil spirit comes upon Saul, and he hurls a javelin at David, twice, trying to pin him to the wall (verses 10–11). Envy that was a glance on day one is a spear on day two. Sin does not stay still; it grows, and it grows fast when it is welcomed and fed.

This is one of the great warnings of Scripture about the nature of sin. James says that lust, when it has conceived, brings forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death (James 1:15). Saul did not decide one morning to become a murderer. He decided, repeatedly, not to deal with a small grudge, and the grudge grew teeth. The lesson is to take the first stirrings of envy seriously, before they take us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Envy is triggered by comparison; Saul could only hear the song as a subtraction from himself (1 Samuel 18:7–8).
- Envy quickly imagines the worst, projecting ambitions onto David he never displayed.
- “Saul eyed David from that day forward” marks a settled, watchful resentment (1 Samuel 18:9).
- Sin grows rapidly when fed; a glance on day one becomes a spear on day two (1 Samuel 18:10–11).
- Small unaddressed grudges grow teeth; take the first stirrings of envy seriously (James 1:14–15).

Discussion Prompts

- Trace with the class the steps from the song to the glance to the spear.
- Discuss how comparison turns another’s honor into our own perceived loss.
- Consider why dealing with envy early is so much easier than uprooting it once grown.

Question 4

Student Question:

Where have you let a small seed of resentment or comparison go unconfessed, and what fruit has it begun to bear in you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Saul’s story turns the searchlight on us. It is easy to condemn the king while quietly harboring the very thing that destroyed him. Envy is a respectable sin. It does not look like the spear; it

looks like a reasonable observation, a fair complaint, a slight cooling toward someone who has been praised. But it is the same poison in an earlier stage.

Ask yourself honestly where comparison has taken root. Perhaps it is a coworker who got the recognition, a sibling who seems to have an easier life, a fellow believer whose gifts are celebrated more than yours, a friend whose family or finances or faith looks more put together. The first symptom is almost always a subtle resentment, a reluctance to rejoice, an inward editing of their joy.

What makes envy so dangerous is that it hides. We rarely call it by name. We dress it up as discernment (“I just think they are getting too much credit”) or humility (“I would never put myself forward like that”). But underneath is the same curdled response that began in Saul’s heart with a song. Naming it is the first step toward killing it.

Here is the mercy: envy caught early is far easier to put to death than envy left to grow. The remedy is not white-knuckled suppression but confession and a return to gratitude, learning to trace every good gift, ours and our neighbor’s, back to the same generous God. When we truly believe God is the giver, another’s gift stops feeling like our loss.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Envy is a respectable, hidden sin that rarely announces itself.
- Its first symptoms are reluctance to rejoice and an inward subtraction from another’s joy.
- We disguise envy as discernment or humility to avoid naming it.
- Envy caught early is far easier to kill than envy left to grow.
- Gratitude that traces every gift to God dissolves the sense that another’s blessing is our loss.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class to name, honestly, where comparison has taken root in their hearts.
- Discuss the disguises envy wears so we can recognize it sooner.
- Consider how gratitude to the Giver disarms the feeling that another’s gain is our loss.

Question 5

Student Question:

What does Saul’s growing fear of David (1 Samuel 18:12, 15, 29) reveal about how envy and the awareness of God’s favor on another can torment a heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

As the chapter unfolds, the text repeatedly notes that Saul was afraid of David (verses 12, 15, 29). This is striking. The king with the army, the throne, and all the power is afraid of the shepherd. Why? Verse 12 tells us plainly: “because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul.” Saul’s fear is, at root, an awareness of God’s favor resting on another.

This is one of the most tormenting dimensions of envy. It is not merely that David succeeds; it is that David is evidently blessed by God, and Saul knows it. Instead of driving Saul to repentance and to seek God himself, the awareness of God's hand on David fills him with dread and rivalry. The very thing that should have humbled him hardened him further.

Notice the contrast with how a faithful heart responds to God's blessing on another. When we see God evidently at work in someone's life, the godly response is to rejoice and to be drawn toward God ourselves. The envious response is to feel threatened, as though God's generosity to another were a verdict against us. Saul could not bear to see grace given to someone else.

Saul's fear also exposes the emptiness underneath envy. A heart secure in God's love does not need to fear another's blessing. But Saul had lost his grip on God, and so every evidence of God's favor on David felt like a loss to him. The cure for the fear of others' success is not more success of our own; it is a settled rest in the God who is for us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul feared David because the LORD was with David and had departed from Saul (1 Samuel 18:12).
- Envy is tormented most by the evidence of God's favor resting on another.
- God's blessing on another should draw us to rejoice and to seek God, not to fear and rival.
- Envy treats God's generosity to others as a verdict against ourselves.
- A heart resting in God's love need not fear another's blessing (Romans 8:31-32).

Discussion Prompts

- Discuss why the evidence of God's favor on another is so threatening to an envious heart.
- Ask how a secure rest in God's love changes our response to others' success.
- Consider how Saul's fear exposes the emptiness that always lies beneath envy.

Question 6

Student Question:

When you sense God blessing someone else, does it move you toward gratitude or toward fear and rivalry, and why?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When you sense God blessing someone else, the direction your heart moves reveals a great deal. Saul's heart moved toward fear and rivalry. The believer's heart is meant to move toward gratitude and joy. The same event, another person flourishing, becomes either a threat or a cause for praise, depending entirely on what we are trusting in for our worth.

If our sense of value rests on being ahead of others, on comparison, on standing out, then every blessing on someone else is a demotion for us, and we will feel it as a loss. But if our worth rests

in being loved and known by God, then another's blessing takes nothing from us. There is no scarcity in God's favor. His generosity to my neighbor does not diminish His love for me.

This is why envy is, at bottom, a worship problem. It reveals that we have located our identity somewhere other than in God. Saul's kingship had become his identity, so anything that seemed to threaten it threatened him. When God is our portion, the success of others can be received as good news rather than bad.

Practically, the next time you feel that familiar tightening when someone is praised, treat it as a spiritual diagnostic. Ask, "What am I afraid of losing right now? Where have I staked my worth?" Then preach the gospel to yourself: you are loved by a God whose favor toward you is not in competition with His goodness to anyone else. From that security, you can genuinely rejoice.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The direction our heart moves at another's blessing reveals what we trust for our worth.
- Envy treats God's favor as scarce; faith knows His generosity to others costs us nothing.
- Envy is ultimately a worship problem, locating identity somewhere other than God.
- When God is our portion, others' success can be received as good news.
- The tightening we feel at another's praise is a useful diagnostic of where we have staked our worth.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask the class whether God's blessing on others tends to move them toward gratitude or rivalry.
- Discuss how locating worth in God rather than comparison frees us to rejoice.
- Consider using the feeling of envy as a prompt to examine and re-anchor our identity.

Question 7

Student Question:

How do we see God's providential protection of David woven through these chapters (1 Samuel 18:14; 19:10–12, 18), even as the danger increases?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Through both chapters, even as the danger to David escalates, God's protective hand is unmistakable. Saul hurls his spear and misses (18:11). Saul sends David into battle hoping the Philistines will kill him, but "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him" (18:14). Saul offers his daughters as bait for a trap, and still David prospers. The king plots, and God preserves.

Chapter 19 intensifies the threat. Saul speaks openly to Jonathan and his servants of killing David (19:1). He throws the javelin again (19:10). He sends messengers to David's house to

watch for him and kill him in the morning (19:11). And at every turn, God provides deliverance, often through human instruments: Jonathan's intercession (19:1-7), Michal's warning and ruse (19:11-17), the company of prophets at Naioth (19:18-24).

It is worth noticing how God's protection works here. There are no fiery chariots or parted seas. There is the loyalty of a friend, the quick thinking of a wife, the gathering of God's people in worship. God preserves His anointed through ordinary providences, through people who act faithfully at the right moment. The hand of God is no less real for being hidden in such means.

And there is a deeper assurance underneath it all. These are the wilderness years, the long, dangerous stretch between David's anointing and his throne. God had promised the kingdom to David, and no spear, no plot, no royal command could undo that promise. The same God who guarded David is the God who keeps His own. He does not always remove the danger, but He is never absent from it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's protective hand runs through both chapters even as the danger escalates (1 Samuel 18:14).
- Deliverance comes through ordinary providences: a friend, a wife, the gathering of God's people.
- God's hand is no less real for being hidden in human instruments.
- These wilderness years test, but cannot undo, God's promise to David.
- God does not always remove danger, but He is never absent from it (Psalm 59, written of this episode).

Discussion Prompts

- Trace the instances of God's protection across chapters 18 and 19.
- Discuss how God often works through ordinary people and providences rather than dramatic miracles.
- Consider what it means to trust God's preserving hand in a season of real and increasing danger.

Question 8

Student Question:

Where do you need to trust that God is protecting and providing for you, even in a season when threats seem to be multiplying?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God's preservation of David presses a personal question for the seasons when our own threats seem to multiply. We tend to measure God's care by the absence of trouble. But David's life

teaches a harder and better lesson: God's protection is often most active precisely in the middle of danger, not in its removal.

If you are in a stretch where the pressures keep stacking up, where one difficulty hardly subsides before another arrives, it is easy to conclude that God has withdrawn. David could have concluded the same. He was anointed king and yet running for his life, sleeping in caves, hunted by the very king he served. Yet God was with him in all of it, providing again and again, often at the last possible moment.

Notice that God frequently provided through people. A Jonathan to plead for him. A Michal to warn him. The lesson is partly that we are not meant to face our dangers alone, and partly that we are sometimes meant to be the Jonathan or Michal for someone else. God's protecting hand often takes the shape of a faithful friend showing up at the right time.

So in your multiplying threats, the call is to trust the unseen hand. It may not part the sea. It may send a friend, an unexpected provision, a door that opens just before another closes. David later wrote, out of these very years, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Psalm 56:3). That is the posture: not the absence of fear, but trust offered in the presence of it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We wrongly measure God's care by the absence of trouble.
- God's protection is often most active in the midst of danger, not in its removal.
- Multiplying pressures do not prove God has withdrawn.
- God frequently provides through faithful people; we are not meant to face danger alone.
- The call is to trust the unseen hand and to be that hand for others (Psalm 56:3).

Discussion Prompts

- Ask where students need to trust God's protection in a season of multiplying threats.
- Discuss how God often provides through faithful friends at the right moment.
- Consider how we might be the Jonathan or Michal God sends to someone else.

Question 9

Student Question:

How does Jonathan's costly, covenant love for David foreshadow the self-giving love of Jesus Christ, who laid down far more for us (1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:1-7; John 15:13)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now lift the study to its highest point. Jonathan's love, so costly and self-giving, is more than a model of friendship; it is a signpost pointing to a greater love. Jonathan laid aside his royal robe and his claim to the throne for the sake of the one God had chosen. In doing so he gives us a faint but true picture of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jonathan risked his life for David, even standing between David and his own father’s spear (19:1–7, and later 20:33). But the Lord did infinitely more. He who was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, laying aside heaven’s robe, and humbled Himself to death, even the death of the cross.

Where Jonathan gave up a throne he had not yet inherited, Christ gave up a glory He had eternally possessed. Where Jonathan loved a friend, Christ loved enemies, “while we were yet sinners” (Romans 5:8). Where Jonathan’s love preserved David’s earthly life, Christ’s love secured our eternal life. Jonathan’s self-giving is a candle; Christ’s is the sun. Yet the candle truly reflects the sun’s light.

And here the lesson’s two halves come together. The same self-giving love of Christ that we adore is the love that uproots the envy of Saul from our hearts. We cannot love like Jonathan, much less like Christ, by sheer effort. But as we behold the One who emptied Himself for us, His love begins to reshape us, loosening our grip on our rights, our status, our comparisons, and teaching us to count others better than ourselves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jonathan’s costly love is a signpost pointing to the greater self-giving love of Christ.
- Christ laid aside eternal glory, not merely an unclaimed throne (Philippians 2:5–8).
- Jonathan loved a friend; Christ loved enemies while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8; John 15:13).
- Jonathan’s love preserved an earthly life; Christ’s love secures eternal life.
- Beholding Christ’s self-giving love is what uproots envy and reshapes us to love sacrificially.

Discussion Prompts

- Trace the parallels and the far greater contrasts between Jonathan’s love and Christ’s.
- Discuss how beholding Christ’s self-emptying love changes our grip on status and rights.
- Consider how the love that saves us is also the love that cures our envy.

Question 10

Student Question:

Name one specific way Christ is forming you through this passage, whether to love sacrificially like Jonathan or to put to death the envy that grew in Saul.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring the two chapters home and let them shape you. You have stood before two hearts: Jonathan’s, opening in costly love, and Saul’s, closing in jealous fear. Sanctification means letting

Christ form the first heart in you while putting to death the second. The question is which one He is working on in you right now.

Perhaps Christ is calling you to love like Jonathan, to lay down a robe, a right, an advantage, for the good of someone else. To step back so another can step forward. To celebrate, genuinely and out loud, a gift in someone that you might once have envied. Self-giving love is not natural to us; it is the fruit of His Spirit at work.

Or perhaps the more pressing work is the killing of a Saul-like envy that has quietly taken root. A resentment you have nursed. A comparison you keep making. A coolness toward someone God has blessed. The first step is to name it honestly before God, refuse its disguises, and confess it as the sin it is, before it grows from a glance into a spear.

Either way, make it specific. Name the person. Name the robe you can lay down or the resentment you must put to death. Then look again to Christ, who emptied Himself for you. You do not face this transformation alone or in your own strength. The God who guarded David through the wilderness is the God who will guard and remake your heart, one honest step at a time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sanctification means forming Jonathan's heart in us while putting Saul's to death.
- Loving like Jonathan may mean laying down a real right or advantage for another.
- Killing Saul-like envy begins with naming it honestly and refusing its disguises.
- Transformation must be specific: name the person, the robe, or the resentment.
- We are remade not by sheer effort but by beholding and relying on the self-giving Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- Ask each student whether God is chiefly forming Jonathan's love or uprooting Saul's envy in them now.
- Have them name one specific robe to lay down or one specific resentment to confess.
- Close by directing the class to Christ as the source and pattern of the heart they long to have.