

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

Lesson 11: David, Jonathan, and Saul's Jealousy -- 1 Samuel 18:1–19:24

The dust had barely settled in the valley of Elah when two very different responses to David's victory began to take shape. One man looked at David and loved him. Another man looked at David and began, slowly, to hate him. These two chapters set those responses side by side like exhibits in a courtroom, and they ask us a question we would rather not answer: when someone near us rises, which response rises in us?

Jonathan is one of the most beautiful figures in all of Scripture. He was the crown prince, the natural heir to Saul's throne, the very person who had the most to lose from David's rise. And yet the text says "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." He stripped off his own royal robe and gave it to David. Here is love that does not grasp, friendship that does not compete, loyalty that costs something. Jonathan models a self-giving love that points us all the way to Christ.

Saul is the tragedy. It begins with a song. The women come dancing into the streets singing, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," and something curdles in the king's heart. "Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Watch how the text traces the slow, ugly growth of envy: from a sideways glance, to a hurled spear, to a settled plot to murder. Jealousy is never content to stay small. It is a fire that, once welcomed, consumes everything, including the one who harbors it.

As we study, do not keep this at a safe distance, as though it were only about an ancient king. Envy still hardens hearts today, in churches, in families, in our own chests. The corrosive habit of comparison, the quiet resentment when another is praised, the bitterness we nurse instead of confess. These chapters hold up a mirror. But they also hold up a refuge, for through all of it God is quietly, faithfully protecting His anointed, and that same God can guard our hearts from the poison if we will let Him.

Group Discussion: Why is it often the people closest to us, those most like us or in similar roles, whose success is hardest for us to celebrate, and what does that reveal about the human heart?

Personal Reflection: Whose praise or success has been quietly difficult for you to rejoice in, and what is that difficulty exposing about what you are truly trusting in for your sense of worth?

Read 1 Samuel 18:1–19:24

Study Questions

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

2. 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?
3. 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?
4. Where have you let a small seed of resentment or comparison go unconfessed, and what fruit has it begun to bear in you?
5. 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?
6. When you sense God blessing someone else, does it move you toward gratitude or toward fear and rivalry, and why?
7. 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?
8. Where do you need to trust that God is protecting and providing for you, even in a season when threats seem to be multiplying?

9. 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)?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Proverbs 14:30, where envy is the rottenness of the bones; James 3:14-16, where bitter envying and strife bring confusion and every evil work; Galatians 5:19-26, where envy is a work of the flesh set against the fruit of the Spirit; 1 Corinthians 13:4, where love envieth not; John 15:13, where the greatest love lays down its life for friends; Philippians 2:3-4, where we esteem others better than ourselves.

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