

David: A Man After God's Own Heart, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: Loyalty, Envy, and Covenant Friendship

1 Samuel 18:1–16; 1 Samuel 20:12–17

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

These chapters set two relationships side by side for our instruction, and the contrast is the lesson. Historically, David's victory over Goliath has made him a national hero, and his rise immediately tests the hearts of those around him. Jonathan, the crown prince who has the most natural reason to resent David, instead binds himself to David in covenant love and gladly cedes his own claim to the throne. Saul, who should rejoice in God's deliverance, is consumed by envy that festers into attempted murder. The doctrinal and ethical stakes are the nature of godly love and loyalty, the deadly progression of envy and unchecked sin, the humility that trusts God with one's own place, and, at the height of the lesson, the way Jonathan's covenant love reflects the steadfast covenant love of God in Christ.

The teacher should help the class feel that Saul and Jonathan are not distant historical figures but mirrors. Most people carry both impulses: the capacity for generous, self-giving love and the capacity for the quiet, corrosive comparison that cannot rejoice in another's blessing. The aim is not merely to admire Jonathan and despise Saul but to examine which response students are actually feeding, and to take envy seriously as the soul-rotting sin Scripture says it is.

Aim at formation throughout. Press students toward costly, faithful friendship in a culture of convenient, shallow ties; expose envy where it hides behind reasonable complaints; and call them to trust God with their own future so completely that they are free to celebrate others. Then lift their eyes to the covenant love of Christ, who loved them at infinite cost, as both the model and the power for loving others this way.

Question 1

Student Question:

Scripture says "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul," and the two "made a covenant" (18:1, 3; 20:16–17). What does this covenant friendship teach us about the nature of godly love and loyalty, and how does loving someone "as your own soul" differ from the casual, convenient friendships our culture often settles for?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the language the text uses, because it is extraordinary. Jonathan's soul was "knit" to David's; he loved him "as his own soul"; they "made a covenant." This is not the casual companionship our culture calls friendship. It is a committed, covenantal bond, sealed by

promise and marked by self-giving loyalty. The teacher should help the class feel how far this rises above the convenient, low-commitment relationships many people settle for.

Covenant is the key word. In Scripture, a covenant is a binding commitment that does not depend on convenience or mood; it holds even when keeping it is costly. Jonathan's love for David will be tested by his father's murderous rage, by danger to his own life, and by the loss of his royal future, and it holds through all of it. This is what godly love looks like: faithful, durable, willing to suffer loss for the good of the other.

Note that this love sought David's good above Jonathan's own advantage. Real love is not mainly a feeling but a settled commitment to another's welfare. Jonathan repeatedly acts for David's benefit at cost to himself. The teacher can contrast this with the consumer model of friendship, in which we value relationships for what they give us and discard them when they become inconvenient.

Apply it concretely. The church is meant to be a community of such covenant love, not a network of convenient acquaintances. Ask the class what it would look like to love a few people with Jonathan's kind of faithfulness, the kind that shows up, stays, and pays a price for the good of another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant love as committed and binding, not convenient
- Loving another "as your own soul," seeking their good above our advantage
- Faithfulness that holds even when it is costly and dangerous
- The contrast with shallow, consumer-style friendship
- The church as a community of covenant love

Discussion Prompts

- What makes covenant friendship different from the friendships our culture settles for?
- Why is faithfulness, not feeling, the heart of godly love?
- Who could you begin to love with Jonathan's kind of committed loyalty?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jonathan's love for David cost him his pride, his position, and eventually his safety, yet he gave himself to it gladly. Who in your life is God calling you to love with this kind of committed, self-giving loyalty? Where have you been keeping your friendships safe, shallow, and convenient rather than faithful and costly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question presses Jonathan's example into the student's relationships. The aim is to move from admiring covenant love in the abstract to naming a specific person God is calling them to love with costly faithfulness.

Help the class examine the quality of their actual friendships. Many are kept deliberately shallow and safe, because depth requires vulnerability and faithfulness requires cost. The lesson invites students to consider where they have been protecting themselves rather than giving themselves.

Then call for a step. Loving like Jonathan begins with a concrete act: showing up for someone in need, staying faithful to a hard friendship, choosing another's good over our own convenience. Invite each student to name one relationship and one specific way they will love more faithfully this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from admiring covenant love to practicing it
- The cost and vulnerability that depth in friendship requires
- Self-protection as the enemy of self-giving love
- Identifying a specific person to love faithfully
- Concrete acts of loyalty rather than good intentions

Discussion Prompts

- Who is God calling you to love with committed, self-giving loyalty?
- Where have you kept friendships safe and shallow to avoid cost?
- What is one specific way you could love that person more faithfully this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

When the women sang that Saul had struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands, "Saul was very angry," and "Saul eyed David from that day on" (18:7–9). What does this account teach us about the nature of envy, where it comes from, and how it takes root and grows in the human heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Turn now to Saul, and let the text trace the anatomy of envy. It begins with a song: the women credit David with ten thousands and Saul with thousands. Saul hears the comparison, and something turns. "Saul was very angry," and from that day "Saul eyed David." Envy is born in the moment we measure ourselves against another and cannot bear the result.

The teacher should help the class understand what envy actually is. It is not merely wanting good things; it is resentment at the good that belongs to someone else, a grief at their blessing and a secret wish that they had less. At its root lies pride and a refusal to accept the place and portion God has given. Saul cannot tolerate that God is with David, and that intolerance is the seed of everything that follows.

Note where envy comes from and how it hides. It rarely calls itself envy. It dresses up as legitimate concern, as fairness, as suspicion of the other person's motives. Saul could doubtless have justified his feelings. This is why envy is so dangerous: it feels reasonable while it rots us from within (Proverbs 14:30). The teacher should expose its disguises so the class can recognize it in themselves.

Finally, observe that Saul fed his envy rather than fighting it. He nursed the comparison, kept his eye on David, and let the feeling settle into a fixed posture. Sin grows by being tolerated. The lesson here is diagnostic: before the spear is ever thrown, the heart has already turned, and that turning is where the battle must be fought.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Envy as resentment at the good belonging to another
- The root of envy in pride and refusal of our God-given place
- Comparison as the trigger that gives envy its opening
- How envy disguises itself as fairness or reasonable concern
- Envy as “rottenness to the bones” (Proverbs 14:30)
- Sin growing by being tolerated rather than fought

Discussion Prompts

- What exactly is envy, and how does it differ from simply wanting good things?
- How does envy disguise itself so we do not recognize it?
- Why is the battle against envy fought in the heart long before it shows in action?

Question 4

Student Question:

Envy rarely announces itself; it hides behind reasonable-sounding complaints and slowly poisons us. When was the last time another person's blessing stirred resentment, comparison, or a secret wish that they had less so you could feel like more? What is envy currently feeding on in your own heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question asks students to locate envy in their own hearts. The teacher should create safety for honesty, because few sins are more shameful to admit and more universal to experience. Almost everyone has felt the sting when someone else received what they wanted.

Help the class identify envy's common triggers: a peer's promotion, another family's ease, a friend's marriage or children, someone's recognition, wealth, or gifting. Envy often surfaces precisely where we feel our own lack most keenly. Naming the trigger exposes the idol underneath.

Then point toward repentance and its remedy. Envy is starved by gratitude and by genuinely rejoicing with those who rejoice. Invite each student to name where envy has been feeding lately and to consider one deliberate act of thanksgiving or blessing toward the very person they have envied.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honestly locating envy in our own hearts
- Common triggers where envy surfaces (our points of felt lack)
- The idol or insecurity beneath the envy
- Gratitude and rejoicing with others as envy's remedy
- Repentance as turning from comparison to contentment

Discussion Prompts

- When did another person's blessing recently stir resentment or comparison in you?
- What lack or insecurity is your envy feeding on?
- What act of gratitude or blessing could starve that envy this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jonathan willingly gave David his robe, armor, and weapons, the very symbols of his own claim to the throne (18:4), and later said plainly, "you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you" (23:17). What does Jonathan's gladness to see David promoted above himself teach us about humility, and about trusting God with our own place and future?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Return to Jonathan for the contrast, and focus on the most remarkable thing he does. He gives David his robe, armor, and weapons (18:4), the very emblems of his identity as crown prince. Later he says it outright: "you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you" (23:17). Jonathan freely yields his own throne to the man God has chosen.

This is humility of a rare and beautiful kind. Jonathan is not crushed into self-hatred; he is simply free, free to celebrate a future that is not his own, because his security does not rest in his position. The teacher should help the class see that humility is not thinking poorly of ourselves but being so settled in God that we no longer need to protect our place against others.

The root of Jonathan's freedom is trust in God. He accepts God's choice of David and finds his own contentment within it. He does not grasp at the throne or scheme to keep it. He trusts that the God who assigns places can be trusted with his. This is the antidote to envy: a deep confidence that our times and our portion are in God's hands.

Apply this directly. We are most tempted to envy and to grasp when we feel our place is threatened. Jonathan models the alternative: holding our position, our recognition, even our hopes, with an open hand, trusting God to assign what is good. A person who truly trusts God with their future is set free to rejoice when others are lifted up.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Humility as freedom from the need to protect our place
- Gladly celebrating a future or blessing that is not our own
- Security rooted in God rather than in position or recognition
- Trusting God to assign our portion as the antidote to envy
- Holding our hopes and place with an open hand

Discussion Prompts

- How could Jonathan rejoice over David receiving the throne he himself might have had?
- What is the difference between humility and thinking poorly of ourselves?
- How does trusting God with our future free us to celebrate others?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jonathan was free to celebrate a future that was not his own because his security rested in God, not in his position. Where do you find it hardest to rejoice when someone else is given what you wanted? What would change if you truly trusted God with your own place, calling, and future instead of guarding it anxiously?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies Jonathan's trust to the student's own grip on position and future. The aim is to surface where we hold on too tightly, because that is exactly where envy and anxiety breed.

Help students identify the arena where they find it hardest to rejoice at another's gain: career, family, ministry, recognition, relationships. The place we cannot celebrate others is usually the place we have not yet trusted God with our own portion.

Then invite a deliberate act of trust. What would it look like to release a guarded hope into God's hands, and to bless the person who received what we wanted? Ask each student to name one such area and one concrete way they will loosen their grip this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Locating where we grip our position and future too tightly
- The link between anxious self-guarding and envy
- Releasing guarded hopes into God's hands
- Blessing the person who received what we wanted
- Contentment as the fruit of trusting God with our portion

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you find it hardest to rejoice when someone else is given what you wanted?
- What would change if you truly trusted God with that part of your future?
- What is one way you could loosen your grip and bless another this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Saul's envy did not stay an emotion; it grew into spear-throwing, scheming, and a settled determination to destroy David (18:10–11, 25, 29). What does the progression from a jealous feeling to murderous action teach us about how unchecked sin grows, and why we cannot safely make peace with envy or any "small" sin in the heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question traces the deadly progression of Saul's sin, and it carries real doctrinal weight. The feeling Saul refused to deal with did not stay a feeling. It grew: from anger to suspicion, from suspicion to a hurled spear, from a spear to calculated schemes, from schemes to a settled campaign to destroy David. Unchecked sin always grows.

The teacher should make the principle explicit. Sin is never static. James 1:14–15 describes the same progression: desire conceives, gives birth to sin, and sin fully grown brings forth death. Saul is a case study in that verse. What might have been confessed and killed as a momentary envy was instead fed, and it matured into murderous hatred that consumed him.

Draw out why we cannot safely make peace with any "small" sin in the heart. We tend to grade sins by their outward size and tolerate the inward ones as harmless. But the inward sin is the

seed of the outward one. Saul did not begin intending murder; he began by refusing to deal with envy. The teacher should press the class to take seriously the sins they consider minor.

Apply it as urgency, not despair. The good news is that sin caught early is far more easily put to death. The remedy is not management but mortification: confessing it, renouncing it, and turning from it now, before it grows. The time to deal with envy or resentment or lust is while it is still small.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Sin as never static; unchecked, it always grows
- The progression of desire to sin to death (James 1:14–15)
- Why “small” heart-sins cannot be safely tolerated
- The inward sin as the seed of the outward act
- Mortification (putting sin to death) versus mere management
- The mercy of dealing with sin while it is still small

Discussion Prompts

- How did Saul’s envy progress from a feeling to a settled course of destruction?
- Why is it dangerous to make peace with a sin because it seems small?
- What is the difference between managing a sin and putting it to death?

Question 8

Student Question:

Saul’s downward path began with a feeling he refused to deal with and ended in destruction. Is there a “small” sin you have been tolerating in your heart, telling yourself it is harmless? What might it grow into if left unchecked, and what would it look like to put it to death now rather than feeding it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-question applies the progression of sin directly. Most people are tolerating some sin they have classified as harmless: a resentment, a private indulgence, a habit of comparison, an unforgiveness. The teacher’s aim is to help students take it seriously now.

Encourage honest naming without spiraling into shame. The point is not to crush students but to wake them. Saul’s tragedy is precisely that his ruin began with something he could easily have dealt with early. The same mercy is available to us: small sins are the easiest to kill.

Then call for decisive action. What would it look like to put this sin to death this week, by confession, by accountability, by removing what feeds it, by turning to Christ for cleansing and strength? Invite each student to name one tolerated sin and one concrete step of mortification.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying a tolerated sin we consider harmless
- Taking small sins seriously before they grow
- Confession and accountability as means of putting sin to death
- Removing what feeds the sin
- Turning to Christ for cleansing and strength to change

Discussion Prompts

- What “small” sin have you been telling yourself is harmless?
- What might it grow into if you keep feeding it?
- What concrete step could you take to put it to death this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jonathan’s covenant with David was marked by faithful, self-giving, sacrificial love that sought the good of his friend even at his own expense, a love that points beyond itself. How does Jonathan’s covenant loyalty give us a glimpse of the steadfast, covenant love of God, supremely shown in Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us? How should being loved this way by Christ shape the way we love others?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it lifts Jonathan’s friendship to its deepest meaning. Jonathan’s covenant love, faithful, self-giving, seeking David’s good at his own expense, even laying down his royal future and risking his life, is a genuine reflection of something far greater: the steadfast, covenant love of God.

The teacher should make the connection carefully and richly. The Old Testament’s great word for God’s love is His covenant faithfulness, His steadfast loyalty to His people that does not depend on their worthiness and holds even at great cost to Himself. Jonathan’s love gives the class a human picture of that divine loyalty. But the picture finds its fullness in Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us, laying down not merely a robe and a throne but His very life. As Jesus said, greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13), and then He did exactly that for people who were not yet His friends.

Be precise so the typology strengthens rather than distorts. Jonathan is not a hidden symbol of Christ in every detail; rather, his covenant loyalty is a true if partial echo of the covenant love that God supremely reveals in the cross. The point is to let a beautiful human friendship lift the class’s eyes to the far greater faithfulness of God toward them in Christ.

Then close the circle to application. Being loved this way is the source and pattern of our love for others. We love because He first loved us. The teacher should help the class see that Jonathan-like love is not finally a matter of willpower but flows from being secure in the covenant love of Christ. People who know they are loved at infinite cost are freed to love others faithfully, even at cost to themselves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jonathan's loyalty as a reflection of God's covenant love
- God's steadfast, faithful love that holds at great cost to Himself
- Christ laying down His life for His friends, and for enemies (John 15:13)
- Careful typology: a true echo of, not a hidden code for, the cross
- Loving others because we have first been loved (1 John 4:19)
- Security in Christ's love as the source of faithful love for others

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jonathan's covenant loyalty give us a glimpse of God's love for us?
- In what way does Christ's love go even beyond Jonathan's?
- How does being loved by Christ at such cost free us to love others faithfully?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages, at Jonathan's knitted soul and Saul's narrowed eye. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this contrast between envy and covenant love. What is the single truth about loving others, or about guarding your heart from envy, that you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the contrast of the lesson and turns it toward response. The class has watched two hearts respond to the same blessing in opposite ways, and has held both up as a mirror. Now the aim is one specific, personal step.

Encourage concreteness over general resolve. One student may need to repent of a specific envy; another to love a particular friend more faithfully; another to trust God with a guarded future; another to put a tolerated sin to death. The value lies in naming one real thing.

Close by lifting the class's eyes to Christ, whose covenant love both forgives our Saul-like envy and forms in us a Jonathan-like heart. We do not generate this love by trying harder; we receive it from the One who loved us first, and we extend it to others. Send the class out not merely warned against envy but warmed by the love that drives it out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from the mirror of the text to a specific response
- Naming one concrete step in love or in guarding the heart
- Christ's love as both forgiveness and the power to change
- Letting one truth take hold this week
- Receiving love before extending it

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this lesson is God pressing on you most directly?
- What is one specific way you will love better or guard your heart this week?
- How does Christ's covenant love free you to respond differently?