

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

Lesson 3: Loyalty, Envy, and Covenant Friendship -- 1 Samuel 18:1–16; 1 Samuel 20:12–17

The day after the giant fell, David stood in the king's tent with Goliath's head still in his hand, and two men looked at him and felt two completely different things. One was the king. The other was the king's son. Saul looked at the young hero the crowds were already singing about and felt the first cold drip of something that would eventually swallow him whole. Jonathan looked at the same young man and felt his own soul knit to David's as if they had been one person all along. Same David. Same victory. Two hearts, and a world of difference between them.

Jonathan had everything to lose. He was the crown prince, the natural heir, the one who should have seen David as a rival to be managed or removed. Instead he stripped off his own robe and armor, his sword and his bow and his belt, and gave them to David. It was a staggering gesture. Jonathan was handing over the very symbols of his royal future to the man God had chosen to receive it. He loved David, the text says, as he loved his own soul, and he made a covenant with him. Here was a man large enough to celebrate a future that was not his own.

Saul went the other way, and the road down is always the same road. First the song that gave David ten thousands and Saul only thousands. Then the narrowed eye: "what more can he have but the kingdom?" Then the spear, thrown twice at the young man who was playing music to soothe him. Then the schemes, the demotions, the calculated dangers, the slow poisoning of a soul by a green and bitter thing. Saul was tormented, and the tragedy is that his torment was largely self-inflicted. He could not bear that God was with David, and the bearing of it ate him alive.

Two relationships, then, side by side in these chapters, and they hold up a mirror to our own hearts. There is the love of Jonathan, loyal, self-giving, glad to see another lifted up, faithful even when faithfulness is costly and unpopular. And there is the envy of Saul, that quiet sickness that cannot rejoice when someone else is blessed, that turns gifts into threats and friends into rivals. Most of us carry a little of both. The question this lesson asks is which one we are feeding, and what it would look like to love like Jonathan in a world that trains us to compete like Saul.

Group Discussion: Saul and Jonathan looked at the very same David and the very same victory, yet one was consumed with envy and the other was knit to him in love. Why do you think two people can witness the same blessing in someone's life and respond so differently? What does each response reveal about what was already in their hearts?

Personal Reflection: Be honest with yourself: whose response is more often yours when someone around you is blessed, promoted, praised, or succeeds in a way you have wanted for

yourself? Can you recall a recent moment when another person's good news quietly stirred something closer to Saul's envy than to Jonathan's gladness?

Read 1 Samuel 18:1–16; 1 Samuel 20:12–17

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Proverbs 14:30, envy as "rotteness to the bones" while a tranquil heart gives life; James 3:14–16, where jealousy and selfish ambition give rise to disorder and every vile practice; John 15:12–13, Jesus' command to love one another and the greater love of laying down one's life for friends; Philippians 2:3–4, counting others more significant and looking to their interests; 1 Samuel 19:1–7, Jonathan risking himself to defend David before his murderous father