

The Life of David

David and Jonathan's Friendship

1 Samuel 18:1-5

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Scripture

The battle between David and Goliath is over. Israel's champion and savior, David, has killed Goliath. The armies of Israel then routed the armies of the Philistines and chased them all the way back to their own territory. After that Saul's commander of the army, Abner, brought David to Saul so that Saul could find out about David's family. Saul's son Jonathan was at that meeting. Today's text tells us what happened next.

Let's read about David and Jonathan's friendship in 1 Samuel 18:1-5:

¹As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ²And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. ³Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants. (1 Samuel 18:1-5)

Introduction

How many of your Facebook friends are real friends? In other words, how many of your online friends would help if you were in trouble? Professor of evolutionary psychology Robin Dunbar put that question to the test. Citing a “dramatic

revolution in our social world,” he wondered if the size of your social media network had any correlation to having more friends in real life.

The average number of Facebook friends possessed by people was around 150. But, out of those 150, only 28, on average, we recognized as low-level “friends.” But when participants were asked how many of those friends would help out in a time of need, emotional distress, or other crisis, the average answer was four. Around 14 would at least express sympathy.

Conclusion: we might have 150 or even 5,000 Facebook friends, but our true relationship with the vast majority of these people is essentially insignificant.¹

Jonathan’s friendship with David is one of the truly remarkable expressions of faithful love given to us in Scripture.

Lesson

1 Samuel 18:1-5 shows us a remarkable expression of faithful love. Jonathan’s love for David is expressed in attitudes and in actions.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. Love Is Expressed in Attitudes
2. Love Is Expressed in Actions

I. Love Is Expressed in Attitudes

First, love is expressed in attitudes.

There are two attitudes that I want us to examine regarding Jonathan’s faithful love for David.

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/february/2022216.html>.

A. *Love Is Strong*

First, love is strong.

It is helpful to keep in mind that David was most likely still a teenager. Twenty was the age of conscription into the Israelite army at that time and, until he appeared on the battlefield, David was serving as shepherd on his father's farm in Bethlehem. On the other hand, Jonathan was much older than David. Jonathan was already a soldier in Saul's army. In fact, he commanded "about six hundred men" (1 Samuel 14:2). Some time prior to the battle between Goliath and David, Jonathan and his armor-bearer went to a Philistine garrison and killed twenty Philistine soldiers. This action caused panic throughout the Philistine camp, and they started killing each other. Eventually, the Philistines fled, and through the leadership of Jonathan the Lord saved Israel that day (14:23).

So, Jonathan was older than David. He was a national hero having defeated the Philistines, and he was perhaps even a hero to David, who would have known about the exploits of Jonathan. Jonathan was a courageous warrior who had previously saved the nation of Israel (14:1-23). Furthermore, Jonathan gained great recognition as the nation's savior and he was tremendously popular among the people (14:45). Moreover, Jonathan was in line to succeed his father Saul as the next king over Israel.

Therefore, it would be quite understandable if Jonathan was jealous of David's victory over Goliath, and his sudden, meteoric rise in popularity. Yet, astonishingly, verse 1a says, **"As soon as he [that is, David] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David."** This is the beginning of a deep and lasting friendship. Instead of there being *rivalry* between the two there is tremendous *unity*,

and it is Jonathan who expressed faithful love in this friendship.

The Hebrew word for “**knit**” (*qāšar*) in the expression “**the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David**” is very strong. One dictionary says that this word “denotes binding or tying something to something. It is also used of a binding together of human beings.”² Jonathan bound himself to David in the strongest possible way.

It seems to me that Jonathan's love for David was strong because Jonathan saw in David what he himself had: a love for God and for the people of God. David had been incensed by Goliath's defiance of the living God, and he had gone out and battled against one who defied the living God. Jonathan had earlier battled against the enemies of God because of his commitment to God and the people of God. The common bond between Jonathan and David was their faith in the Lord. That is what made Jonathan's love for David strong.

B. Love Is Selfless

And second, love is selfless.

Verse 1b says, “**...and Jonathan loved him** [that is, David] **as his own soul.**” In fact, this statement is repeated in verse 3b where we read that Jonathan “**loved him** [that is, David] **as his own soul.**” Jesus once said, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39) When you love someone as you love yourself, you are unselfish! It is not likely that Jonathan knew at this point that the Lord had selected David to be the next king over Israel. But, at whatever point it became

² Leonard J. Coppes, “2090 קָשַׁר,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 818.

clear to Jonathan that David was to be the next king and not himself, he was able to say to David in 1 Samuel 23:17, “You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you.” Even though Jonathan was next in line to be king, he gladly submitted to God’s will and affirmed David as the next king over Israel. And in this regard he was selfless.

Richard Phillips writes, “What we see in Jonathan is nothing less than a man who has been set free from worldly thinking and selfish concerns so as to truly love God and others.”³ Jonathan was not selfish wanting power and possessions and people for himself. His focus was on God and the things of God. And because he trusted fully in the Lord, he was freed from the trappings of self and selfishness. He was able to give himself wholeheartedly and freely to love God and others. His ultimate priority was not himself; his ultimate priority was the Lord.

I think Jonathan would have agreed with John Piper who has famously said, “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” Jonathan was satisfied in the Lord. He was concerned about the glory and honor of the Lord, and he wanted the Lord’s name to be magnified. And so, when David came along and valiantly defeated Goliath when no-one else would do so, Jonathan found a kindred spirit. And he selflessly loved David.

Well, Jonathan’s love was expressed in attitudes.

II. Love Is Expressed in Actions

And second, love is expressed in actions.

³ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 318.

There are two actions that I want us to examine regarding Jonathan's faithful love for David.

A. Love Is Covenantal

First, love is covenantal.

Verse 3 says, **“Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.”** A **“covenant”** (*bērit*) is “an agreement between two parties...the exact relationships of the two parties will vary according to context.”⁴ In fact, Jonathan repeated this covenant with David two more times in the months and years ahead, as we read in 1 Samuel 20:16 and 23:18. Jonathan's covenant with David represents commitment, dedication, and loyalty in his love for David.

Allow me to digress for a moment. There have been attempts in recent years to say that there are sexual overtones in the relationship between Jonathan and David. In fact, some would go so far as to say that theirs was a homosexual relationship. I would heartily agree with Richard Phillips who writes, “...to paint sexual overtones onto this passage are both perverse and preposterous.”⁵ Scripture always describes homosexuality as sinful. And there is nothing, nothing at all, in the entire Scripture to suggest that Jonathan and David had an improper relationship.

What we do know from the rest of Scripture is that Jonathan's friendship with David was a remarkable expression of faithful love, the love of two very close friends. This covenant love was expressed not just in words but in deeds. Later we

⁴ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁵ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, 319.

shall see Jonathan risking his own life to protect David from the evil intentions of his father, Saul. And much later David expressed his covenant love to Jonathan by taking care of Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, who was brought into David's life-long care after Jonathan's death.

A covenantal love between friends is committed, dedicated, and loyal. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo Baggins, a hobbit, is given the unenviable task of destroying a ring in The Cracks of Doom in a dark and evil land called Mordor. His task is fraught with mortal danger.

Gandalf, the wizard, understands such a perilous journey could cause anyone to become discouraged. Gandalf encourages Frodo's best friend, Samwise Gamgee, to accompany Frodo on the trip. In fact, Gandalf makes Samwise promise he will never leave Frodo. Several other brave individuals accompany Frodo as well. These nine travelers become the "Fellowship of the Ring."

Well into the journey, the lives of those in the Fellowship have been endangered on multiple occasions. Concerned for the safety of his friends, Frodo makes a private and noble decision to slip away from his friends and make the remainder of the journey on his own. Frodo steps into a boat and quietly pushes away from the shore.

Suddenly, the branches on the sloping hill above the shore begin to snap and give way to a tiny hobbit warrior. Samwise Gamgee crashes through the branches and onto the shore shouting, "Frodo! Mr. Frodo!"

Frodo yells back, "Go back, Sam! I'm going to Mordor alone!"

Sam is not deterred. He continues toward Frodo, splashing into the river up to his waist. "Of course you are, and I'm coming with you!"

“You can’t swim!” Frodo shouts. “Sam! Sam!”

Sam tries desperately to swim out to the boat. Frodo watches as Sam begins to sink beneath the murky surface of the river.

Frodo reaches down and grabs Sam’s wrist, pulling him up and into the boat. Frodo looks at Sam as if to say, “Why? Why would you risk your life attempting to swim out to me?”

A soaking wet Sam sees the question in Frodo’s eyes and says, “I made a promise, Mr. Frodo. A promise. ‘Don’t you leave him, Samwise Gamgee.’ And I don’t mean to. I don’t mean to.”

Frodo embraces Sam. “Come on,” he smiles.⁶

Love is covenantal.

B. *Love Is Giving*

And second, love is giving.

Having just made a covenant with David, we read in verse 4, **“And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.”** Much more is going on here than meets the eye at first glance. Now the text does not tell us what Jonathan was thinking. But any careful reader of the text will know what is going on. The **robe** that Jonathan gave to David was not just any robe. It was his royal robe. It was a symbol of the kingdom of Israel. Jonathan wore it because he was Saul’s son, and everyone assumed that Jonathan was next in line to be king over Israel. John Woodhouse writes, “Jonathan was symbolically transferring his own royal rights

⁶ *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (New Line Cinema, 2001), directed by Peter Jackson, based on the novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, screenplay by Frances Walsh.

and prerogatives (chief of which was his legitimate claim to the throne in Israel) to David.”⁷

The documentary *A King's Story* tells the story of the life of Great Britain's King Edward VIII and his abdication of the throne for the love of a woman.

Amid a nationwide and often rancorous public debate, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin had cautioned the king not to marry Mrs. Wallace Simpson, a divorced woman, so as to keep his throne. The king had to make a choice.

The king agonized for several days over the impending crisis in Parliament and his deeply personal dilemma. On December 10, 1936, with his three brothers beside him, the King signed with firm hand the instrument of abdication. The eleven months of his reign ended.

The night before, on December 9, the King called Mrs. Simpson to inform her of his decision. When she pleaded with him not to abdicate, he said: “The abdication documents are being drawn up. You can do whatever you wish. You can go wherever you want. But wherever you go, I will follow you!”⁸

To show how completely Jonathan gave himself to David, we read that Jonathan gave David **“his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt”** (18:4b). Woodhouse writes, “This was nothing less than an act of abdication. It may not have been official, and it may not have been publicly known, but the covenant (v. 3), we may now reasonably suppose, had something to do with David and Jonathan's respective prospects for power in Israel. David would take precedence, and Jonathan would rejoice!”⁹

⁷ John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 350.

⁸ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2003/july/14486.html>.

⁹ John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*, 350.

That is love that is giving.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 1 Samuel 18:1-5, we should see Jonathan's love for David as God's special gift to his anointed servant.

Jonathan quickly understood, as no-one else at the time did, that God had anointed David to be the next king over Israel. He did not chafe under God's plan. He did not resent David's promotion over his own. Indeed, he loved David and submitted to him and served him faithfully to the end of his days.

Jesus is David's greater Son. He is God's anointed servant who calls for us to submit to him and to give him our love and allegiance and obedience.

Jonathan took off his royal robe and gave it to David. Jonathan took off his royal symbols of power and leadership and gave it to David. The Puritan Matthew Henry writes, "Our Lord Jesus has thus shown his love to us, that he stripped himself to clothe us, emptied himself to enrich us; nay, he did more than Jonathan, he clothed himself with our rags, whereas Jonathan did not put on David's."¹⁰

Oh, dear friends, let us thank God for Jesus. Let us submit ourselves to him and thank him for clothing himself with our filthy rags of disobedience and sin, and giving us his robes of righteousness. Amen.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 415.

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is:

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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