

Friends Forever

1 Samuel 18

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Turn with me now to 1 Samuel chapter 18. The last time we were in 1 Samuel it was in the morning service and we were looking at chapter 17 — David killed the Philistine (pronounced long “i”), or Philistine (pronounced short “i”), Goliath, and cut off his head. And then at the end of chapter 17, the king, Saul, inquires — verse 56 — whose son the boy is. And he asks his chief military officer Abner who doesn't seem to know, and sends for David and asks in verse 58, “Whose son are you, young man?” And David answered, “I am the son of your servant Jesse, the Bethlehemite.”

And my wife was asking me on the way home why was Saul asking who David was when he already knew who David was. David was already in his service. Well, he's not asking who David is, he obviously knew David. He wanted to know whose family David was from. It's a southern question that Saul is asking. He wants to know David's pedigree, and that because, at this point at least at the end of chapter 17, he wants perhaps to ensure that David spend the rest of his useful military life in Saul's army and for that perhaps he would need to ask Jesse, David's father.

Well now we turn to chapter 18 and a story about a wonderful friendship of Jonathan and David. Before we do that, let's look to God in prayer.

Father, we thank You again for the Scriptures, for the Word of God, for that which has been breathed out by You and profitable for doctrine and reproof and correction and instruction in the way of righteousness that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. Now grant Your blessing as we read the Scriptures together. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

As soon as he (that is Saul) had finished (David had finished) speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 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. And 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.

As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out and all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that day on.

The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice.

Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul. So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people. And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him. And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

Then Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him." And David said to Saul, "Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?" But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.

Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. Saul thought, "Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then become the king's son-in-law.'" And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?" And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak." Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.'" Now Saul thought to make David fall by

the hand of the Philistines. And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife. But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.

Then the princes of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

Well, thus far God's holy and inerrant Word.

I. Jonathan's friendship.

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid; Frodo Baggins and Sam Gandy; Jonathan and David — friends, exceptional friends. And I want first of all tonight to examine that section — David's friendship with Jonathan, or perhaps more accurately, Jonathan's friendship with David. Jonathan was Saul's son. He would have been a little older I think than David. He was already a decorated soldier. He had gained several military victories in battles in previous chapters here in 1 Samuel. And he hears his father Saul asking David about his father and his lineage and has no doubt watched David in battle against Goliath and there is an immediate bond between Jonathan and David. "His soul," the Scripture says, "was knit to the soul of David." "He loved him," the text says, "as his own soul." It's as one of the puritans says, "It's almost as though there's one soul in two bodies." Two warriors, two soldiers — what is it they say, Marines? "Hooah." Jonathan and David - there's a bond. It goes deeper than ordinary friendship. It goes deeper than anything we've seen so far in the life of David and Jonathan does something extraordinary — he makes a covenant with David. The Hebrew is, "he cuts a covenant." It's that typical Hebraic way of describing what making a covenant involved.

Think of that passage in Genesis 15 in the life of Abraham when animals are sacrificed and severed in two pieces and they pass between the severed pieces. That's probably what took place here between Jonathan and David — a ritual of self-maledictory oath. That is to say, they're saying to themselves, "May we be sacrificed, may we be torn apart like these animals if our friendship and the loyalty to our friendship ceases." It's countercultural. You understand what a prince like Jonathan, an heir to the throne like Jonathan, what he was expected to do with an upstart usurper like David. You kill him. You get rid of him. You don't make a covenant with him. Your soul is not knit to him.

Now of course we can't read this passage without being aware of contemporary interpretations of this passage and some of you are grimacing because you can almost guess where contemporary commentaries have gone. Yes, this is an example of homosexuality. This is an example of gay love between two men. I read several commentaries of a more liberal sort over this week and it just took my breath away, the liberties that they took with this text. This is an example of male friendship in its purest form, in its most sublime form — a friendship between two warriors, a friendship between two soldiers, who had experienced what it is to have one's life threatened and almost taken away, that they could relate even though Jonathan and David come from opposite sides of the tracks. Jonathan is a prince, an heir to the throne. David is a pauper. It's not clear to me whether Jonathan knows about David's anointing by Samuel. He may well not have known that. His action here is astonishing. He takes off his robe, hands it to David, his sword, his armor, his belt — he's passing over succession rights to David. It's an act of self-denial. This is not the action of an effeminate Jonathan who doesn't really want to be in battle and in war. There was a TV series about a year ago on one of the main channels. It was playing out the life of David and Jonathan, the early life of David and Jonathan. Jonathan in this series was most decidedly gay and homosexual and there were no holes barred as to how they identified Jonathan. The series didn't make series two thankfully. It was banned. Jonathan is a soldier but he sees in David a soul mate, someone with whom he can share a male friendship.

I have a dear friend. I've known him for thirty five years, almost, almost without fail since I've been here in the United States the last fourteen years, I call him on a Sunday afternoon. I didn't call him today. It's been a little odd. I didn't call him today because it's his fiftieth birthday and he was out of town. He and his wife have taken the day off. I talked to him yesterday, on a Saturday. Usually when I talk to him it's Sunday. He's in London, and usually he's at the end of his day. He's preached his two sermons and I'm still frantically trying to think about my evening sermon. He's relaxed and I'm a little frenetic and the conversation always revolves around "What have you preached and what are you going to preach?" We've shared all kinds of things. He's someone I could tell anything to. I could share the most intimate things of my life and know that I could trust him, that he wouldn't email, that he wouldn't begin calling on the phone. This is the relationship, this is the bond between Jonathan and David. It's a "Band of Brothers" story. It's that kind of relationship. "Your love to me," David says — you know when Jonathan dies, in the first chapter of 2 Samuel when Jonathan dies, David says, "Your love to me has been extraordinary, surpassing the love of women." How the mighty have fallen.

C. S. Lewis said, "Friendship is the greatest of worldly goods, certainly to me it is the chief happiness of life." Ligon has really close friends and in staff meeting, sometimes when he's been around them, you can sense how meaningful they are to him. Have you got a friend like that? I want you to take care of that

relationship. That friendship needs to be nurtured and fed and thanked for, to thank God that in His providence He's given you a friend, a friend — what does the book of Proverbs say? “A friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Maybe it's your spouse, or maybe it's not a friend like Jonathan and David, but maybe it's Jesus. What did Jesus say? You know it's interesting to me that when the gospels describe the calling of the disciples, in Mark's gospel, Mark says, “He called the disciples in order that they might be with Him,” as though Jesus needed human companionship. The special relationship that John had with Jesus, that Jesus would give His mother's care into John's hands. What did He say in the Upper Room to His disciples? “I don't call you disciples, I call you friends.” “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry every thing to Him in prayer.” It's a great thing in God's sweet, tender providence to have friends. Be thankful for them.

II. Saul's jealousy.

The second thing I want us to see here is Saul's jealousy or Saul's envy. Now counselors, and we've got some professional counselors here tonight, and this is where you make your shekels in this chapter because you must be having a field day trying to analyze this tortured soul of Saul. Schizophrenic, split personality disorder, paranoia for sure, depressive episodes for sure, mood swings for sure, episodic rage — it's all here in this chapter. When the Philistine campaign was over David is coming back. He's had great success and the women are out in the street and they're singing to tambourines and they're dancing and they've got a little ditty that they're singing — that Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands. Not good. It's guaranteed to annoy someone who has a fixation for fame and self-importance. David has come out of nowhere like, what's her name? Susan Boyle! I didn't buy the CD, I'm sorry. “I Dreamed a Dream” from, what is it? From *Les Mis*. And three billion viewings on YouTube and still counting. The most sold CD I think perhaps ever. This nobody, this upstart. Saul is both insecure and envious and jealous. Verse 9 — “He eyed David.” Verse 12 — “He's afraid of David.” Verse 15 — “He's in fearful awe of David.” In verse 29 — “He's even more afraid of David.” But it's that tenth verse, isn't it? “A harmful spirit” — some of your versions might say, “an evil spirit” — “a harmful spirit rushed upon Saul.”

But it's not just that, is it? It's a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul. When bad things happen, yes, they happen by God's decree. Nothing happens outside of the will of God. Think of Job. It's God who says to Satan, “Have you considered My servant, Job?” What does Peter say on the Day of Pentecost about the crucifixion of Jesus? He says to the Jews in Jerusalem, “It was you by wicked hands who took Him and slew Him and yet it was all by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God.” God has departed from Saul. God has allowed a harmful spirit now to come upon Saul and to distress him. David is the morning star and Saul is the setting sun. Jealousy and envy overtakes Saul. It's

that spirit that when somebody gets a promotion, when somebody gets applause, when somebody gets success and it isn't you and you feel resentment and bitterness and anger because we deserve that, that should have been mine, and it leads to all kinds of neurosis and paranoia and who knows what in Saul. Saul has abandoned God. He made his own reputation an idol.

Some of you are studying Tim Keller's *Counterfeit gods*. Well, here is an example of — he's made his own reputation his idol, his god. It was envy that killed Jesus. It's an awful, ugly thing. The gospels say it was out of envy that they handed Jesus over to Pontius Pilate, out of envy, envy because the people hurt Him gladly, envy because who wants to listen to Pharisees and Sadducees droning on about six hundred and something interpretations of the Law. Saul's envy, it's in all of our hearts. You don't have to dig down deep to find it. It's there. When someone gets success, when someone's family seems to do so much better than yours, when someone's children seem to advance so much better than yours and you're filled with envy. And my dear friends, I beg you tonight, repent of it. Turn away from it. It's an ugly, detestable sin. Turn to Jesus with that envy and ask Him to take it away.

III. The Lord's presence

But the third thing I want us to see is the Lord's presence. Did you get that as we were reading this passage? Three times — verse 12, verse 14, verse 28 — “The Lord was with David.” Four times we read of David's success. Six times we read of love, the verb love, with respect to David as the object. Jonathan loved David, the women loved David, the Israelites loved David, Saul's servants loved David, Michal loved David.

There's a description here of David's marriage to Michal. He was promised the older sister but got the younger one instead. Saul has this plot — we'll be looking at it again in chapter 19 because the story continues in chapter 19. Saul thinks that if he puts David out in front of the Philistines, the Philistines will do his job for him. He's already had these, what are they, turns — these episodic rages with a spear and David and managed to dodge them twice. It's not until the first verse of chapter 19 that David is fully aware that Saul is actually trying to kill him. Perhaps in chapter 18 David is just thinking this is one of Saul's turns, as he's playing the lyre. But if David is put out in front of the Philistines perhaps Saul's desire to see him dead will be accomplished. But instead, David is victorious. Even — we won't go into these hundred foreskin things. It's all a bit yucky. You know, Egyptians cut off hands, and Assyrians cut off heads, and well this is what Saul desired. It was a proof and a guarantee for sure that the Philistines were dead. At least they were dead before they were mutilated.

The point is, get past that. The point is at every turn David's success is attributed to the presence of God. God was with him. That's a beautiful thing. That's a

beautiful thing. When Paul was in Corinth he had a vision. You remember? Not to be afraid because “I am with you. I have many people in this city. I am with you, Paul” just as He was with Joseph when he had been falsely accused of rape and imprisoned and the text says, “I am with you.” You know I love that Tyndale translation. Tyndale says, “God was with Joseph and he was a lucky fellow.” That's Tyndale's translation of Genesis 39. It's a wonderful thing to have God with you. When you're walking in covenant with God, in fellowship with God, in friendship with Jesus, hand in hand with Jesus, to be able to know, to be able to be assured — come what may, in sickness and in health, He will never leave me nor forsake me. “Even when I walk in the valley of the shadow of death” David wrote in the twenty third psalm, “Thou art with me.” Even there.

My friends, when John Wesley was dying — what an astonishing man, what a great man John Wesley was. What an evangelist he was. What a heart — travelling thousands and thousands and thousands of miles on horseback to preach the Gospel to sinners. And when he was dying his friends gathered around him and began to recite to him the promises of God from the Scriptures and all of a sudden he sits up in bed and he says, “And best yet, God is with us. God is with us.” May we walk every day in that assurance and in the comfort and the blessedness of that thought that God is truly with us.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You that these stories, though they are thousands of years ago, yet by Your Spirit they come alive in our own lives and experiences. We thank You for friendships. We pray that You would deliver us from a spirit of envy and jealousy. And we pray that You would give us an assurance that You are always with us. Help us to walk in Your ways to fear Your name, and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand to receive the Lord's benediction.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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