

Friends Forever
1 Samuel 18:1-19:24
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C.S. Lewis wrote: *"Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy or art. It has no survival value. Rather, it is one of those things that gives value to survival."*

In his wonderful book, The Four Loves, Lewis argues that friendship or brotherly love (phileo) is usually superior to romantic love (eros) because it is more lasting, more rational, and not so fragilely tied to emotions. He adds, however, that Christian love (agape) is superior to both because it is rooted in God's unconditional love.

Lewis believed friendship was one of God's greatest gifts to humanity. He once asked, *"Is any pleasure greater than a circle of Christian friends around a fire?"* I am not sure if he said that before or after he was married.

Folks, I think Lewis is on to something. Oh, I am all for romantic love. Great joy can be found in those relationships. However, I think our society's obsession with romantic love – something evident in music, movies, etc. – causes us to often ignore and miss the joy that can be found in friendship. Even within the church we often fail to appreciate the value of deep, committed friendships and how they can enrich our lives.

Friends, today our journey through the book of 1 Samuel brings us to chapters 18-19, where we will find one of the greatest examples of friendship – not just in the Bible, but in recorded history – David and Jonathan. If you have your Bible, go ahead and turn there (page 241 in the pew Bibles).

Let's pause and pray that the Lord would enable us to hear his word and realize what it means for our lives and friendships today.

As we go through this portion of the Bible, the background that needs to be kept in mind is this: Saul is the current king of Israel. He has been for many years. David is the anointed king, the one God has chosen to be the new leader of the people.

There is an almost inevitable tension between the two. At the end of chapter 17, after the Lord

had used David to defeat the Philistine giant Goliath, Saul expresses his desire for David to permanently live and serve in the king's residence. 1 Samuel 18:2 says that is what happened. Yet, in that setting, another important relationship is formed – one between David and Saul's son, Jonathan.

1 Samuel 18:1b – Jonathan was bound to David in close friendship, and loved him as much as he loved himself.

The Hebrew phrase is literally, "the life of Jonathan was bound to the life of David." This close relationship is then cemented with a covenant, a promise of loyalty to one another.

1 Samuel 18:3-4 – Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as much as himself. Then Jonathan removed the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his military tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt.

Two things about this friendship are important to note:

#1 There is apparently a significant age gap between David and Jonathan.

Now, I always thought David and Jonathan were about the same age. Yet, he may have been old enough to be David's father. How do we know that? By doing the math. Saul was king for about forty years. We also know (2 Samuel 5:4) that David was 30 years old when he became king. That means he was born after Saul had already been ruling for ten years.

Then, 1 Samuel 13 talks about Jonathan fighting in his father's army. Apparently that happened in the third year of Saul's reign, meaning seven years before David was born. Since a soldier in Israel was to be at least 20 years old. Thus, Jonathan would be about 27 years old when David is born.

Now, it's possible our translations of Hebrew numbers are inaccurate. Maybe it was the thirteenth year of Saul's reign when Jonathan

served in the army. Yet, Jonathan was clearly a few years older than David.

One of the lessons for us is that friendships – deep, committed friendships – can exist between people who are of different ages.

#2 David and Jonathan do not have a homosexual relationship.

Now, some of you may scoff even at that thought, thinking it totally ridiculous. Yet, some people read the passage and think this is obviously the type of relationship being described. In their mind, the depth of love these two men have for each other can only happen within a sexual relationship; and since they are both males, it is clearly a homosexual bond. Some would argue that the age difference makes that even more apparent.

However, this is the Old Testament, 1000 years before the birth of Jesus, not 21st century America. There is no way that David and Jonathan's relationship would have been celebrated like our text does if it was homosexual in nature.

Of course, the reason why some folks get confused is because, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, they don't realize how loving a non-erotic friendship can be. They fail to recognize that people don't need sex to be deeply committed to each other. There is zero indication that David and Jonathan have a homosexual relationship.

OK, back to our text where we see a number of complicated relationships.

1 Samuel 18:5 – David marched out with the army and was successful in everything Saul sent him to do. Saul put him in command of the fighting men, which pleased all the people and Saul's servants as well.

1 Samuel 18:6b-7 – When David was returning from killing the Philistine, the women came out from all the cities of Israel to meet King Saul, singing and dancing with tambourines, with shouts of joy, and with three-stringed instruments. As they danced, the women sang: Saul has killed his thousands, but David has tens of thousands.

Oh, oh, David is not just popular, but he is *more popular* than Saul, the current king.

1 Samuel 18:8-9 – Saul was furious and resented this song. “What more can he have but the kingdom?” So Saul watched David jealously from that day forward.

And folks, that last sentence is the key to almost everything that happens in the rest of the book of 1 Samuel. Saul is jealous or envious of David. We are able to see how destructive envy can be.

As the story continues (vs 10-11), Saul twice throws a spear at David, attempting to kill him. Each time, however, David escapes without being harmed.

1 Samuel 18:12 – Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had left Saul.

A very sad truth, for which Saul has only himself to blame. Saul then makes David an officer in his army, probably just to get him away from the people with whom he is becoming so popular. However, David excels in that role and his popularity grows. So Saul comes up with another plan.

1 Samuel 18:17 – Saul told David, “Here is my oldest daughter Merab. I'll give her to you as a wife, if you will be a warrior for me and fight the LORD's battles.” But Saul was thinking, “I don't need to raise a hand against him; let the hand of the Philistines be against him.”

If David gets killed in battle, Saul thinks his problems will be solved. Yet, David refuses the offer, claiming he doesn't believe he is worthy of being the king's son-in-law. I am not sure whether David really believed that or was simply avoiding the trap Saul was setting.

However, Saul's daughter Michal (vs 20) really wants to marry David, and so Saul sees another opportunity to get rid of him. He says David can marry Michal if he kills a hundred Philistines. I hope you are not too offended by the “negotiations” surrounding their marriage. In the ancient world, women were often treated kind of like property. At least in this case, Michal

really does want to be David's wife. And apparently David has some affection for her.

He eventually agrees to the so-called "bride-price" and goes to battle the Philistines. However, rather than being killed, as Saul hoped would occur, David is victorious, slaying 200 Philistines. David and Michal get married, but that makes Saul even more unhappy.

1 Samuel 18:28-29 – Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved him, and he became even more afraid of David. As a result, Saul was David's enemy from then on.

Saul had already tried to kill David in a fit of rage. Now, apparently, he hates David even when he is in a good mood. Yet, as David continues to lead soldiers in Saul's army, his fame and popularity continue to grow.

As we come to chapter 19, Saul's hatred reaches a new level. He is no longer going to count on the Philistines to kill David in battle.

1 Samuel 19:1a – Saul ordered his son Jonathan and all his servants to kill David.

At this point, Jonathan has a big decision to make. Will he be loyal to his father or to David? He chooses the latter.

1 Samuel 19:1b-2a – Jonathan liked David very much, so he told him: "My father Saul intends to kill you."

They then make plans to keep David safe. Jonathan also appeals to his father.

1 Samuel 19:4b-5 – He said to Saul: "The king should not sin against his servant David. He hasn't sinned against you; in fact, his actions have been a great advantage to you. He took his life in his hands when he struck down the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it and rejoiced, so why would you sin against innocent blood by killing David for no reason?"

Apparently because the appeal came from his son...

1 Samuel 19:6 – Saul listened to Jonathan's advice and swore an oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be killed."

With that promise, David is back serving Saul, both as a musician and as a military leader. Yet, once again Saul tries to kill David by throwing a spear at him. David escapes, but...

1 Samuel 19:11a – Saul sent agents to David's house to watch for him and kill him in the morning.

This time it is not David's friend, Jonathan, but his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, who helps him escape.

1 Samuel 19:12b – She lowered David from the window, and he fled and escaped. Then Michal took the household idol and put it on the bed, placed some goat hair on its head, and covered it with a garment. When Saul sent agents to seize David, Michal said, "He's sick."

Saul eventually discovers it is not David, but a statue. He confronts Michal for deceiving him, but she continues to deceive her father and protect herself by telling Saul David had threatened her.

1 Samuel 19:18 – So David fled and escaped and went to Samuel at Ramah and told him everything Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel left and stayed at Naioth.

This is a section of the village of Ramah, perhaps where shepherds stayed. Saul learns where David is and sends agents to arrest or kill him there. David has been aided by his friend Jonathan and his wife Michal, but now God intervenes directly to protect him. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon the agents; and instead of capturing David, they focus on "prophesying" – meaning apparently they gave praise and prayers to God. Finally Saul himself goes to Ramah where the Spirit of God comes upon him.

1 Samuel 19:24 – Saul then removed his clothes and also prophesied before Samuel; he collapsed and lay naked all that day and all that night. That is why they say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

The Lord has made sure Saul will not harm David at Naioth in Ramah.

OK, that is our text today. There are many interesting things here, but I want to focus on two points we should keep in mind.

#1 Our text reminds us that our ultimate loyalty should not be to any human relationship, but to God.

Jonathan basically has to choose between his father and his best friend. Michal has to choose between her dad and her husband. Three thousand years later, people still face those types of choices. I know some of you have sometimes felt torn between competing loyalties. You may even be feeling that way this morning. Whenever something like this occurs, our priority needs to be to honor the Lord.

The Bible speaks of a variety of relationships where we have specific responsibilities: Children are to obey their parents, and even when we are adults, we are to honor our father and mother. Those who are employees are to serve their employers. Students are to mind their teachers. Citizens are to obey their government. And yes, (Ephesians 5) wives are to submit to their husbands. And, perhaps even more controversial, (Hebrews 13:17) church members are to obey their church leaders.

Yet, none of these individuals or institutions have inherent authority. Their authority is always derived from God and subject to him. This means that whenever they tell someone to do something contrary to what God desires, they forfeit their authority. We should not obey them in those situations.

Now, you may come up with some unusual scenario where it seems prudent to submit to an authority not giving godly direction. But, in general, the basic rule is, as Peter and John say in...

Acts 5:29 – We must obey God rather than men.

When Saul is plotting to kill David, he is doing evil and forfeits his parental authority. It is a good thing for Jonathan and Michal to help David

instead of their father. That is what honored the Lord.

Friend, whenever a parent, a spouse, an employer, a pastor or any authority tells you to do something which dishonors the Lord, you should not do it. In that particular situation, these folks have forfeited their authority.

Now, if your boss asks you to lie to a customer and be dishonest, for example, the easy path is to just do what he says. Yet, I think the Bible is pretty clear. Your responsibility to honor the Lord trumps any responsibility you have to your employer.

And let me just say, if any of you are in a situation where you are afraid to do the right thing because of how a parent, spouse, employer or another authority might react, feel free to give me a call. That would be a good thing to talk about.

#2 We should make an effort to develop and maintain godly friendships.

The story of David and Jonathan is one that continues throughout 1 Samuel. We are not going to take time to trace that this morning, but even from our text today I think we see some important qualities of true friendship.

1) It is built on a common interest or concern.

C.S. Lewis notes that in erotic or romantic relationships, the focus of love is the other person. Phileo or friendship love always involves something outside of the two people. Friends will share a hobby like fishing, golf or quilting. A couple of moms with preschoolers may become friends because they share an interest in being a good mom. A Packer fan and a Viking fan may even be friends because they both enjoy watching and talking about NFL football.

This means that when a common interest no longer exists, friendships often fade.

For about eight years, when our two oldest boys were in Jr. High and Sr. High School, we spent a lot of time with a particular group of people. What did we have in common? Our sons were playing basketball and baseball together. We were the parents who spent many hours

watching the games. These people became our friends. Yet, when Ben and then Brady graduated from high school, almost all of those friendships began to fade. We still like those people. We just don't have as much in common. We seldom make an effort to get together with them anymore.

Folks, I think David and Jonathan had a deep friendship based on their desire to honor their Lord and their concern for the nation of Israel. That is what had drawn them together. That is what kept them together. That was the foundation for a good friendship.

I also believe that if two people are committed to trusting, following and serving Jesus Christ, they can be friends. Not necessarily best friends, but the love we have experienced through Jesus should, indeed, flow over in love for our fellow believers in Christ.

1 John 4:11 – Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

“But, Pastor Dan, you can't expect me to be friends with everyone else in this room!” Maybe not. But I do believe that if you love the Lord Jesus and desire to honor him, you have a foundation which will enable you to be a good friend with any other person who loves the Lord Jesus and desires to honor him.

2) The second quality of true friendship we see with Jonathan and David is a commitment to one another.

Now, I don't believe we need to swear an oath to each other as they did or sign a friendship contract. Yet, we do need to be intentional in our friendships. We need to take the initiative to stay in touch and communicate. Waiting to call, email or message someone because it is that person's “turn” to initiate is a good way to let a friendship die. When there seems to be a bit of tension in a relationship with a friend, it is always your responsibility to make the first move, take the first step, in working things out with the other person.

And when a friend could use some encouragement or help, we must not adopt the “*a friend in need is a friend to be avoided*” attitude. We need to work to make our time, money and

energy available to that other person because, well, that is what friends do.

Last week, Nancy and I spent a few days in Eau Claire for a little reunion with about a dozen of my friends from college. These are friendships that started over forty years ago. Yes, some of them have kind of faded over the years. I am closer to some of the folks than others. Yet, they are friendships built on a solid foundation of a common love for Jesus Christ and a desire to honor him.

Our experience of God's grace in Jesus Christ has enabled us to forgive each other, be generous toward one another, and avoid unrealistic expectations of each other.

We didn't sit around a fire, like C.S. Lewis mentioned, but we did sit around a table outside of Culvers drinking shakes and malts and enjoying some wonderful fellowship as we talked about how we have experienced God's grace and encouraged each other to keep growing in our faith.

Within this room there are many wonderful friendships. These are the relationships which make good times even more fun and provide the support and encouragement we need to keep trusting and following the Lord Jesus when times get tough.

Folks, may the Lord help us develop godly friendships. May these friendships be built on our common faith in Jesus and be characterized by a commitment to help one another become the men and women he has called us to be.