

10. Len says that our social media makes us hunger more and more for face-to-face relationships but that the church is not poised to do this well because it is a place of doctrine. What does he mean by this? Do you think he's right?

## EXPERIMENTS IN STORY

This week's session is all about characters and the role they play in good stories. For "Experiments in Story" this week you are invited to reflect on the key characters in your own story.

Imagine your life as an unfolding narrative and select three people who have been significant in shaping your story so far. Write down their names in your journal, and after each name, make a few notes about why that person is important to you. Consider whether that person is a positive or negative influence. Explain your answers.

Now write their names down again.

This time consider who you are in *their* stories. Make a few notes about how you imagine you might fit in with the unfolding narrative of *their* lives. Are you a good influence on them?

Make a note of anything you learned and be prepared to share during the next session.

## EXPLORING THE STORY FURTHER

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Day 1 \_\_\_\_\_

### 1 SAMUEL 19:1-3

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Saul ordered his son Jonathan and all his servants to *figure out a way* to kill David, but Jonathan was very fond of David.

**Jonathan** (*warning David*): My father wants you dead. Watch out tomorrow morning. Think of a safe place to hide that nobody knows about. I will go into the field near where you are hiding, and I will speak on your behalf to my father. If I learn anything, I will tell you.

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Read the scripture for today and consider:

- ☒ Have you ever felt like someone was out to get you? How did that make you feel and what did you do about it?

At this point in the story, David has been anointed the true king of Israel. Saul, the reigning king, mentally unraveled and tried to murder David. It was an intense conflict that must have been painful, considering David's close relationship with Saul's son Jonathan. In your life, there may be people who are out to get you.

They may not be trying to literally murder you, but like Saul, they might be relentless in their attacks and even try to get others to do their dirty work for them.

We would do well to observe how David navigated these conditions. He never took matters into his own hands. He never plotted a preemptive strike or tried to turn Jonathan against his father. Instead, he trusted God for his care, protection, and sustenance. This doesn't mean David did not bemoan his condition. The Psalms are full of places where David cried out for justice (Ps. 56) and even demanded that God destroy his enemies (Ps. 143:12). The important thing is that he left it all in God's hands. He told the truth about what he felt in prayer, but he left the justice to the Lord. Can you do the same? How can you follow David's example in dealing with your enemies?

❏ Who are your enemies and why are they your enemies?

❏ What does it mean for you to trust God to do justice?

❏ Are you "the enemy" in any one else's story right now? If so, what can you learn from this situation in 1 Samuel?

- How does Jesus' teaching to "pray for those . . . who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44) apply to your enemies?



## Day 2

### 1 SAMUEL 18:1-4

By the time David had finished speaking to Saul, *Saul's son Jonathan* was bound to David *in friendship*, and Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. Saul took David *into his service* on that day and would not let him return to his father's home. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as he loved himself. He took off the robe he wore and gave it to David, and also his armor, sword, bow, and belt, *symbolically transferring to David his right to ascend the throne*.

Read the scriptures for today and consider:

- Who are a few of your best friends today? What makes them good friends?

The relationship between David and Jonathan is one of the most beautiful depictions of friendship found in the Bible. What makes it so compelling is not simply the depth of affection the two friends have for each other, but it is the way they put their love for each other into action. We get a small snapshot of this in the reading for this morning.

Jonathan is the political heir to the throne of Israel, but David is God's choice. Jonathan knows this, so he makes the incredibly difficult choice to lay down his rights and give away his claim on the throne to David. He does so because, as the text repeats, he "loved David as he loved himself." His love for David is expressed in selfless action. Our closest friendships will have markers of this same dynamic.

What makes a friendship strong is a mix of affection, vulnerability, and sacrifice. We see this between David and Jonathan in the scripture today. Affection is present in the way Jonathan loves David as himself. Vulnerability is pictured in the way he takes off his armor and weapons. Sacrifice is demonstrated when Jonathan hands over his right to the throne. How much affection, vulnerability, and sacrifice are present in your friendships? How much do you expect from your friends and how much do you bring to the table yourself? What is one way you can put love-in-action in your significant friendships? Exploring questions like these will bring more intentionality to our friendships and open up their power in our story.

- ❏ Which of these three (affection, vulnerability, and sacrifice) do you value most in your friendships?

- Which of the three do you find the most challenging to express to your friends?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Is there one of the three that is more difficult to accept than the others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Think of at least one friendship in your life that is meaningful. Consider what makes it meaningful to you and give God thanks for that friendship in your life.



## Day 3

### 2 SAMUEL 12:1-7A

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The Eternal One sent *the prophet* Nathan to visit David. Nathan came to him and told him *a story*.

**Nathan:** Two men lived in the same city. One was *quite* rich and the other *quite* poor; the rich man's wealth included *livestock with* many flocks and herds, but the poor man owned only one little ewe lamb. He bought it and raised it in his family, with his children, *like a* pet. It used to eat what *little* food he had, drink from his *meager* cup, and snuggle against him. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveler came to the city *to visit* the rich man. *To offer a proper welcome*, the rich man knew he needed to fix a meal, but he did not want to take one of the animals from his flocks and herds. So instead he stole the poor man's ewe lamb and had it killed and cooked for his guest.

*Nathan stood back, waiting for the king's verdict.* David grew very angry at the *rich* man. *It was his royal duty to protect the poor and establish justice.*

**David:** As the Eternal One lives, the *rich* man who did this deserves to die. *At the least*, he will restore that lamb four times over because he acted without pity.

**Nathan:** You are that man!

Read the scripture for today and consider:

❏ Is it difficult or easy for you to receive correction? Why?

One of the hardest things to do is admit when you are wrong. Demonstrating weakness can threaten your conviction that you've

got it all together. However, you needn't fear correction because God will never use it to shame or condemn you. Instead, God brings correction into your life to produce a new future.

You can choose to work with or against God in this endeavor. You can admit your failure, turn from it, and start fresh, or you can deny it and stay exactly where you are. The choice is yours—just like it was for David. The reading today ends with Nathan saying, “You are the man!” What did David do next? What should he have done next, or more importantly, what would *you* do next?

- Who is a Nathan-type person in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is your immediate reaction to being confronted with your faults?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How do you deal with failure? Do you see it as an opportunity for God to demonstrate his love or his judgment?





## Day 4

### 1 SAMUEL 13:13-14

**Samuel:** That was a foolish thing, Saul. You have not kept the commandment that the Eternal, your True God, gave to you. He was willing to establish your kingdom over Israel for all time, but now your kingdom, *your dynasty*, will not last. He has found a man who seeks His will and has appointed him king over all the people *instead of you* because you have not kept to what the Eternal One commanded.

Read the scripture for today and consider:

- ❏ What does it mean to you to be a person “after God’s own heart”?

The text today is an invitation to look at David’s life through the eyes of the main character in the biblical story: God. Today’s portion of 1 Samuel includes the very famous verse where Samuel told Saul that Yahweh had selected a new king for Israel who was “after his own heart.” What does such a description even mean?

Simply put, for David to be “a man after God’s own heart” meant that somewhere at the core of his being, David cared about

the things God cares about. Deep within himself, he believed in God and trusted what God was doing. This was primarily revealed not in the way David made good choices, but instead how he dealt with the bad ones. When confronted with his sin, David honestly and openly repented. This was unbecoming behavior for a king in his day, but David was showing us a kingdom that is not of this world. David missed the mark many times and in many ways, but his responses to his failures revealed God's heart.

❏ What does it mean for you to be a person “after God’s own heart”?

❏ Is it easy or difficult for you to receive the grace to fail?

❏ Have you learned anything new about God’s kingdom from the session this week?