

MONDAY, 5/6

Read 1 Samuel 18:1-19.

This week we will be covering the story of David and Saul that unfolds after Goliath's defeat. Prepare yourself for some twists and turns.

Chapter 18 introduces us to Jonathan, King Saul's son. We see that immediately Jonathan and David become fast friends. After watching David obey the Lord with such courage, Jonathan became "one in spirit" with David. Jonathan had such great respect for David's devotion to God and shared his passion to serve the Lord as David did.

Jonathan also "loved [David] as himself." We see this statement pop up several times in 1 Samuel 18-20. This ties closely with the ultimate love command as seen in Leviticus 19:18: "Love your neighbor as yourself." We must care for others with the same energy and priority with which we care for ourselves. Jesus points to this command when He is asked which is the greatest commandment. After quoting from Deuteronomy 6 that we should love God with all our being, He turns to our call to love our neighbor. We will see what this love looks like as we see Jonathan's and David's friendship over the next few chapters.

David's victory over the giant earned him a permanent place in Saul's royal court. David would no longer tend to sheep. He would lead men in battle. David continues to have success in battle because the Lord was with him. When Saul hears that the people had greater affection and respect for David than they did for him, he grew angry.

In verse 10, we witness a "distressing spirit from God" come upon Saul. This tends to raise some questions for us. This spirit is God's judgment upon Saul. Saul had once enjoyed God's Spirit upon him, but the consequences of his repeated unwillingness to follow the Lord was that God removed His Spirit from Saul. It seems that God allows this spirit to torment Saul, much like Job. The tormenting spirit isn't permanent; it comes and goes. While it is a part of God's judgment, it isn't meant for evil, but likely sent to get Saul to repent. The spirit gives Saul a taste of the misery that awaits him if he continues his descent away from God's will.

Rather than turning to the Lord for relief, Saul lashes out when plagued by this distressing spirit. He tries to kill David, who was ministering to him. Again, we see the themes of pride and humility come to light in this passage. Saul's pride is causing his ruin, while David's humility leads to God's blessings.

As David's success grows, so does Saul's fear, so he hatches a plan to get rid of David. Saul puts David in charge of more men and encourages him to fight in the hopes that David will be killed by the Philistines. Saul also uses his daughters as a ploy against David. He offers David his oldest daughter, who was part of the reward for killing Goliath, but pulls back at the last second and gives her to someone else.

There is a lot happening in these verses. They are a glimpse into the worst elements of the human condition. Jealousy, rage and malice leading to attempted murder come to the forefront of David and Saul's story. Meanwhile, David will continue to be David--he will look to the Lord and fulfill his duties. Through it all, God is with David and blesses him. This is a reminder that even when we deal with great adversity from the hands of others, God will bless us when we are faithful. Like David, we must trust the Lord and maintain a humble heart.

Praying Together:

“Lord, be with me in the challenges I face in my life today. Give me a humble heart. Bolster my trust in You so that I can be a part of what You are doing all around me. Keep me from stooping to the level of others, and help me to live according to Your way. Amen.”

TUESDAY, 5/7

Read 1 Samuel 18:20-30.

Today's passage might just be the strangest wedding gift ever given, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

King Saul is still trying to find a way to get rid of David, whom he sees as a threat to his throne. Saul sees that God is with David, so he pulls out the stops in order to put a stop to David.

When Saul discovers that his daughter Michal is in love with David, he gives her to David in marriage in hopes that she will be his downfall. Apparently, Saul thought a lot of his daughter.

While Saul is scheming, David sees this as an amazing honor. David feels unworthy of being the king's son-in-law, again a sign of his humility. When David asks what he can offer to the king for such a privilege, Saul requests the foreskins of 100 Philistines. That makes sense. Who wouldn't love to have that hanging on their wall?

As strange as it sounds, we can see why Saul would ask for such a thing. There is only one way to get a man's foreskin, and that is to kill him. The likelihood of David killing 100 Philistines and escaping with his life is rather low.

David didn't come back with 100 foreskins; he came back with 200. As a kid, I had a picture Bible that brought famous scenes to life. For some reason, I don't remember this scene in that Bible (I'll stop with the jokes now).

Saul is forced to give David his daughter in marriage. When he sees that his son and now his daughter love David, Saul becomes even angrier. The descent into fear and rage continues. Saul loses himself in the process, which is the danger of giving into such strong emotions. Saul will be an enemy to David the rest of his days, which, as he continues down this path, are numbered.

The story of Saul is a cautionary tale about the dangers of playing around with such sinful thoughts and desires. We can easily justify despising someone for one reason or another. Jesus was clear that there is no place for that in the human heart. Hatred and jealousy are sins rooted in pride, and they will ruin us if we don't get rid of them. In the Beatitudes, Jesus said those who are blessed are humble, merciful, and are peacemakers. A few verses later, He calls us to deal with the malice in our hearts by seeking forgiveness and reconciliation rather than revenge.

I wonder if you are holding onto anger toward someone. I wonder what steps you can take to rid that from your heart. Praying for them is a great place to start. If you can't start there, then pray for the courage to forgive them, then move on to praying for them. Making sure our hearts are free from hatred and jealousy is our responsibility, but we don't have to do it alone. Jesus will help us if we call on Him.

Praying Together:

“Jesus, You know my heart. Show me if there is any offensive way in me. Free me from any such things that resemble hatred, envy, jealousy or malice. Lead me in the way everlasting. Give me

Your love so that I may live into Your vision for Your Kingdom people, for it is a vision to share and show Your love to the world. Amen."

WEDNESDAY, 5/8

Read 1 Samuel 19:1-10.

Remember the saying, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer"? We already see it coming. We know that God has anointed David to be the future king of Israel, and we know that the current king Saul both appreciates David and is jealous of him. Saul easily recognizes David's power and popularity, so he names him as the general of his army. It was a move that any king would make after witnessing someone kill an infamous giant with a single slung stone to the forehead. David also left his mark on the minds and hearts of those who witnessed what he did, including Saul's army.

We all know that jealousy can be a powerful negative motivator. Jealousy closes our hearts and minds as it makes our decisions short-sighted and often laser focused on destroying whatever threat it perceives. Saul is blinded by his need to remove David as a threat to his power. The hardest part of allowing jealousy to override our actions and words is that the jealous ones tend to be the ones who suffer the most. Regardless of how good he is--and maybe because of how good David is--Saul wants David dead.

Jonathan makes a very risky move to try to talk Saul out of killing David. He put his position in Saul's kingdom, his living expenses, his inheritance, and even his life on the line to do this, yet as David's goodness and influence increase, Saul's compulsion to kill David also grows. To Saul, it no longer matters how good David is.

If we can step back for a moment, we can see that this struggle with jealousy is not really between Saul and David. It is between Saul and Yahweh. The jealous Saul does not seek counsel from Yahweh. He doesn't pray to move past this. Verse 9 speaks of an "evil spirit of the Lord" coming upon Saul; according to the culture in ancient Israel, Saul had developed an emotional or mental illness. His first attempt to kill David was unsuccessful as David escaped into the night.

Have you even been so compelled by your own jealousy that it drove you to do things that are out of character for you? Working against what God calls us to do can drive us to self-destructive behaviors. Notice that jealousy leads only to suffering until you invite God back into your life to allow healing and forgiveness to soften your heart.

Praying Together:

"O Holy Lord, jealousy can drive us to do things we know are not right in Your eyes, yet You are bigger than our worst desperations, compulsive actions, and harsh words. Thank You for Your continued offering of grace as we struggle to stop. It's in Your name we pray, Amen."

THURSDAY, 5/9

Read 1 Samuel 19:11-24.

David is now on the run. David's wife Michal warns him of a second threat on his life and helps him escape out a window. She then takes a household idol, places it in David's bed, covers it up, then places a quilt of goats' hairs at the top of it. No sooner had she covered the statue when the king's messengers arrived to arrest him. She claimed he was ill.

There are now two attempts made on David's life and twice did he have those closest to him protecting him. The first attempt was thwarted by King Saul's son, Jonathan, who tried to convince Saul that David did amazing things much needed in an exemplary warrior, including leading his army into battle successfully. And now we see King Saul's daughter, Michal, lying to the king's men. Saul catches on to her strategy and returns to her house to confront her. When he enters David's bedroom, he discovers only the statue and goats' hair quilt.

Saul is livid. Think about it. Your own family has turned against you in order to allow your worst enemy to escape. Saul has now been betrayed twice. Whatever heart he had left open for God's grace is now closed by his own actions. It will be only by the Lord's presence that Saul will change heart. We will get to witness this transformation in the last few verses of this chapter.

When Saul discovers that David has fled to Samuel in Ramah, he sends three sets of soldiers to find him. We learn that each group of men witness a company of prophets prophesying, with Samuel as their leader. As a result, all the armies are themselves filled with the Spirit of God, and they too begin prophesying. Finally, Saul goes to see why these armies have been unsuccessful in retrieving David, and even he was powerless against the Holy Spirit. He strips down to nothing and prophesies in Samuel's presence for a day and a night, lying naked and vulnerable.

Praying Together:

"Lord, there is nothing You can't do. You show up when we least expect it, somehow knowing that we needed You the most in that moment. You find us when we feel lost and overwhelmed by our own wants and desires. Thank You for Your ability to meet us wherever and whenever we are. Thank You for Your presence in all things. Amen."

FRIDAY, 5/10

Read 1 Samuel 20:1-16.

It is no wonder that David flees from Ramah. He knows that three groups of messengers and now King Saul himself have come to kill him, but instead are overtaken by the Holy Spirit.

David then runs to Jonathan, Saul's son, for counsel. Jonathan is convinced that his father Saul would not make a move without speaking to him first. David, however, believes Saul's obsession with him would prevent him from telling anyone about his plans, especially Jonathan. David tells his friend that the rules of the game have changed, and that the king's hatred of David will speak louder than his love or connection to his children.

So David tells Jonathan of his plan. He decides not to attend the king's festival; instead, he hides in a nearby field. He asks Jonathan to note the king's reaction to his absence and will remain hidden in the field until he learns of it. This plan requires an enormous amount of trust, because David is well aware of what might happen if Jonathan and Saul ever decide to join forces against him. David has questions about Jonathan's willingness to let him know his father's reaction to his absence, and Jonathan reminds him that they share a *hesed* bond.

*Hesed* is Hebrew word that defines God's love as unconditional, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and overflowing with loyalty as described in Exodus 34:6. This is how the ancient Israelites define God's character. From God's character, we learn how God loves us in the same way. It's a love that represents an ongoing, long-term covenant with our Creator God, where we uphold the same values and laws that were designed for God's people in both the Old and New Testaments. Jonathan and David are said to enjoy a similar bond, a bond that will be tested over time. We will learn going forward how well their *hesed* was upheld.

Praying Together:

"Lord, teach us to love one another as You have loved us. We love You, Lord. Amen."

SATURDAY, 5/11

Read 1 Samuel 20:17-33.

Jonathan and David are finalizing the plan to gauge the reaction of the king when David's absence is noticed at the festival. Here's the plan: if the king does not ask why David is absent, that is a good sign. If the king asks and accepts that Jonathan has given him permission to attend a sacrifice in his hometown of Bethlehem, that too is a good sign. If the king becomes angry at any point, this will indicate an immediate threat on David's life, a certain bad sign.

In either case, David will hide in the fields close to the stone Ezel. Jonathan said he would be shooting three arrows to the side of the rock. If the response about David's absence was favorable, he will send a young servant to collect the arrows close to the rock. It would then be safe for David to return without consequence.

But if there was a bad reaction from Saul, Jonathan will tell the boy who will collect the arrows to search way beyond the rock, David will know then it will be time to escape once and for all. After they discuss the contingencies, Jonathan reminds David that they will always be connected by their covenantal love.

On the first night of the festival, King Saul does take notice of David's absence, but says nothing. But when David misses the second night of banqueting, Saul questions his son about it. One absence is understandable, but David's place should be sitting right next to the king. Two absences were unacceptable. Saul's response was one of violence toward his son, given the words used to describe Jonathan's mother. When Jonathan asks Saul what David had done to deserve death, Saul's hurls a spear at him. That's when Jonathon knew that if his father were willing to kill his own son for siding with David, he would surely kill David.

Each day Saul's jealousy grows into madness, also known as an "evil spirit of the Lord" as seen in 1 Samuel 19:9. With each passing moment, the king found more and more reason to want David dead. And until he is dead, Saul tells his son that he and his kingdom will not be established, thus driving a permanent wedge between Jonathan and his father.

Praying Together:

"Lord, we know You will walk through fire with us. Strengthen us at our weakest points. Reshape the darkness we face into light. Carry our burdens with us. Show us how to heal from the hurts caused by others. Thank You for Your presence in all things. Amen."

SUNDAY, 5/12

Read 1 Samuel 20: 34-42.

Jonathan grieves his father's treatment of David, yet he follows through with the agreed upon plan. The next day Jonathan shot the arrows beyond where David was hiding in the tall grass of the field. After sending the boy who collected the arrows away, David stands up from the south side of the rock and bows to Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kiss each other and weep. The two swear allegiance to each other and to each other's descendants, then part ways.

Looking back on Jonathan's reaction to his father, there were several moments where Jonathan took liberties with his own authority that might make any king angry. First, he gave David permission to leave the estate to handle his own family's business without consulting the king. Bold move. Second, he disrespected his father by defending David, his father's sworn enemy. After the threat about not establishing him or his kingdom until David was dead, Jonathan knew that David's life was in danger. Yet Jonathan still sought a way to protect his dearly loved friend from harm and see David one last time.

In other words, Jonathan's *hesed* relationship with David was far more important than appeasing his father and gaining his royal rights as a son of a king. What would this world be like if only we could love one another like Jonathan loves David—with *hesed* love?

Praying Together:

"Lord, we are reminded how precious *hesed* relationships are with both You and Your people. Teach us to love like You love. Teach us to cherish love in new ways and to remember how rare it is to have a relationship like that of Jonathan and David. What must we do to love like this? What must we give up to love that deeply and completely? Thank You for allowing Your seekers to find You. In Your name. Amen."