



Community Group Discussion Guide

January 12, 2025

1 Samuel 18: 1-30 | The Beginning of the End

MOTIVATE

Starter Question

- ⇒ *Who are some of your favorite dynamic duos in history or from television or movies?*
- ⇒ *What are some examples of friends or bands that used to be close and are no longer together?*

Optional Activity: Ask a few volunteers to share pictures of toys they wanted as a kid but never got. Ask a few others to share pictures of something they want as an adult.

- ⇒ *What does it feel like as a child to not get what you want?*
- ⇒ *How does that compare to not having what you want as an adult?*

DISCUSS

1 Samuel 18 begins as a continuation of the last verses of 1 Samuel 17. David had killed Goliath, igniting the courage of the Israelites who pursued the Philistines, striking them down along the way. Saul inquired who the youth was that killed Goliath, resulting in his reintroduction to David. Saul was so impressed with David that he brought him into his court, where David became friends with Saul's son, Jonathan, and quickly won the respect and affection of Saul's servants, fellow soldiers, the general population of Israel, and even one of Saul's daughters. (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for additional information.)

Saul's affection quickly waned and turned into jealousy, which gave way to scheming and attempting to kill David. While the narrator of 1 Samuel highlighted the relational tension between Saul and David, he was more focused on the theological implications of the two men's choices. Technically at this point in Israel's history there were two anointed kings. One had the kingship but did not follow God and continued to spiral into a self-made mess. The other had been promised a kingship, but humbly and patiently waited on the Lord and received His blessings.

- ⇒ *Why do we continue to see the contrast between Saul and David?*

There are two key themes in 1 Samuel 18:1-30. First, the Lord was with David, but not with Saul. Secondly, God works sovereignly among humans who are free to either follow or resist. God continued to propel David forward despite all of Saul's attempts to kill him. In this chapter, David began to set the standard for Israel's future kings.

- ⇒ *How did David's kingship help pave the way for the King of Kings to perfectly fulfill His role?*

1 Samuel 18:1-5 *As 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. 2 And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. 3 Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. 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. 5 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 soon as he had finished speaking" implies there was more said between David and Saul that is not recorded. Many scholars believe this conversation revealed David's godly character and his trust in the Lord. Scholars presume this is what built the fast foundation for David and Jonathan's friendship. Whatever was said also convinced Saul to keep David in his court and to give him a position of

authority instead of allowing him to return home. It's obvious that David not only made an impact through his physical act of defeating Goliath, but also through his words and beliefs.

⇒ ***What does David's life teach us about making our faith in God evident?***

David and Jonathan's friendship has been called into question by critics, so it is important we address the original language to ensure we interpret and apply the principles accurately. The Hebrew text tells us the soul of Jonathan was "bound" or "chained" to the soul of David. The phrase "bound to the soul" was a Hebrew idiom for an intense emotional bond. This phrase is also used in Genesis 44:30-31 when expressing Jacob's love for his son, Benjamin. Due to some biblical chronologists calculating that David was around 18-20 and Jonathan was between 43-48 years old, some scholars believe this friendship was more like a father-son or mentor-mentee type of relationship.

Even if Jonathan and David were close in age, the Hebrew word used for love in this passage has no sexual overtones. Love in Hebrew in a sexual sense is typically translated "to know." Examples of this can be seen in Genesis 19:5 and Judges 19:22. In some contexts, "to love" can have political connotations, like a dedication to a military leader (1 Kings 5:1). The same word used for love in verse 3 is the same word used in 1 Samuel 16:21 expressing how Saul loved David.

With all of this in mind, we must confer that David and Jonathan's friendship was just that. It was a deep, abiding friendship, built on a mutual trust in the Lord. They were also comrades in arms, so they likely bonded over shared experiences, too. It's unclear if Jonathan knew about David's future kingship or if he was just prompted by brotherly affection, but he sealed their friendship with an exchange of his royal possessions, creating a covenantal bond between the two. This covenant will benefit both men in future chapters as circumstances test their friendship.

⇒ ***What does a biblical friendship look like? What are other examples of God-honoring friendships we see in the Bible?***

⇒ ***Even though our American culture has seen some changes, there is still a hesitancy among men to build deep and intentional friendships. How does the example of David and Jonathan encourage friendship between men? How can women encourage the men in their lives to engage in godly friendships and to resist cultural tendencies of isolation?***

1 Samuel 18:6-9 *As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. 7 And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." 8 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?" 9 And Saul eyed David from that day on.*

During this time period, the Israelites were in ongoing battles with the Philistines. It's likely that this return of David's was another campaign against this enemy and did not happen immediately after verse five. Whatever the timing, this event seemed to be the turning point in Saul's attitude toward David.

David's victory in this battle prompted the Israelite women to sing a song of praise. The comparison of "thousands to ten thousands" was actually not a jab at Saul. It was a common poetic symbol in ancient near eastern culture that was understood as a synonym. The women were praising both Saul and David by acknowledging the contributions both made toward victory over the Philistines.

It's unlikely either man had literally killed "thousands or ten thousands," however Saul took the words personally and began to harbor anger toward David. We can see his bitterness, jealousy, and paranoia sprouting as he asks, "What more can he have but the kingdom?" The Hebrew word used here for "eyed" sounds like the Hebrew word that is often translated "iniquity" or "transgression." This deliberate word play implies that Saul began to act with malicious intentions.

⇒ ***What does Saul's response to the victory song tell us about where his heart and identity lay?***

1 Samuel 18:10-16 *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. **11** And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice. **12** Saul was afraid of David because the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. **13** 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. **14** And David had success in all his undertakings, for the LORD was with him. **15** And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him. **16** But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.*

To better understand the harmful spirit mentioned here, we should revisit the first mention of it in 1 Samuel 16:14, which says, "Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him." The Hebrew word *ra'ah* translated as "evil" has a wide range of meanings, including misery, morally evil, distressing, and injurious. The Hebrew verb *ba'at* translated as "torment" in 1 Samuel 16:14 can be understood as extreme fear.

At this point in Israel's history, the Sinai covenant formed under Moses' leadership was still in effect. Under this covenant, obedience to God resulted in blessing while disobedience resulted in curses. Saul deliberately chose disobedience, inviting God's judgement upon himself. God is sovereign and just and therefore can choose the means of punishment appropriate for the situation. God certainly could have called a demonic spirit to torment Saul, or He could have plagued the king with a psychological affliction. We don't know the exact method of His punishment, but we do see the results. Saul's jealousy had been boiling for a while, and under the influence of the evil spirit it spilled over into action.

- ⇒ ***When contemplating God's authority to punish sin, what emotions or thoughts rise in you?***
- ⇒ ***How do we reconcile God's actions toward Saul in light of the Sinai covenant and the new covenant that Jesus brought forth?***

Saul's spear was a symbol of his royal office and authority. Using his sword, Saul attempted twice to take David's life but was unsuccessful. Saul was a seasoned warrior and his spear was his best weapon. To miss his target at such a close range would have been unlikely a lack of skill. This caused great fear in Saul as he began to realize God was with David. Saul responded by moving David to the front of the battlefield, hoping the Philistines would be able to accomplish what the king could not. However, God gave David great success over Israel's enemies as well as favor with the entire nation. Instead of David's success humbling Saul, he now stood "in fearful awe" of David's favor with God. In other words, Saul was terror-stricken.

- ⇒ ***What should have been Saul's reaction to David's successes and God's favor on his life?***
- ⇒ ***Do you battle the same type of jealousy? What steps can you take to guard against this?***

1 Samuel 18:17-19 *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." **18** 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?" **19** 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.*

Driven by paranoia, Saul continued to plot ways to eliminate David as a threat to his kingship. Previously, Saul had promised one of his daughters in marriage to the man who killed Goliath, but he had not fulfilled this promise with David. With a plan in mind, Saul offered his oldest daughter, Merab, to David but placed an additional requirement to remain in the military. Saul appealed to David's zeal for the Lord by claiming these were the Lord's battles, but Saul was actually hoping David would die in battle with the Philistines. David declined the offer of Merab on the basis of his humble family origins.

- ⇒ ***What contrast do we continue to see between David and Saul?***

1 Samuel 18:20-24 Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. **21** 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." **22** 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.'" **23** 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?" **24** And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak."

Saul learned that another of his daughters, Michal, was in love with David, so the king schemed to use her against him. Saul commanded his servants to lie to David and to persuade him to marry Michal, but David again refused due to his socioeconomic status. Neither David nor his family would have been able to afford the dowry of a princess.

- ⇒ **How does David's humility continue to show he was "a man after God's own heart?"**
- ⇒ **What does Saul's misuse of his daughters indicate about his heart?**

1 Samuel 18:25-30 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. **26** 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, **27** 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. **28** But when Saul saw and knew that the LORD was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, **29** Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually. **30** Then the commanders 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.

Saul offered a deal: for the bride-price, David was to bring proof of 100 dead Philistines instead of money, livestock, or property. Other cultures practiced circumcision at this point in history, so presenting the foreskins would be proof the Philistines had died. Saul was again hoping the Philistines would kill David during his attempt to win the hand of Michal. It's not clear if David suspected Saul of ulterior motives, but he decided to obey his commander. David returned in half of the allotted time with double the requested amount of "proof."

There was no way Saul could wiggle out of this one! He gave Michal in marriage to David but did not take on any of the familial affection we would expect. So far, every attempt Saul made to demean, diminish, or destroy David backfired and instead worked in David's favor. Not only was David loved by the people, Saul's family, and the military men, but as Saul's son-in-law David had an official minor claim to the throne.

Saul was fully aware that God was against him and with David. Saul's actions would soon move from sneaky schemes to outright campaigns against David's life. But as we will see, God was faithful to the promise He made to David and continued to give him success.

- ⇒ **What sticks out to you from Saul's response? Have you ever been in a situation where you acted desperately, and it caused you to sin?**
- ⇒ **Why do you think the author only focuses on Saul's inner thoughts and actions and not on David's during this section?**
- ⇒ **What theological purpose does God's favor toward David have?**

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: Saul made his stance before the Lord clear. He was deliberately opposed to God's authority and demonstrated it in his attempts to eliminate God's chosen leader. Although it is easy to judge Saul from our vantage point, we have all been in situations where our jealousy, anger, bitterness, or even a bad mood have prompted us to sin. Whether it's lashing out at a friend, child, or

spouse, gossiping about how someone could afford a purchase, or using someone else as a means to an end, we are not that different than Saul.

Where we must differ is our response when our schemes or dreams fail. We must turn to the Lord in humble repentance. We must trust him to provide, believe that He gives good gifts abundantly, and have faith that He remembers us. We must depend on the Holy Spirit to guide our words and actions.

David existed as a king to point toward Jesus as the true King. Because our true King has atoned for our sins, we can approach Him and receive grace (Hebrews 4:16). Because our true King has given us His righteousness, we have God's blessings and favor. This is cause for rejoicing. Knowing we do not have to be slaves to our fleshly insecurities or emotions frees us to find joy in our relationships. We do not have to be defined by our successes, failures, or other's opinions because we are defined by our true King.

- ⇒ ***Describe a time when you acted rashly or sinned due to jealousy, anger, or bitterness. How did God expose your sin and how did you respond?***
- ⇒ ***How can you practice walking in the Spirit and letting Him guide your thoughts and actions?***
- ⇒ ***How should knowing you are defined by Jesus' righteousness affect your relationships?***
- ⇒ ***On a scale of 1-10, how good of a friend are you? What can you do to become a better friend?***

2. Pray: Thank Jesus for being our true and better King. Confess the times you have sinned out of jealousy or anger and ask God to forgive you. Express your dependence on the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in your thoughts, actions, and relationships. Pray that God will help you be a Christ-like friend.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Christian Standard Study Bible (2017), pg 438-440.*
- *English Standard Version Study Bible (2008), pg 583, 587-588.*
- *ESV Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel-2 Chronicles (2019), pg 178, 194-201.*
- *Holman Old Testament Commentary I & II Samuel (2009), pg 115-116, 134-138, 145-147.*
- *Life Application Study Bible New International Version (1997), pg 468-469.*
- *Wiersbe Bible Commentary, OT (2007), pg 524-526.w*