

David | The Once and Future King

David and Jonathan

First Samuel 18.1-16 (and CHs 18-20)

8.29.21

Now it came about when David had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself. ² Saul took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house. ³ Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴ Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵ So David went out wherever Saul sent him, and prospered; and Saul set him over the men of war. And it was pleasing in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

⁶ It happened as they were coming, when David returned from killing the Philistine, that the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments. ⁷ The women sang as they played, and said,
"Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands."

⁸ Then Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands. Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" ⁹ Saul looked at David with suspicion from that day on.

¹⁰ Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand. ¹¹ Saul hurled the spear for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David escaped from his presence twice. ¹² Now Saul was afraid of David, for the LORD was with him but had departed from Saul. ¹³ Therefore Saul removed him from his presence and appointed him as his commander of a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. ¹⁴ David was prospering in all his ways for the LORD was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul saw that he was prospering greatly, he dreaded him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, and he went out and came in before them. (1 Sam 18 .1-16)

We've been looking at a period of ancient history from (the Iron Age) about 1000BC.

The history in this *Book of Samuel* details transitions from Samuel the Prophet to Saul the King (the people's choice) to David who's God's choice and has now been designated/anointed as king... but King Saul is still on the throne... Conflict is inevitable and today it flares up.

Our topic is how God uses relationships and especially friendships in the spiritual life as an agent of change and something essential to spiritual life and growth.

This is one area where our own culture is out of step with the Gospel (basic teaching of Christianity) because we persist in Bowling Alone - THAT'S the title of a now 20-year-old book by the Harvard political scientist, Robert Putnam. In it he describes our society's longstanding trend toward isolation. His main point is that we still do the activities we've always done but less and less as group activities and *more and more as individual, private activities*. We bowl but we don't bowl in leagues; we're Bowling Alone.

This is an important book but it builds on the study of Berkley sociologist Robert Bellah called *Habits of the Heart* (1985) and *The Lonely Crowd* by David Reisman in 1963 AND scores of others all agreeing that modern Americans are in a long retreat from community *and into privacy and individualism*.

Today we want to show from this passage and the whole biblical arc in which it stands that social isolation is incompatible with spiritual life and health as God defines it AND that relationships (as messy as they can sometimes be) are the context where spiritual life plays out... We may be able to bowl alone but we cannot walk with God alone. Let's look at:

- 1. When a Good Deed Does NOT Go Unpunished**
- 2. The Power of Spiritual Friendship**
- 3. The Practice of Spiritual Friendship (in a fast paced world)**

"No good deed goes unpunished" is kind of a cynical way of saying that getting involved with people is almost always more difficult than it looks. We may expect to get punished when we do wrong (we deserve it!) but you learn that helping can also lead to trouble.

David is helping – he defeated the DragonMan and he won the bride and set Israel free by representing them on the field of battle. But when the people hail David and when the women sing about it...Saul's insecurities explode. He's miffed, he's annoyed, he's resentful, suspicious, afraid... hateful.

David's getting mixed messages. He's invited to court ... as a musician and then as a kind of general and King Saul has really loved David but Saul's insecurities are taking on a life of their own and Saul is mentally/emotionally unstable and he throws a spear at David ONLY because David is doing good and doing well in all he does.

And in the course of these next three chapters (18-19-20) David's relationship with Saul gets really weird. David wonders if he's reading Saul the right way. Saul's scheming about how to get rid of this young gun with the Midas Touch but everything David does seems to prosper and he succeeds (he's a lot like Joseph from Genesis). Saul plots to put David into battle and hopes the Philistines will do Saul's dirty work and take David out (BTW – David will employ this same strategy later in his life.)

Saul assigns David these daring missions knowing David will not be able to execute them but then David does, he exceeds Saul's unreasonable demands.

And Saul gets angrier and enraged and then he sort of gives himself to this evil impulse until it consumes him (Gal 5.15). He tries again (19.10) to pin David to the wall with a spear. Then Saul enlists his children's help.

He marries his daughter Michal to David hoping she'll choose Dad over husband...Saul enlists her help but it goes the other way and Michal actually helps David (her husband) escape the thugs Saul sent.

David eventually runs back to Samuel the prophet for some counsel (19.18) and protection. "Samuel: I didn't sign up for this! I'm ok with getting punished for doing wrong... but I can't figure out what King Saul has against me! SAUL has it IN for me!"

I had a teacher who had it in for me. At the end of eighth grade she told me she never liked me. (Looking back from adulthood, I can totally get it.) But at the time, it's an extremely hard realization for a young person because you assume that everyone likes you. My parents liked me and loved me...and then you realize that not everyone feels that way ...and for David, he wasn't hated for doing evil but for what he THOUGHT was good... That's traumatic. Now, I don't know if you've had this experience, being opposed for doing good, or being resisted by a person you're trying to please... but whenever someone "*has it IN for you*" and you can't figure out WHY – it's always dispiriting and really upsetting.

The point is... relationships can be confusing and taxing and painful. When you're facing a relational failing or a conflict you just can't fix – it's the most awful feeling. It's worse than physical pain. It's one reason people withdraw into privacy (and bowling alone!)

One the other hand... these conflicts that David faced were the context of so many of his poems (the Psalms). They drove him to God again and again.

And thankfully, this present conflict was NOT the whole story of David's relationships. Saul's son had noticed David. Jonathan was a good bit older than David – maybe 30 YEARS older! Prince Jonathan was the next king. He had proven himself a man of valor and wisdom and military competence...but whether Jonathan knew that David had been designated the next king by Samuel or because Jonathan knew David was from the kingly/royal tribe of Judah (Gen 49.10) or for whatever reason, Jonathan knew David was to be the next king...and this thought thrilled Jonathan.

So, Jonathan, after hearing David speak, had a soul to soul connection with David and loved David as he loved himself (which is understandable when you realize that David was very much

like Jonathan – they fought the same way and acted in very similar ways – “that guy reminds me of a younger ME!”).

Jonathan and David entered a covenant of friendship and Jonathan performs this very significant act in giving David his royal robe and his armor. Jonathan’s saying, “I want to promote YOU as the next king! I’m giving you the robe of many colors – the significant garb of the Prince!”

And where David had (last chapter) declined to wear Saul’s armor – David accepts this special robe and armor because it’s offered in a very different way.

And, of course, not only did Jonathan “not regard equality with David a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant” (Phi 2.6-7) Jonathan was putting himself in gravest danger because his father would not like this... and when Saul heard about it, the Mad King threw a spear at his own son, and tried to strike Jonathan down.

And all the while that Crazy King Saul was seething in hatred trying to murder David, Jonathan was pleading David’s case and working behind the scenes to give David the inside scoop he needed to know the king’s next moves. Jonathan kept his younger friend safe.

And in the sacrificial way Jonathan loved David, he looks a lot like Jesus Christ who gave up His place so that we could be included in God’s Court.

He too did not regard His place and position something to clutch and crave and protect but from His sense of total security in the love of His Father, Jesus Christ became a Servant on behalf of His friends... He became the friend of sinners. He told His disciples, “I no longer call you servants but friends” (John 15.15)

And yet the Covenant Jesus Christ makes with us so surpasses the one between David and Jonathan that this New Covenant grants us the deep security that’s needed if we’re going to risk being friends with other people.

The father of Jonathan became insane with jealousy and paranoia and obsessive insecurity...but the Father of Jesus Christ IS the Perfect Father... Jesus gave us His robe of righteousness NOT because it belonged to us or because He was abdicating the throne... We were unworthy and we were banished from the Court. He had nothing to prove but He obeyed all the Law IN MY PLACE so that when I simply trusted Him, His record of obedience would be attributed to me.

He’s not the insecure King (like Saul) but the infinite, eternal and unchangeable One who became the Friend of Sinners (Matt 11.19) and the Friend who sticks closer than a brother (Prov 18.24). His Father gave Him all things and from that place of safety He could call us friends and, in the process, make His own heart vulnerable. I love these words from John 13:

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. (13.3-4)

Now let me finish with a few words about the Gospel, spiritual friendships (like Jonathan's and David's) and the sad state of togetherness and friendship in our fast-paced world. (4 C's)

First, **CONTACT**: Christianity is a contact sport. St Paul told the Galatians, "The only thing that matters is faith expressing itself in love" in other words when you really do have faith in Jesus and receive His robe of rightness that you could never weave or buy for yourself – when you believe or have faith in Jesus Christ it WILL play out in love... you will have actual contact with other people.

Contact with some of those people may be painful or confusing (as was David's contact with King Saul) and some of the contact will be astoundingly healing and helpful (as with Saul and Jonathan). But contact you will have... And it will all be used for your good (even when it hurts – that's where we get all those Psalms).

We begin to see that our own record... my performance and my love for God and people is a robe with a lot of holes in it... and really filthy and smelly. And if you could see the moral record of ANYONE, it would be the same way. The best people we've known all fall FAR short of God's standard and NO ONE will be approved by God except by God's gift of rightness received by trust.

And seeing that gives us the security to have contact with people. We become less self-protective and secure enough to brush up against people. We can risk rejection and even betrayal because we're accepted and embraced by God based on Jesus' gift.

2nd **COMMUNITY** – the Gospel not only frees you to have contact with people in general but a special relationship with the Church. That's where real, deep, honest, open, covenant-based friendships can happen. The spiritual life lived apart from the Church is many things but one thing it's NOT is Christian.

Christian Spirituality requires connection to the Church. Remember, the alternative to organized religion is disorganized religion or unorganized religion. Church-less spirituality is not Christian spirituality.

3rd **COMPANIONS IN CONFLICT** – I'm sure David wanted many times to run back to the pasture. Communing with God in nature can be so soothing. And there IS a place for solitude that rejuvenates and restores us for more contact with people. But growing up spiritually involves the possibility of conflict...partly because we need other people to help us see ourselves...because we don't!

I didn't read it today but in CH 20 – David and Jonathan have this meeting and you hear it in David's words and tone that he NEEDS this friend to help David see himself as he is. The scene is not the kind of conflict David had with Saul...in fact it doesn't really look like a conflict at all. David's conflicted in himself. He's at the end of his rope and he cries out to his spiritual friend, "What have I done? What is my iniquity? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?" (20.1)

He's asking his friend – "please point out my sin so I can repent... I can't see myself as you can and if I'm in sin – please help me see it!" (You sense David's anguish!) and as David had earlier sought counsel from the Prophet Samuel and later from the Prophet Nathan – here he gets counsel from his friend Jonathan.

The point is – when God gives you this kind of a friend, someone who (according to Eugene Peterson) "is leisurely enough to find out what's really going on in us, is secure enough not to exploit our weaknesses or attack our strengths, recognizes our inner life and understands the difficulty of living out our inner convictions, confirms what's deepest within us. A friend."

HOLD ON TO THAT PERSON. Thank God for her or him and cultivate mutual appreciation and honor for that person. You won't have these deep friendships with everyone but one or two is so helpful.

We need these companionships (intimate allies). I know personally I cannot go on without the ones I have.

Forth (last), (contact, community [the church] companions in conflict) and – **CO-LABORING**. The church is a place where we find an outlet to serve one another and outsiders as well.

It's quite often IN this serving-side-by-side that we discover and develop the Covenant Companionship I just mentioned. So, volunteer for children's ministry or hospitality/greeting ministry... There's nothing like being together and serving together to open things up between you and a brother or sister...and I know (because I've seen it): so many in this church have deep and flourishing friendships that started in some simple shared task... SO volunteer...lose your life and you'll find it.