

# JONATHAN AND DAVID, RESOLUTE FRIENDS

“You said you would never move back home,” said Jaime.

Erica steadied herself on the stool, stepping down with a stack of plates. She was packing up her kitchen for her move—something she never expected. But her older sister’s multiple sclerosis had worsened to the point of her being confined to a wheelchair. Their parents had passed a couple years back, and her sister had no one else.

“I’m sure she can find help somewhere else. Maybe home health care, or some sort of live-in facility,” said Jaime. “Besides, you said she was mean to you when you all were kids, right?”

“We didn’t always get along, but we were young,” Erica said.

It was true. Erica had not wanted to return to her hometown. And when she left, Erica put unsavory memories in the rearview mirror. She was free—free to make her own decisions, pursue her career, go where she wanted to go.

“I’ll do what the Lord has laid on my heart,” said Erica. “I’m not doing it out of guilt. I can be there for my sister. Even if we decide she can’t live with me, I need to be close enough to be available to help. And I know it’ll be challenging.”

She didn’t know how this next chapter of her life would play out—it certainly didn’t fit her plan—but she knew it was worth it. Her sister would receive the care she needed and wouldn’t be as lonely. *Who knows*, she thought, *maybe God has bigger plans than I can see.*

**1 How does it feel in practice to put the needs of others first?**

**2 When have you had the experience of taking a supporting role to someone else?**

<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. <sup>2</sup> And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house. <sup>3</sup> Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. <sup>4</sup> And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

...

<sup>16</sup> So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, Let the LORD even require it at the hand of David's enemies. <sup>17</sup> And Jonathan caused David to swear again, because he loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

<sup>32</sup> And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore shall he be slain? what hath he done? <sup>33</sup> And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.

<sup>34</sup> So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.

<sup>1</sup> After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. <sup>2</sup> From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. <sup>3</sup> And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. <sup>4</sup> Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt..

...

<sup>16</sup> So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD call David's enemies to account." <sup>17</sup> And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

<sup>32</sup> "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. <sup>33</sup> But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the feast he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

## Unexpected Allies

Fresh from David's victory over Goliath, David is welcomed by Saul and Jonathan. David has been anointed as a future king, and God has been faithful in orchestrating the details for his future. While

God has already made known to Saul that the throne would be removed from his family, the text at this point does not indicate that Saul realizes it is David who has been anointed as the future king (see 1 Sam. 15:28).

Thus David gains favor in Saul's eyes, and his friendship with Jonathan increases. Jonathan even makes a covenant of loyalty and friendship with David, accepting David as his equal and loving him "as himself" (v. 3). The text does not describe David and Jonathan's initial agreement. But in a remarkable sign of acceptance and submission, Jonathan gifts David tokens of his own office (v. 4). Jonathan's princely clothing and soldier's armor are fitting gifts to Israel's future king.

Whenever David goes to battle, he comes back victorious. Thus Saul makes David an officer in the army, and David continues to excel and increase in popularity (see vv. 5–9). When Saul realizes that David's abilities are recognized beyond his own, Saul becomes angry. He repeatedly tries to kill this rival, without success (18:10–11, 25; 19:9–10). Even though Jonathan doubts his father will follow through, he agrees to protect David. Thus they expand their covenant agreement. Just as Jonathan promises to protect David's "house" (20:16)—which includes family and descendants—Jonathan requests David's future protection (vv. 14–15).

The two plan a test for Saul, to see whether he truly intends to kill David. As planned, Jonathan makes excuses for David's absence at a feast. This provokes the king's fury, as David has escaped a trap (20:24–31). Jonathan advocates for David, only for Saul to hurl a spear at his own, supposedly disloyal, son (vv. 32–33). With no more lingering doubts, Jonathan is "grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David" (v. 34).

**1 How do Saul's and Jonathan's attitudes toward David differ?**

**2 How do you explain Jonathan's reaction to David's growing role?**

**3 Where have you observed the destructive effects of jealousy?**

<sup>42</sup> And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

...

<sup>26</sup> I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

<sup>27</sup> How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

...

<sup>7</sup> But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'" Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

...

<sup>26</sup> I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me.

Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.

<sup>27</sup> "How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!"

...

<sup>7</sup> The king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath before the LORD between David and Jonathan son of Saul.

## A Covenant Remembered

After confronting his father, Jonathan confirms David's suspicions: Saul is still seeking David's death. He needs to leave immediately. Realizing this, the pair "wept together—but David wept the most" (1 Sam. 20:41). They renew their covenant of mutual friendship. And this time, they invoke God as a permanent witness to their alliance, promising a never-ending alliance among their houses. David flees, but Jonathan cannot go with him. He returns to serve his father, the king.

Ever loyal to his father, Jonathan dies beside him in battle while they fight the Philistines. It is a tragic end to the life of a man who did not follow in his father's crimes. In the same battle, Saul dies by his own hand, falling upon his sword rather than being captured (1 Sam. 31:1–4).

In the face of this news, it is David's turn to show graciousness in

his reaction to the deaths of rival leaders. He composes a song of lament—weaving together words of tribute to Saul and Jonathan. For the man who tried to kill him, David writes, “the shield of the mighty was despised, the shield of Saul” (2 Sam. 1:21). It demonstrates respect for Saul’s kingly office; David does not speak ill of the dead.

David has even more to say over the death of Jonathan: “How the mighty have fallen,” he repeats (2 Sam. 1:25, 27). He calls Jonathan “my brother” as he grieves the loss of the closest of friends (v. 26). David’s psalm refers to Saul and Jonathan as “weapons of war” now destroyed (v. 27)—a personification of their heroic roles as defenders of the nation.

Although 1–2 Samuel is sometimes critical of David’s conduct, he is never portrayed as seeking to rule until God’s timing is fulfilled. And even after Jonathan’s death, David continues to honor their covenant. When he negotiates with the Gibeonites—whom Saul tried to annihilate—David spares the life of Jonathan’s disabled son, Mephibosheth. Any descendant of Saul could be held responsible for his grandfather’s crimes. But David spares him on account of his oath, honoring his friend one more time (2 Sam. 21:7).

**1 How do David and Jonathan each defer to God’s plan?**

**2 How does David keep his covenant after Jonathan is gone?**

**3 What is a fitting tribute you have heard for someone’s life?**



This spear is from the Sumerian civilization, long before the time of David, but it has an inscription dedicated to the king (probably for ceremonial use). Jonathan’s loyalty to David caused Saul to throw his spear at his son, but this did not dissuade their friendship.

Louvre Museum

## Seeking God's Interests

Jonathan's enthusiastic alliance with David is staggering, even as we look at it thousands of years later. As the son of a king, Jonathan could have used his power to keep David in line, even kill him to prevent losing the throne. Instead, Jonathan does not cling to the throne of his father but submits to God's choice in the matter. Jonathan could not have known that God had a longer-term plan to renew the very meaning of kingship through David's future descendant, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14). From Jonathan's perspective, David is just God's choice—inscrutable as it might have seemed.

And yet, Jonathan saw plenty of evidence of God's favor upon David. We don't know whether David shared that he had been anointed by Samuel, but Jonathan witnessed David's heroic defeat of a giant who had stood against the God of Israel (see 1 Sam. 17). Jonathan—a heroic warrior himself (1 Sam. 14:1–14)—still was not the one whom God chose to go against the Philistine champion. Later, Jonathan's actions were driven both by genuine love and concern for David, reflecting Jonathan's support for what God was doing in and through him. Instead of protecting his own interests, Jonathan did what was best for the nation. He stood in the breach between Saul's troubled rule and David's eventual kingship.

Submitting to God's plans can contradict our self-interest or desire for recognition. We dare not expect God to endorse our plans instead of His. Jesus modeled the selfless submission to God's will when He laid aside His life (Luke 22:42). As we humbly seek God's will, we are freed from obliging our self-interest, free to choose the path that brings glory to God.

**1 Do you imagine that you would have deferred to God's choice of David, the way that Jonathan did? Why or why not?**

**2 What does the witness of Jonathan show us?**

**3 Where do you struggle the most to give control to God?**

## A Godly Legacy

This week, reflect on the godly friends and mentors in your life, past or present. Try to name at least three individuals whom God placed beside you to give support and counsel, and hold these names before God in grateful prayer. Later, if you feel led, reach out to the surviving family of departed friends, to share what the relationship meant to you.

*Lord, thank You for the legacy of godly friends, whom You used to grow my faith.*

### Key Text

And Jonathan said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, The LORD be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed for ever. And he arose and departed: and Jonathan went into the city.

—1 Samuel 20:42 KJV

Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, “The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

—1 Samuel 20:42 NIV

## Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

### Week of June 22 through June 27

**Mon.** Isaiah 61:4–9—Prophecy: Toward Restoration.

**Tue.** Luke 15:1–7—A Shepherd Rejoices.

**Wed.** Amos 5:16–20—Prophecy: The Day of the Lord.

**Thu.** Amos 5:21–27—Prophecy: Let Justice Roll.

**Fri.** John 10:1–9—Know the Shepherd’s Voice.

**Sat.** John 10:10–18—The Good Shepherd.

**Next Week:** Amos 1:1; 2:11–12; 3:7–8; 7:10–15

*We will discuss the equipping and empowering that God gives. Share with a partner about the hardest job of your life (paid or unpaid).*