

Session 7 Jonathan and David's Covenant and Plan (1 Sam. 20)

I. DAVID MET WITH JONATHAN (1 SAM. 20:1-3)

Well, 1 Samuel 20 is one of the most intense parts of David's story. It is emotional. There is a lot of drama in this chapter, and it is about the relationship of David and Jonathan. Now you know Jonathan was the crown prince. He was the natural heir to the throne of Israel. His best friend David was anointed by the prophet to be the next king of Israel, but Jonathan had been in line for that. So their relationship was under tremendous testing.

This chapter is about relationships being tested, in this case, under the most extreme positives and negatives. There was tremendous wealth—millions and millions of dollars—that was in the balance, and one would get more than the other. A tremendous amount of fame, prestige, honor, promotion, but on the other side, equally intensely, their relationship was tested with reproach, tremendous stigma, real risk of losing everything, and both of them were faced with both dimensions. So this is one of the most extreme snapshots. Most relationships have far less intense testing in the positive and testing in the negative, but the principles are nonetheless the same.

Now the premise is that pressure changes people. The pressure of great money, fame, opportunity, the pressure of criticism, stigma, reproach, even the fear of loss before the loss takes place, and people change under that pressure. Many people make surprising decisions that are negative under the pressure of gaining money or the fear of losing or losing their prestige. A lot of kingdom friendships are tested under the pressure of increase. One gets more than the other or one might get the other's portion and the relationship is ruined. There is the pressure of bearing reproach or stigma.

Not only do people change, relationships change. For some people under pressure their hearts are really torn and they go through that interaction with God and actually come through refined and become more stable and steady in love, deeper in love with God and committed to truth.

What is happening in this chapter is these two men are being tested in their relationship and in their loyalty to the will of God, to God's leadership over their life. They are tested in their loyalty to their friendship with extreme positive pressures, extreme negative pressures. They love each other, but they do understand that men change under pressure. So all through this chapter there is a note of uncertainty, yet a resolve to go forward and to trust one another and to be committed to the will of God and even to trust God to help the situation go rightly. It is quite dramatic.

First I will give you the context from our last session last week in 1 Samuel 19 because we are flowing right into 1 Samuel 20. So we have to remember the context of last week. Then I will tell you the story. I will summarize the story and then we will read through some of the passage. Most of the notes I will not exactly refer to because I will just cover it as I read through the passage, but the notes are there so you can recall some of the principles later.

In the last session, 1 Samuel 19, King Saul, the jealous king, the demonized king, who was being tormented with jealousy and the fear of young David taking his position, his place, was pursuing David. David had fled from Gibeah where the governmental center was. They were all living in Gibeah, as this is before Jerusalem became the capital. Jerusalem became the capital later on, a few decades later under David's leadership. So Gibeah was the governmental center. David fled Gibeah because Saul was trying to kill him. He made seven different attempts to kill young David who was his son-in-law and who was, quote, "on staff" serving in the king's court. David was a very successful leader with a tremendous amount of skill and favor and grace of God.

The most unusual situation happened. David fled to a town called Ramah, a small city or a town. That is where the prophet Samuel lived. David went there. He fled to Samuel, young David to the old prophet Samuel. "Samuel, Samuel, help me! What is God saying? You said under the direction of the Lord that you were to anoint me, but this king whom you know so well, he is trying to kill me. He has tried seven times. Help me make sense of this."

Then word got out that David went to Ramah. It was not very far away from Gibeah the capital or the governmental center. So Saul sent a group of men to arrest David and bring him back to Gibeah to be executed. So a group of men went to Ramah, and the Spirit of God fell on them. These soldiers who were going to arrest David were so immobilized by the Spirit that it did not work. Word came back and Saul sent another group. The Spirit touched them, they were immobilized, and they could not do it either. Then the third group went and the same thing happened.

Now a fourth thing happened. Saul decided, "I will go myself." So Saul went to Ramah, and he went into the town. The Spirit of God hit him. He prophesied, it says, all day and all night. I mean that is a long session. We are talking nearly twenty-four hours. In that situation David escaped again. Saul was absolutely in this ecstatic kind of prophetic state. I mean, who knows exactly how to describe it? So David took the opportunity to flee. He ran back to Gibeah to talk to his best friend Jonathan. He said, "Jonathan, your dad is up in Ramah, just up the way, not far from here, and the Spirit has been touching him." He continued, "Help me! What is going on? Help me make sense of this." So that is where the story picks up.

- A. David fled from Ramah to meet Jonathan in Gibeah (20:1-3). Instead of staying at Ramah with Samuel, even after the Lord had released supernatural tokens of His favor, David returned to Gibeah to talk to Jonathan to determine whether Saul's recent encounter with the Spirit had changed his view of David.

¹Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and went and said to Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my iniquity, and what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?"²So Jonathan said to him, "By no means! You shall not die! Indeed, my father will do nothing either great or small without first telling me. And why should my father hide this thing from me? It is not so!"³Then David took an oath again, and said, "Your father certainly knows that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved.' But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death." (1 Sam. 20:1-3)

1 Samuel 20:1, then David fled from Ramah. That is, again, the town where Saul was being apprehended by the Holy Spirit, and he was prophesying. So David took the opportunity to escape. He ran back to Gibeah, again it is just twenty miles down the road, and he says to Jonathan who is the crown prince, David's best friend, "Jonathan, what have I done? What is my sin?" The sin that he was talking about was that of treason. He was not talking about the sin not walking with the Lord in the fullness or some personal issue in his life. He was talking about, "In what way have I been guilty of treason against the king, against the crown?" He asked, "Why is your father trying to seek my life? Why does he want to kill me? Because he has tried seven times, and this eighth time he is going to succeed."

Now you would think that after God had supernaturally delivered David seven times, and the seventh one was that supernatural break in of the Spirit, you could have said, "David, do the math. The Lord is helping you. Look at that supernatural thing that just happened a couple of days ago. Why are you so convinced Saul is going get outside of God's control and kill you?"

Jonathan said, “This is so not going to happen!” This is what was undoubtedly in their conversation. “My dad is not going to kill you; the Spirit of God has just touched him. I believe my Dad was renewed in this encounter and this experience.” Verse 2, Jonathan said, “You are not going to die. It is not going to happen. Just look at the evidence. The seven times you have escaped. The Lord has helped time after time after time.”

He went on in verse 2, “My Dad will not do anything, whether it is a great, really significant decision in the nation or whether it is a very small decision with very little political importance or consequences, without telling me. I am the prince. I am the heir apparent. He talks to me. We have a good friendship. He will tell me first. Why should my father hide this? If he were going to kill you, he would tell me.”

Remember earlier, in 1 Samuel 19, Saul had talked to Jonathan, and Jonathan talked his father out of it. He reasoned with his father, and his father came to a place of peace and said, “You are right, Jonathan. This is crazy what I am doing.”

Jonathan said here, “I know my Dad; he is not going to do it. The Holy Spirit has just touched him and renewed him in Ramah which is reminiscent of many years earlier, twenty-five years plus ago when the Lord first touched him in that very city by the Holy Spirit. You are fine. Honestly, just relax.”

In verse 3, David thought that Jonathan is being a bit naïve. He said, “I do not think you really understand where your father is in his heart and how far he is progressed in darkness.” David took an oath in verse 3. He said, “Your father knows that I have found favor in your sight. He is not going to tell you like he told you the last time.”—in early 1 Samuel 19—“He is not going to tell you the next time because he knows you are going to try to talk him out of it and he knows you are going to help me.” He said at the end of verse 3 just to get Jonathan’s attention, “I want to tell you as the Lord lives”—I mean he was invoking the Lord—“as truly as God is our witness I am sure, I am positive, he is going to try to kill me. Your kind of naïve approach to this is not helpful because you are missing it.” He said, “I am invoking God’s presence as a witness that what I am telling you is true. I am not just disturbed by fear, but rather you are being very naïve.”

Now the question that could have been asked is, why didn’t David stay in Ramah where the Spirit was touching Saul and where the prophet was? Why did he even leave? What if Saul had been renewed in that circumstance? Rather, David ran back to Gibeah, to the capital, to talk to Jonathan before his dad could get back there.

B. **You shall not die:** Jonathan and Saul both knew David would be king (20:15; 23:17; 24:20).

¹⁷“...**you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that.**”
(1 Sam. 23:17)

Now it is interesting when Jonathan says in verse 2, “David, I am telling, you are not going to die,” that the scriptures make it clear that both Jonathan and Saul were sure that David was going to be king. It is later, in 1 Samuel 23—we are in 1 Samuel 20 here—some months down the road, that Jonathan has another, last encounter with David. This is Jonathan and David’s second-to-last encounter. They have one more later in 1 Samuel 23 when Jonathan says it really clearly, “David, you are going to be king.”

David was about twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven years old, right in there. Jonathan said, “We know you are going to be king. You are going to have my position. I am the heir, but it is the will of God that you have that role and that I serve you.” That is a remarkable testing of a relationship. People can be friends until they are both aiming at their same position and the one that is in line for it gets passed up and the new guy gets it. Beloved, that tests a lot of friendships, whether in the marketplace, in ministry, and in many kinds of situations.

So Jonathan said, “We know you are going to be king. You will have my role. God says it is yours. We did not understand that in the early days when I was being trained to be king, but I will be next to you. I will be second in command just like I am with my father. I am content to take second place because it is the will of God. That is good for me. I am as committed to God’s leadership in my life as I am committed to you. I am committed to both. You know, David, I have talked to my father, and he knows you are going to win. He knows you are going to end up king.” That is a remarkable situation going on.

- C. **A step between me and death:** David did not agree with Jonathan’s naïve view of Saul. This is the first time we see David struggling with strong fears.

David answered, “I know there is only one step between me and death.” I am a minute away from it, in essence. Now this is the first time we see David struggling with fear. We are going to see it all through 1 Samuel 21 in the next session as the fear takes hold of him. He will make some very bad decisions under the influence of this fear. This is the first time we see it in him.

When you read the different psalms that David wrote you see he was very honest about his fears. He did not hide them. He did not pretend they were not there. That was one of David’s key to victory. He was so straightforward about his failures, his weaknesses. He called them straight. He did not rationalize them. He did not cover them up. He said, “This is my problem. God, help me.” He was very open to the Lord.

He thought, “Jonathan, you are just so naïve about your father. I know one of your great defining characteristics is your loyalty, but you are a little naïve as well in your loyalty pertaining to your father.”

II. JONATHAN’S PROMISE TO HELP DAVID (1 SAM. 20:4-9)

- A. Jonathan’s full commitment to help David (20:4-9)

⁴Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you.”⁵ And David said to Jonathan, “Indeed tomorrow is the New Moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king to eat. But let me go, that I may hide in the field until the third day at evening.⁶ If your father misses me at all, then say, ‘David earnestly asked permission of me that he might run over to Bethlehem, his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family.’⁷ If he says thus: ‘It is well,’ your servant will be safe. But if he is very angry, be sure that evil is determined by him.⁸ Therefore you shall deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. Nevertheless, if there is iniquity in me, kill me yourself...”⁹ Jonathan said, “Far be it from you! For if I knew certainly that evil was determined by my father to come upon you, then would I not tell you?” (1 Sam. 20:4-9)

Jonathan said, “Okay, so you think I am a little naïve that you say, ‘in the presence of God I tell you I am going to die soon if something does not change.’” Jonathan said in verse 4, “I take you very seriously. What is it that you want me to do? Do you have a plan?”

David in verse 5 said, “Well, as a matter of fact, I do have a plan. I have been thinking about this when I was fleeing from your father,” which was, again, twenty miles down the road at Ramah where the Spirit was touching Saul. He said, “Here is the plan and this is why I am coming to you urgently before he gets back in town. Tomorrow is the New Moon Feast.” It was a monthly feast that the royal house would observe and many in Israel would observe it. Some would observe it on a monthly basis when the new moon came. Others would observe it on an annual basis, as the poorer families they could only afford to have that celebration annually. It is described in the law of Moses.

So David said, "Tomorrow is the new moon. Let's use this holy day, this festival, this feast that the royal household always engages in every single month, and let's test where your father really is. If you will do this with me, it will really settle my heart. The problem, Jonathan, is my plan is going to require that you tell your dad a lie."

Jonathan answered, "Okay, tell me more."

David was thinking, "It is a lie with a good purpose because your dad is evil and I have to find out where his heart is." Theologians debate whether this was a good lie or a bad lie, whatever that means.

He said, "Here is what happens: tomorrow at the feast, when we are always there, the whole royal household"—remember David was not just a top leader in the government; David was the son-in-law. He was Jonathan's brother-in-law and King Saul's son-in-law. He was part of the royal family which actually made it dangerous for David as it was more threatening, because as part of the royal family then he had even another argument for succession to the throne. Being a part of the royal family actually created more trouble for him.

He went on, "Here is what I want you to do. Let me skip the feast, because it is always the same." King Saul sat here, next to him was Jonathan, then Abner the general, and David. He said, "We are always the four of us together at the front table, always, every time in this feast. So let me be absent, and your dad is going to say, 'Hey where is David?'" David believed he would say this because Saul was in pursuit to kill him. Saul was going to arrest him and kill him that day. That was probably what was in Saul's mind.

Jonathan said, "David, he has been touched by the Spirit. I mean you have escaped by the Lord's hand, so do not worry about it."

David said in verse 6, "If your father misses me"—which he would, since there were the four main guys at the front table, I mean he is going to miss him. Besides, Saul is pursuing him to capture him. Saul has been trying to get his hands on him to arrest him, to execute him—"then tell your father this lie. As the crown prince say, 'David begged me earnestly that he could go out of town and celebrate the feast with his family.'" You know, kind of a "go home for Christmas" sort of thing.

Verse 7, David said, "Here is how my plan works. If your dad says, 'Oh, that is good. You know I really value family life. That is good,'" and he is at peace, then I will believe, Jonathan, that you are right. But if your father becomes angry, it is because he plans to arrest and execute me and he was hoping that the monthly feast would be an occasion to trap me with all of the bodyguards and the soldiers around. I could never escape that. I mean I would be right in the lion's den there, in the king's camp with all of the soldiers available to the king. I will never escape if I do that."

Verse 8 is very interesting because David was invoking the covenant that he made with Jonathan back in 1 Samuel 18. Again we are in 1 Samuel 20. In 1 Samuel 18 they made a covenant with one another. David was saying, "Jonathan, let me add some extra thoughts on this. Jonathan, you know men do change and you really are loyal to your father and you are bearing a lot of trouble because of loving me. All you have to do is be silent and I will be executed. You do not have to do anything; just do nothing and the stigma of relating to me is gone, and you get the money and the power and the promotion. Actually you do not have to do anything wrong. You would just be quiet."

Under pressure people change. Under pressure relationships change. Good relationships go bad or good relationships go yet deeper. He said in verse 8, "Deal kindly with me." Meaning, you can go there and not really do this plan of mine, and I will never know, then I will go to the feast tomorrow and get executed. He said, "Remember, you brought me into a solemn covenant with God."

This idea, as I talked about in 1 Samuel 18 a couple of sessions ago, was that it was not just a relational covenant where "I am covenanting to be your friend." It was certainly that, but it was far more than that, although friendship in and of itself is a glorious thing. It was a political covenant because there is so much at stake when you are touching the throne of a nation. Just look through the history of the kings of England, or through the history of other nations or the Roman empire. When there is a shift in who is king, and a new one comes in power, a whole lot of purges happen. A lot of people die. A lot of people are sent to the tower. Many are executed through the purge when there is a shift in leadership of a king or an emperor.

He said verse 8, "I am going to appeal that you invoke that commitment again to God. I trust you, Jonathan, but men do change. I want you to say to God in my presence, 'I will be true to my word.' I know between your integrity and that statement and God's intervention that God will intervene at that level. You make a covenant, and God will intervene."

I tell people that covenants are serious things. That is what I tell people when they are messing around with the covenant of their marriage and they are taking it lightly. Now, there are ways that the covenant of marriage can be broken and a believer can actually be innocent and be free to move on. But a lot of people play with that holy covenant. That covenant is important to God. I encourage people, "God breaks in when it is a true covenant. Things happen. God protects covenants that are in His will."

Then he went on in verse 8 to say to Jonathan, "If there is sin in me, if there is treason in me, if you see it, do not trick me and let me go to the feast tomorrow. Just kill me yourself. He said, "Honestly, do not trick me by a little play of hands and just be silent."

Because, again, Jonathan could say, "I didn't do anything."

That was the point; I just did nothing. All of us are tested in relationships where if we speak up, we bear reproach, yet we are loyal to the friendship. We speak up, and not only do we bear reproach, we lose opportunity. We might want a better opportunity in something related to what is going on in their life, and if we are quiet, it goes well for us, but it goes badly for our friend. David said, "That is not good enough for me. I need to know before God this is real."

Verse 9, Jonathan said, "Far be it from you that you would die!" He said, "If I know my father is going to hurt you, I promise you I will not be silent and just let you walk into the trap. I will not do that to you. I promise you before God."

- B. **David's plan:** David's plan was designed to expose Saul's true intentions. The plan safeguarded David and avoided any use of force, though it required that Jonathan lie to his father (20:5-7).

David's plan was designed to expose Saul's true intentions, because Saul was acting a little friendly again. He was just coming back from this Holy-Spirit encounter, and I mean who knows all that was involved with that. So David wanted to push this, because if he goes to that feast tomorrow he is going to be trapped. He wanted to make sure that Jonathan will not stumble a little bit along the way, but will actually execute the plan according to how they agreed.

- C. **Deal kindly with your servant:** David reminded Jonathan that he had made a covenant with David and asked him be faithful to him in executing their plan (20:8). Perhaps David had doubts about his loyalty. However, Jonathan, next in line to be king, promised to protect David in this plan.
- D. **Kill me:** If David was guilty of treason against the king, then the covenant should be cancelled.

III. JONATHAN’S PROMISE TO GIVE DAVID INFORMATION ABOUT SAUL (1 SAM. 20:10-17)

- A. Jonathan with David shared his plan to give him information about Saul (20:10-13).

¹⁰*Then David said to Jonathan, “Who will tell me, or what if your father answers you roughly?”*
¹¹*And Jonathan said to David, “Come, let us go out into the field.” So both of them went out into the field. ¹²Then Jonathan said to David: “The LORD God of Israel is witness! When I have sounded out my father sometime tomorrow, or the third day...if it pleases my father to do you evil, then I will report it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety.” (1 Sam. 20:10-12)*

In verse 10, David said, “Okay, are you in?”

Jonathan said, “Yeah, I am in. I will be truthful. I will find everything out, I will. I will not be quiet. I will not let this go badly for you. I will be true. I know it is the will of God even though it is the position I was prepared for all these years. I am willing to take a lesser position because I know it is the will of God. I know you will get more than I have but we will be true in our love and our friendship.”

So David said, verse 10, “When you go to the feast, how are you going to get the word back to me?” Everyone was looking for David. David was the cultural icon. I mean think of the most popular person in this nation. I would guess that is some cultural icon, a hero-status person everybody loves. Everywhere the guy goes, they know him. He cannot go anywhere without being noticed. Think of England and the crown prince or Prince William. It is not like he walks to the store and everybody goes, “Hi!” I mean the cameras, the paparazzi swarms. They cannot move. This is all high drama, and it is magnified by the intensity that it is all in public. The whole thing is in public. It makes the stakes far harder and far more intense considering just the weariness of doing it in public. So he asked, “How are you going to get the word to me?”

Jonathan answered in verse 11, “I have an idea. You know that field down the way there, the one we have been to a few times?” David nodded. He said, “Well, just to be really precise because we cannot afford to miss on this, let’s go to the field right now. There is a way we can get to it and nobody can see us. It is a field out of sight.” Remember, these were the two most popular young men in the nation. Everybody was watching them—crown prince and the cultural icon—and they were walking together. So they go to this out-of-the-way field. Jonathan says, verse 12, “The Lord God is witness. You asked me to promise in the sight of God that I will be true. I promise you in the sight of God I will be true.” That is what he said here. “I will tell you everything. I will not hide anything. I will not be conveniently silent on anything that will cause a loss to you. I call God as my witness.”

- B. ***If Saul is planning evil:*** Jonathan promised to report any negative plans that Saul revealed to him. If Saul had planned evil, the risks for executing this plan would be high for Jonathan and David.

- C. Jonathan reaffirmed his covenant with David, asking David to protect his family (20:14-17).

¹⁴*And you shall not only show me the kindness of the LORD while I still live, that I may not die;*
¹⁵*but you shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever, no, not when the LORD has cut off every one of the enemies of David...”*¹⁶*So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “Let the LORD require it at the hand of David’s enemies.”*¹⁷*Now Jonathan again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul.* (1 Sam. 20:14-17)

Then Jonathan turned the conversation around. He said, “I have promised I will not drop the ball on getting you the information even though it is at the risk of my life.” Saul finding out that his son betrayed him—this was

serious; this was not small. This was not just a little side relationship. The risk that Jonathan was taking was huge. There were so many people who would have loved to get rid of both of those young men to take their position for a price, I mean so many willing servants who would bump those two off or give information that would nullify their promotion and cause trouble for them or even lead to their death.

Jonathan in verse 14 flipped it around. He said, "You wanted me to promise. Now I want you to promise." So they trusted each other, but they knew life changes, and people are people. I mean I have seen the most trusted relationships change under the pressure of who gets the money and the position or "I cannot bear the stigma and the reproach any longer." I have seen a lot of people shift. Good people shift. So Jonathan said, "David, I trust you, but in the presence of God you tell me that when you become king that I won't die." You think, what? Again, when a new king gets in power all through history there is a purge of any of the potential heirs to the throne. There is a purge, and I mean lots of people die. You take the Roman empire. When a new emperor got in, a lot of people were killed when the power shifted. Again the kings of Europe, right through Europe and all the nations, there is a tremendous upheaval.

Jonathan said, "I want you to promise that you will not change. I mean I know we love each other, but men change and situations change. Promise that I will not be killed in the purge."

We are reading this story where the stakes are so intense. We can bring it way down from a level ten to a level one so we can apply this in our own relationships. Maybe it is not hundreds of millions of dollars at the stake; maybe it is a thousand dollars. Maybe it is not a position around the royal court. Maybe it is, you know, I have a position on the org chart or I got on the worship team instead of you or something relatively small compared to this, but it is the same principle.

Verse 14, "In the presence of God, promise me I will not die. Promise me that you will let me live and that none of your offspring will purge my offspring a generation or two down the road." Because that happened all the time too, that kind of thing. Maybe David's son would kill Jonathan's son twenty, thirty years later. He said, "Not only are you going to declare this now, I want you to promise that you are going to promote this value to your future children." David nodded. So Jonathan made a covenant, verse 16, with David's entire house, all his descendants. He swore, "Let the Lord require it at the hands of David's enemies." What Jonathan was saying was along the lines of "If one of my offspring, someone in my family line, gets a wrong spirit and decides to stand against you, I am actually invoking the judgment of God. May God bring it on any enemy of yours."

Now the trouble was that just recently Saul, Jonathan's father, had declared, "David is my enemy" with his own mouth. And Jonathan was now saying, "If anybody that I am related to you is your enemy, may the Lord remove him."

I think, "Jonathan, that is pretty intense! That is a pretty intense statement."

Verse 17, Jonathan said, "I want you to vow again, David." Again there is this reality of human uncertainty, the reality that people change, relationships change, through the pressure of tremendous increase or promotion or money or the pressure of stigma or the risk of great loss. That pressure changes a lot of people. They make subtle choices to kind of "get out of the way" or be silent so they do not have to stand for the will of God and stand for the truth of the relationship.

- D. **Jonathan's request of David:** Initially David asked Jonathan to protect him when Jonathan executed their plan with Saul (20:8). Now the roles are reversed as Jonathan asks David to promise to protect him and his descendants in the purges that occur when a new king takes office (20:14-15).

- E. **When the LORD cuts off David's enemies:** Jonathan recognized the coming kingship of David and that the Lord would remove his enemies in due time, including the Philistines and Saul (20:15).
- F. **Leadership lesson:** During this time, Jonathan had more faith in God's promises for David than David had for his own life. Sometimes we believe God's promise for others more than for our life.

I have a leadership lesson here. It is interesting that David was convinced he was going to die. He will say that again down the road a year or two. He said, "I know I am going to die," and he meant it. He was not just kind of carrying on. He really meant it. Jonathan had more confidence at that time in David's calling than David did.

Many times in the context of a kingdom relationship your friend will have more confidence and more insight on your calling than you will. I don't mean they direct you or tell you what to do. I am not talking about directing you. I am talking about having confidence that you should not give up and give in. I have found that it is easier sometimes for me to believe for somebody else's calling than it is for my own in different times and seasons when the pressure is on. Of course that is a part of what friendship is there for, because when you are discouraged they have a clarity and a confidence or vice versa. The concept from Ecclesiastes 4, when one falls the other one picks them up, that famous passage. When one friend falls, the other one picks them up and vice versa in Ecclesiastes 4.

- G. **At the hand of David's enemies:** May the Lord punish any of Jonathan's descendants who make themselves an enemy of David by seeking to overthrow David or his descendants in the future.
- H. **Jonathan's love:** Jonathan's motivation of this political covenant was genuine love for David.

Now the reason is clear why Jonathan did this. It says right there in the text that Jonathan made the vow because he loved David like he loved his own soul. So Jonathan's motivation was to have safety in the political covenant. He wanted the money, the position, all the dynamics to be secure, he did want that for sure, but he said, "I am motivated by love, I really do care about you. It is not just a deal; it is more than a deal. I want to excel in love, and I know I am going to be tested, and I know you are going to be tested, David."

- I. **Jonathan caused David to vow:** Jonathan asked David to solemnly renew his vow to Jonathan's house or family line (20:17). He did this because he was convinced that David would be king.
- J. Jonathan and David kept their promises. David showed kindness to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, by giving him his father's land and a place in David's court (2 Sam. 9:1-13; 16:1-4; 19:25-30; 21:7). David took initiative in this by asking, "Is there anybody from Jonathan's house?" (2 Sam. 9:1).

¹David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"...⁷So David said to him, "Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father's sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather..."

¹³So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table. (2 Sam. 9:1-13)

The glory of this story is that both of them kept their covenant under pressure. They are the story of weak and broken men tried under the pressure of great opportunity and promotion, the pressure of great loss and stigma and bearing reproach, and they both were faithful. Both of them grew in love, and they excelled in love, and therefore they are a picture of this whole reality of kingdom friendships.

Jonathan died in battle, some of you know that, maybe about five or six years after this covenant, after this episode here in 1 Samuel 20. He died in battle in 1 Samuel 31. In 2 Samuel 9, after Jonathan died, some years later, and David was then king. In 2 Samuel 9, he said, "Hey, now that I am in power and am king, and I have tremendous wealth and prestige and authority, is there anybody left in Jonathan's house that I can show my covenant loyalty to? I want to show kindness because I made this promise to Jonathan."

They answered, "Well, yeah, there is his son Mephibosheth."

Say "Mephibosheth." Maybe that is not a good name to—maybe some little guy is named that, never mind—to name your hamster. Okay, do not name your hamster Mephibosheth.

Verse 7, so David had all of this power and wealth and he called for Jonathan's son. This happened many years after he was king. He said, "Mephibosheth, come into the king's royal court here." Mephibosheth was terrified because remember David was from another family and there are so many purges that take place when one family is in power and another one takes over. So he was a little scared in verse 7. David said, "No, no, do not be afraid. Do not be afraid." He explained, "This is related to the covenant I made with your father that you do not even know about. You were just a little baby when it happened." He was about four or five years old when his father, Jonathan, died. David said, "Here is what I am going to do. I am going to restore to you all the land of your grandfather Saul, because it would have gone to your father Jonathan, but they both died in battle together."

Now do you know how much land Saul owned? I mean undoubtedly millions and millions of dollars' worth, as it were. Nobody knows for sure. He had vast herds and land. I mean after all he had been a king. David said, "I am going to give it all to you." David took the initiative. Nobody even knew about this covenant, nobody. For the sake of analogy, it would be as if he said, "I am going to give you a hundred million dollars. Yes, my government could use it, but no, I am giving it all to you because I gave my word. I do not care what it costs me. It is all yours." David took the initiative. Beloved, that is what you call excelling in love. That is being true to a covenant.

He continued, "Not only that," verse 13, "you are going to sit at the royal table. You are going to dine with me. You are going to dine in the king's court." Think of just the privilege of that, not only the good food, but the privilege and status of that.

IV. JONATHAN'S PLAN TO GIVE DAVID INFORMATION (1 SAM. 20:18-23)

- A. Jonathan gave David the details about how he would pass the vital information to him (20:18-23). Many in the court would have been paying close attention to Prince Jonathan and looking for David. Secrecy was of the greatest importance, since David's life depended on it.

¹⁸Then Jonathan said to David, "Tomorrow is the New Moon; and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. ¹⁹And when you have stayed three days, go down quickly and come to the place where you hid on the day of the deed; and remain by the stone Ezel. ²⁰Then I will shoot three arrows to the side, as though I shot at a target; ²¹and there I will send a lad, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I expressly say to the lad, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; get them and come'—then, as the LORD lives, there is safety for you and no harm. ²²But if I say thus to the young man, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you'—go your way, for the LORD has sent you away. ²³As for the matter which you and I have spoken of...the LORD be between you and me forever."
(1 Sam. 20:18-23)

Jonathan now said, “Okay, David, here are the details. Here is how it is going to work. I mean I am going to do what you asked; I am going to do your plan. Now I am going to tell you how I am going to execute it.”

He is going to answer David’s last question, “How are you going to get me this information?” Because I mean they were both very, very public figures. Saul had everybody searching for David to arrest him. I mean the police had him on the most wanted list: get David. The crown prince could not walk over to David’s house or meet him for a coffee at the local Starbucks. It could not happen that way. So David had asked, “What secret way could we get together because everybody is watching every move you make?”

Jonathan said, verse 18, “Tomorrow is the feast, and you will be missed undoubtedly. There are only four main chairs. Dad will know you are gone. Here is what I want you to do. I want you to be gone the whole three days of this festival. Then I want you to go to the place where we hid in that field. You know the place. It is by that particular stone, Ezel. You know where it is at?”

He nodded, “Yeah, we have been there before. Yeah, that one day when we did that one deed, it is there. Yeah, I got it.”

Jonathan continued, “Here is what I am going to do. I am going to get up from the feast and say that I am going to do a little target practice. Because everybody is watching me and they are all looking for you, they may ask, ‘Target practice today?’ I’ll say, ‘Yeah, yeah, I think I am going to just go stretch a little bit and go do a little target practice.’ Then I am going to make a few errors. I have to take enough shots so it is convincing, I am going to go down to the field and I am going to have my lad with me, but I cannot trust even him. So I am going to shoot the arrows. Now if I shoot the arrows short, I will yell to the lad, ‘Hey little guy, the arrows are really close.’ You will be in hiding right behind that rock, so you will be able to hear everything I am saying. I will only be shouting so you can hear me, David, because there could be anybody watching us, anybody following us. It has got to be top secret how we do this, because our lives are in the balance. We are actually conspiring to lie to the king. This is serious business. So if I shoot short and I shout, ‘Hey little guy, the arrows are really short,’ then you could just pop right out and come and people will see us walking from that out-of-the-way, hidden, little field. They might think, ‘Hey, where was David at the whole time?’ but it will be okay because you know will know everything is fine.” He went on, “But if I shoot really far away, I am going to tell the little lad, ‘The arrows are really far away,’ and that will mean, ‘David, you better go real far away because you are in trouble.’ Just take off at that point and do not let anybody even see you.”

- B. **Your seat will be empty:** Jonathan had to give an excuse for David’s absence from the meal to determine from Saul’s reaction whether he meant to do harm to David.
- C. **I will shoot three arrows:** Jonathan brought a lad with him to alleviate suspicion. He was to shoot three arrows near the stone where David was hiding in the field as a signal regarding David’s safety.
- D. **The Lord has sent you away:** We see Jonathan’s spiritual interpretation of their separation. Jonathan reminded David that the Lord was overseeing the relationship that existed between them.
- E. **The Lord be between us:** Jonathan called on the Lord to witness the commitments they had made and to intervene in their lives accordingly.

V. WHY DAVID MISSED THE FEAST (1 SAM. 20:24-29)

- A. Jonathan gave a dishonest reason to Saul as to why David was missing from the feast (20:24-29).

²⁴**David hid in the field.** And when the New Moon had come, the king sat down to eat the feast.
²⁵Now the king sat on his seat, as at other times, on a seat by the wall. And Jonathan arose, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but **David's place was empty.** ²⁶Nevertheless Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him; he is unclean, surely he is unclean."
²⁷And it happened the next day, the second day of the month, that David's place was empty. Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to eat, either yesterday or today?"
²⁸So Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked permission of me to go to Bethlehem."
²⁹And he said, 'Please let me go, for our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there...please let me get away and see my brothers.'" (1 Sam. 20:24-29)

So David hid in the field. The festival happened. King Saul sat down, verse 25. He had a seat against the wall, you know, so nobody could sneak up on him, so nobody could assassinate the king. He was in the safest place in the room at the feast. Then Jonathan arose and Abner who is the general, the commander in chief of the army. David's place was empty.

Verse 26, Saul did not say anything because he thought that maybe David was unclean, as they had all of those rules. You had to be ritually clean. You had to do all of these things in order to be clean in the ritual sense of the Law of Moses. Saul thought, "Well, maybe he made a mistake and touched something unclean, and he cannot come today. He will be here tomorrow, no problem."

Verse 27, the next day David's place was empty. Saul was now suspicious. He thought, "I am not following what is going on here." So he asked, "Where is the son of Jesse?" Now Jesse was David's dad, and Saul was not calling him David anymore. He had not for a while. "The son of Jesse," that to him was derogatory as in "Where is that kid from that other place that is outside of the royal family who tricked his way into the royal family?" That is kind of what he is saying. That is derogatory.

Verse 28, now Jonathan is going to do what they agreed. He said, "Oh Father, just the other day David asked me earnestly, 'Can I go to Bethlehem for Christmas? Can I go back home for the annual feast?'" Because the poor families only did this feast once a year and this was the time for his family.

- B. **First day of the New Moon:** At the first of each month a three-day feast occurred (Num. 28:11-15).
- C. **Saul said nothing:** Saul was not concerned by David's absence from the meal on the first day. Saul assumed he must have become accidentally unclean for it, but would be clean the next evening.
- D. **Jonathan's lie:** Jonathan lied as David had requested (20:6).

VI. SAUL'S ANGER AGAINST JONATHAN (1 SAM. 20:30-34)

- A. Saul was very angry that Jonathan had chosen David rather than him (20:30-34).

³⁰Then Saul's anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame...?"
³¹As long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, you shall not be established, nor your kingdom. Now therefore, send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." ³²Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said to him, "Why should he be killed? What has he done?" ³³Then Saul cast a spear at him to kill him, by which Jonathan knew that it was determined by his father to kill David.
³⁴So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully. (1 Sam. 20:30-34)

Saul got it. He thought, “I get what you are doing. He is not ritually unclean or just trying to be devoutly religious, because today it does not apply. He could be here today.” Verse 30, Saul was so angry that he said, “You son of a perverse woman.” Do not use that one. I mean he not only insulted Jonathan, he insulted his wife. I mean call Jonathan rebellious, but do not pick on mom. Seriously, do not throw mom under the bus just because you do not like what the kid is doing.

He said, “Do I not know? You think I do not get what you just did?” Again this is the king; this is not the leader of a little club. Jonathan was conspiring against the will of the king on a national issue related to who is the heir of the throne, Saul’s dynasty. This was a most heavy-duty situation. He shouted, “You think I do not get what you just did, to your own shame?” Now God calls what Jonathan did loyalty. Jonathan’s father called it shameful in front of all the guests in the royal court. “You are a shameful son,” and all he had been was loyal. Talk about stigma, about reproach.

Jonathan was unmoved. In verse 31, Saul appealed to Jonathan’s pride and his future. He said, “You will not be king as long as that guy is alive. Your future is at risk.”

Jonathan was thinking, “You cannot appeal to my future and my own prosperity when I know the will of God is for him to be king. I am committed to the will of God, and I am committed to being genuine in my friendship.” This was the most intense test, not only being rebuked but hearing he was going to lose the throne. He might have said, “I have already done that in the will of God in my heart. I am not in this thing for the throne. I want to do the will of God and walk in genuine relationship.”

Saul said, “Bring me that guy! He is going to die! Bring me David now! I am going to kill him!”

Everybody was listening. This was all public. Jonathan asked in verse 32, “Why? Why are you going to kill him?” This is the conversation they had back in the early parts of 1 Samuel 19 when Jonathan prevailed on his father. That question had worked a little bit earlier.

Verse 33, Saul cast a spear. He literally threw a spear to murder his firstborn son. He was so angry he was saying, “You want to stick up for David? I am going to give you what I gave David, then.” Because he had thrown the spear at David several different times, this was not a joke. This was not a practice shot. He actually tried to murder his son.

Verse 33, Jonathan understood David was right, “Dad is trying to kill David.” Now Jonathan knew it. He was thinking, “Wow, I was naïve. I was naïve.”

- B. **Saul’s anger:** Saul accused Jonathan of helping David to destroy the family dynasty.
- C. **David shall surely die:** The king warned Jonathan that he would lose his right to kingship.
- D. **Saul cast a spear at him to kill him:** Since Jonathan chose to identify with David, Saul treated him like David, throwing a spear at him. After this, Jonathan knew that Saul determined to kill David.
- E. **Jonathan was angry:** Jonathan left the room in anger and fasted that day. He was grieved for David’s sake because of his father’s shameful treatment of David.
- F. **Leadership lesson:** Jonathan paid a heavy price for standing for truth and the relationships associated with it. He showed his loyalty by resisting Saul’s lures as he stood with David.

VII. JONATHAN AND DAVID’S COMMITMENT AND FAREWELL (1 SAM. 20:35-42)

- A. Jonathan fulfilled his commitment to David (20:35-42). With a heavy heart he left the royal court to go to the field, having to be secretive in reporting back to David.

³⁵So it was, in the morning, that Jonathan went into the field at the time appointed with David, and a little lad was with him. ³⁶Then he said to his lad, “Now run, find the arrows which I shoot.” As the lad ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. ³⁷When the lad had come to the place where the arrow was which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan cried out after the lad and said, “Is not the arrow beyond you?” ³⁸And Jonathan cried out after the lad, “Make haste, hurry, do not delay!” So Jonathan’s lad gathered up the arrows and came back... ³⁹But the lad did not know anything... ⁴⁰Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad, and said to him, “Go, carry them to the city.” ⁴¹As soon as the lad had gone, David arose from a place toward the south, fell on his face to the ground, and bowed down three times. And they kissed one another; and they wept together, but David more so. ⁴²Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, since we have both sworn in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘May the LORD be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.’” So he [David] arose and departed... (1 Sam. 20:35-42)

Let’s read the last part here. Verse 35, so it was in the morning, the next day. Jonathan was so upset. He had gone to bed, and now he was walking to the field, that secret, out-of-the-way place. He has brought this little kid to help him with the target practice because everybody was watching Jonathan now, watching every move he made. He had to go to this out-of-the-way place; nobody could be there.

David had been there for three days. That is going to play into the next episode when David goes to the city of Nob, is hungry, and needs some food. David had been there for three days thinking, “Jonathan, your idea of me staying here three days—I did not get to go home and pack anything to eat.”

Jonathan went into the field the next morning. Imagine how sad he was, walking to that field knowing he was going to give the signal to David to go far away. So verse 36, he shoots the arrow far out there.

Verse 38—go down to verse 38—Jonathan cried out to the little lad, because David was hiding behind the rock and David could hear him. He said it so David could hear him, but the lad did not get what was happening. Jonathan cried, “Make haste!” He was talking to the boy, but he was really talking to David, “Run! Go! Do not delay! Quick, get out of here! Dad tried to kill me, and he is coming after you with all of his soldiers.” Saul came after David with three thousand soldiers for several years.

So the lad in verse 39 did not know anything was going on. Jonathan gave him the weapons and said, “Hey, go take them back to town. I am going to just stretch out and be here for a while.” So the kid left, and nobody is around in this kind of secret, out-of-the-way field.

- B. **David’s response:** David came out of hiding and fell to the ground. The men wept together.

He went over by the rock where David was hiding, verse 41, as soon as the lad left. David rose up from the hiding place and fell on his face. He understood this was it. Potentially they would never see each other again. In fact, they did for only just a brief moment in 1 Samuel 23, and that is when Jonathan said, “David, you are going to be king. I am only going to see you for a minute, so I want to prophesy and bless you. You are the king of Israel. I want to say that on my last time I talk to you.” It is amazing! There was no bitterness in Jonathan. Then Jonathan died in battle a little bit after that. Here, they fell to the ground, they kissed one another, they wept together, but David even more than Jonathan.

- C. **Jonathan's response:** He told David to go in peace, since they had both made a covenant together. Jonathan and David briefly met one more time at Horesh in the wilderness of Ziph (23:15-18).

Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace for we have both sworn in the name of the Lord. We have given our commitments. We have given our commitments in the presence of God. We have both been true to each other under pressure, the stigma, the reproach, the fear of loss, the potential of gain. I know you will be true to me when you are king"—because Jonathan did not know he would die—"that you are going to let me sit next to you." He said, "May the Lord be between you and me. May the Lord protect our relationship. May the Lord intervene to strengthen who we are together and to protect our lives. May this continue through our descendants through all the generations."

Then David, so heavyhearted, departed lonely, leaving town not to return again. That was it. He went out by himself. Jonathan went back to Gibeah, to the main town. Both of them were devastated, but they both had the awareness that they were true to one another. Because, while relationships change, sometimes the depth continues, though the location changes.

God has seasons for relationship. Earlier in the chapter I failed to mention that when Jonathan was talking to David those three days earlier, he said, "Hey, if by chance it goes bad, I want you to know that God is overseeing this. Our love will not change; the depth will not change. The truth for how we stood for the will of God and for each other will not change." The location will change in the season, but the purpose will go on and on and on. Then he invokes this in verse 42, "The Lord be between us and the Lord oversee our future together."

Amen and amen. Well, let's stand. I am going to pray that the Lord would give you the application. Everyone in this room has or will have a relationship or two or three, probably not involving hundreds of millions of dollars, not the most powerful position and prestige in the nation, not the threat of actual physical death, but maybe the threat of bearing reproach or losing out. Maybe they get your position, or maybe you get their position, but both of you are true to each other, even when you are not with one another, behind each other's back with your words and your actions because you are doing for the sake of love and in the truth before God.

Father, I ask you for this application, Lord, that we would love well though tested. We would be people who excel in love, who do not change and shift under the pressures through which love is tested. We thank You in Jesus' name, amen and amen.