



We're in our third week of a 12-week sermon series titled, "The Life of King David: A Complex Man After God's Own Heart." Scripture calls David a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), but he was also a complex man who achieved incredible heights of success and some of the most miserable and even despicable lows. Throughout it all, he was a man who yearned for and turned to God. There is much we can learn from him in our own walk with God.

Last week we looked at one of David's "successes" as he defeated Goliath. We read of more successes today and the impact of his success. But what is the response of those around him to this success? **Have you ever noticed that when someone is successful, there are both positive and negative responses and others in between?** Maybe you've experienced that yourself.

My senior year of High School, I had a pretty negative response to the success of a friend of mine that was not the kind of response a good friend should have – I was jealous and envious. Maybe you've had a similar experience. Or maybe you've been the one who had success, and even if you handled it with grace and humility, maybe other people responded negatively. And what we see today is that: **A person's response to success (their own success, or someone else's) is driven by their mission and their motivation to succeed.**

Today we are in 1 Samuel 18:1-16. After David killed Goliath, King Saul spoke with him in the last few verses of chapter 17. And that sets the stage for what we read this morning, where we will begin with the first 4 verses and see the relationship between David and Saul's son Jonathan begin to flourish (1 Samuel 18:1-4).

Here, we see a positive response by Jonathan to David's success. He responds not with envy, but with loyalty, making a covenant with David and giving him the clothes off his back as a sign of his loyalty. He sees God's

hand in David's life, and rather than letting pride and ego get in the way and lead to judgment or envy, he aligns himself with David and befriends him.

Now, keep in mind, as far as we know from Scripture neither Jonathan nor Saul know about David being anointed as the king in waiting. We looked at that two weeks ago. So, it's not as if Jonathan is trying to butter him up and ride David's coattails into some position. In fact, had Jonathan known about David's future, he probably would have had incredible jealousy because normally kings hand their crown down to their oldest son, and that would be Jonathan. But rather than seeing David as a threat, he sees him as a friend.

Now, their relationship needs more attention so we can all be clear about them, because: **There are some theologians in the last few decades who argue that Jonathan and David's relationship was sexual in nature.** Later in 2 Samuel chapter 1, after Jonathan dies (oh! sorry if I just ruined things...yes, Jonathan dies...in fact, spoiler alert: eventually they all die) David says that Jonathan's "love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26). That statement and today's passage, along with a couple others, are what some progressive theologians point to for their claims that their relationship was sexual in nature.

But that is looking at David and Jonathan through our present-day lens of male friendships. We presume a heterosexual married guy (David is not married by today's passage, but is married before Jonathan dies) would not say a man's love was greater than that of women, as David says. And the way the relationship is described in today's passage – that Jonathan loved David as himself – would also not be said. Our mindset is that "deep bonds" of male connection revolve around sports, car engines, computers, and power tools. And all God's men said: Amen!

But it hasn't always been that way. Just a few weeks ago I read an article in *The Atlantic* titled, "How the Passionate Male Friendship Died" with a subtitle of "The 'perfect' platonic bond used to be between two men. What happened?" The moment I read the title, I was like, "I think God put this article in my inbox for this upcoming message." The author is a highly regarded historian, and one thing she wrote is that Aristotle, in the 4th

Century B.C., wrote about three levels of friendship. The highest form he called the “perfect” friendship. **This level of friendship was “a bond between two men ‘alike in virtue,’ who saw each other as a ‘second self.’** She goes on to write that philosophers later explained, it was as if ‘one soul dwelled in two bodies.’” And she writes that until 150 years ago or so, women in our culture were considered incapable of having these kinds of relationships – that their brains were “colder and weaker” than men’s brains and “too flighty, capricious, and stupid for the commitment that true friendship required.”¹ In other words: the only place to find a deep, intellectually and emotionally stimulating platonic relationship for a man was with another man.

So, **David’s and Jonathan’s relationship should be viewed through *this* lens rather than our current one where women are the ones with deep emotional bonds of friendship.** And Jonathan responds to David’s success with a deeply loyal friendship, and we’ll see more of that in the coming weeks. Success draws them closer together. Let’s continue reading **(18:5-16)** to see a completely different response from Saul.

Now, I want to address and clarify a couple things from the previous couple of chapters that I didn’t address previously, because verse 10 here kind of opens the door to do that. **Verse 10 mentions that David was playing his harp in Saul’s house, “as he usually did.”** And this harp-playing is first noted near the end of chapter 16. He also becomes one of Saul’s “shield bearers.” But then in chapter 17 as we saw last week, Saul doesn’t seem to recognize David when he offers to go take care of Goliath. And after Goliath is killed, Saul asks Abner, his military commander, “Who’s son is he?” Given that David played the harp for him (and was one of his shield bearers), this might raise a question in our minds about the integrity of these events: How could Saul not know him?

A couple things to consider. **First, we see that Saul is suffering from a “evil/injurious spirit” – today we’d probably say he has some kind of medical condition.** Hebrew thought at that time and for centuries to come, didn’t separate spiritual, mental and physical illness like we do today. Based on Saul’s actions – both in today’s passage and in ones we’ll get to later on –

it seems that his judgment and consistency are fading, he was paranoid, had violent outbursts and more. So, memory issues could be part of some of these kinds of things, and he simply didn't remember who David was. Or perhaps because of the different context he just didn't connect the dots.

Second, although David played the harp for him previously, it doesn't mean that Saul really knew him – for instance, he likely didn't know about his family. So, when David kills Goliath and is now supposed to receive a daughter of Saul's in marriage because that was part of Saul's offer, Saul asks about his family background near the end of chapter 17, "Who's son is he?" So, it's not his identity that's in question, but his family.

All right, let's talk about Saul's response to David's success. Initially, he gives David a promotion in the army. Later, he demotes him and sends him out to the battlefield in charge of a thousand men. But where Jonathan befriends David and forms a deep relationship, Saul ends up resenting and hating him. David has skill and ability that God has given him, and Saul is jealous. But it's not just about David – it's about the response of others to David. David has killed his 10,000s, and Saul his 1,000s. Saul is the one people (the women, because all the men – or the vast majority – are serving in the military) are coming out to see as they come home from battle, but all the ladies are chanting about David – and in comparison to Saul.

And so: **What we see first is that Saul is envious because he is too concerned with how other people perceive him.** His sense of self-worth is found in people's opinions of him, rather than in a relationship with God his Creator. Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with wanting people to like us. Everyone wants to be liked – it would be hard to have friends otherwise. The problem is that Saul craves it, and it's how he judges his sense of self-worth – do people like me, and like me more than others? David is a threat to that because of David's sudden popularity.

Second, Saul sees David as a threat to his position, and the power that comes with it. In verse 8 Saul thinks (ironically), "what more can he get but the kingdom?" So, Saul is concerned with his positional power. That's what he cares about. He wants to hang onto power and position at all costs. So,

Saul is all about popularity, position, and the power that comes with those two things. And David is a serious threat to that.

Now, anyone could struggle with this and have a response of jealousy and envy and hatred. We are all capable of these emotions and actions. This isn't about being all judgmental toward Saul. Just the opposite: It's precisely because we're capable of these same reactions, we want to humbly learn from Saul so we can steer clear and have a godlier response, as well as positive examples. Certainly, David provides a positive example, as does Jonathan. Ultimately, as Christians, we want to live like Jesus. He's the one we're disciples of.

So: The root of Saul's response is that his heart is not aligned with God and God's mission and purposes. In fact, verse 12 says, "the Lord was with David but had left Saul." This was said earlier in the narrative as well; it's why God has anointed David as the next king. Saul is not a man after God's heart; Saul was not on mission for God. He is concerned with the wrong stuff. What he should be concerned about rather than his own popularity, position, and power is God's popularity, position, and power. More biblically phrased: he should be about the glory of God. If he was focused on glorifying God, rather than himself, he wouldn't perceive David as a threat, but as a teammate. And David wouldn't be anointed to be the next king. If Saul were focused on bringing glory to God, David would be viewed as helping the cause of bringing glory to God.

So: what's a better response? Well, in the next chapter (19), Saul tries to kill David. His jealousy and anger are out of control. And out of that experience David writes Psalm 59. David models a response for us turning to the Lord in this Psalm. As you may know, many of the Psalms will have an introduction that was not written by the Psalmist, but a bit later by copyists or worship leaders to help later worship leaders understand how to use the Psalm in worship. Here's what the one for Psalm 59 says, along with the first two verses:

For the director of music. To the tune of “Do Not Destroy.” Of David. A miktam [probably a musical term]. When Saul had sent men to watch David’s house in order to kill him. That last phrase is what gives us the clue that this comes from the next chapter – 19. Next Sunday, I hope we can sing Psalm 59 and follow these directions, by the way!

**¹ Deliver me from my enemies, O God;
be my fortress against those who are attacking me.**

**² Deliver me from evildoers
and save me from those who are after my blood.**

It continues with a lot of lyrics along those lines. And if you’re putting these words to a tune called “Do Not Destroy” and has lyrics like this...I don’t know about you, but I’m hearing some angry sounding, head-banging, hard rock – not harp and lyre, and certainly not country music. Next Sunday we are rocking out. Just kidding...that’s imposing today’s music on it, and we already talked about not imposing 21st Century lenses on texts written 3,000 years ago. Psalm 59 closes in verses 16 and 17 with these words,

**¹⁶ But I will sing of your strength,
in the morning I will sing of your love;
for you are my fortress,
my refuge in times of trouble.**

**¹⁷ You are my strength, I sing praise to you;
you, God, are my fortress,
my God on whom I can rely.**

This is the response of a person after God’s own heart. When David is threatened, he shows us a better way: turning to God. Casting our cares upon him. Being honest. Getting the emotion out. God can handle it! Better than throwing a spear or swinging a baseball bat. And then he seeks to bring glory to God, to praise him even in the middle of the storm. Unlike Saul, it’s not about his own popularity, position, or power. It’s about glorifying God.

This is the kind of person God is looking for and wants to work through: someone who is driven and motivated to seek God’s glory and not our own. So, what drives and motivates you? Is it popularity and position and

power for yourself? If so, there will always be threats. Sin will always be “crouching at your door” as God tells Cain before Cain murdered Able. God works through people who are on mission for him, who seek to glorify him and his position and power. Let’s be those kinds of people. Let’s be people who are so grateful for who God is and what he’s done that nothing can stop our response to his grace and goodness of praising him.

Feelings of jealousy and envy may come because of other people’s successes. Threats and accusations may come our way because of our successes. Either way, let’s keep our faces turned to the Lord, glorifying and honoring him. As Jonathan befriends David, so we want to befriend the Lord. We want to turn to him because he is trustworthy. He’s the Alpha and Omega. He’s the Creator of the Universe. His only begotten son (Jesus) went to the cross for us. And he’s the lord hearts when we put our faith in Him and glorify him. That’s what David does: he glorifies God.

A thousand years later, Jesus turns to, and glorifies and praises his heavenly father, even on the cross. He turns to his heavenly father and says, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). He takes it a step further than David did and prayed for those who persecuted him. This is putting his own teaching from earlier in his ministry into practice right there on the cross – “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). That’s the heart of someone who’s mission is all about God’s glory. And that’s the kind of person God is desiring you and me to be. So, let’s be all about the glory of God. Let’s be motivated to succeed in life by bringing God glory, and celebrate joyfully with others when they do that as well. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2025/05/men-friendship-history/682815/>