

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: God's Life-Transforming Work

(Studies in the life of David)

Friends - with God in the Middle

(Selected passages from 1 Samuel 18-23)

Study #2

Introduction: Radish friendships vs. asparagus friendships...

Have I mentioned that I enjoy vegetable gardening?

Most every spring and fall, I plant tomatoes and peppers and beans and more. Right now, I'm picking lettuce and other greens - and, yes, I'm covering everything up today before the hard freezes ahead.

Among the garden veggies I have long wanted to grow is asparagus. Kathy and I enjoy eating asparagus. Since it's expensive, it would be handy to have in the garden. But I've never tried it because it takes so long before you get to harvest asparagus.

On the other hand, you can plant radishes and harvest them in a few weeks. But then you have...radishes. Tomatoes are tasty, and you can often pick tomatoes 90-120 days after planting.

But you have to wait until the third year after planting asparagus to harvest.

Well, three years ago, I finally planted asparagus. Which means that this spring, after surviving 2021's Snowmageddon and two summers of blistering heat and drought, I'm gonna get to harvest some asparagus spears.

The lesson of the radish and the asparagus is that a plant that requires little yields little. A plant that yields much requires much.

Preview...

Today, my gardening thought will carry over into what we see in our second look at the life of David.

We believe that the point of life is to nurture love for and trust in God. As we look at David's life over these next few weeks, we'll see that he did love and trust God.

David certainly didn't live perfectly - and we'll see his failures as well as his successes - but he was all about God.

One of the essential elements that grew David's God-loving soul was friendship. And the deep, soul-to-soul friendship we're going to see today is the one he sustained with Jonathan, King Saul's son.

Theirs was an asparagus, not a radish, friendship. And today we are putting their friendship under the microscope.

Review...

Last Sunday we watched as David was anointed by Samuel, set apart as King Saul's personal musician, and dissed by everybody. AND he defeated the giant, Goliath.

To this point, we haven't yet met Jonathan. So, let's back up and learn something about this man who will become David's friend.

At about the same time that David defeated Goliath, we read about Jonathan who was also fighting Philistines.

The Foundation of Friendship with God in the Middle (14; 18:1-5)

Jonathan - Man of Valor, Man of God (1 Samuel 14)

Jonathan told the young man who accompanied him,
[1]...“Come, and let's cross over to the Philistines' garrison that is on the other side” ...[6]...“perhaps the LORD will work for us, because the LORD is not limited to saving by many or by few.”

The servant was behind him all the way as Jonathan laid out his battle plan.

[8]...“Behold, we are going to cross over to the men and reveal ourselves to them. [9] If they say to us, ‘Wait until we come to you’; then we will stand in our place and not go up to them. [10] But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ then we will go up, for the LORD has handed them over to us; and this shall be the sign to us.”

When Jonathan and his servant stood up so that the Philistines saw them, the Philistines shouted, ***[12]...“Come up to us and we will inform you of something...”*** - so Jonathan and his servant (just the two of them) charged.

In the ensuing battle they killed twenty Philistines, which set the whole enemy camp shaking with fear. It was a great victory, but Jonathan didn't claim the victory for himself.

He recognized God's hand. He said, ***[10] “the Lord has given them into our hands.”***

It is obvious that Jonathan was zealous for God, and that he was a courageous and skilled warrior.

That's Jonathan. That's a good way to describe the other half of this famous friendship, too.

David - Man of Valor, Man of God (see 1 Samuel 16, 17)

We learned last Sunday that David was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons. He, the littlest brother, was assigned the most menial task in the family. He tended his father's sheep.

But that was a win, because shepherding gave David plenty of time alone, time to get really good at slinging stones and time to cultivate a heart for God.

David and Jonathan both loved God. They were both valiant warriors.¹

David and Jonathan - Men of God TOGETHER (1 Samuel 18:1-5)

Saul put David to good use for his kingdom (vv. 2, 5)

Before he defeated Goliath, King Saul knew David as the young man who calmed his raging spirit with soothing music.²

After he defeated Goliath, Saul realized what a kingdom asset David was. So, he ***[18:2] took him that day and did not let him return to his father's house.”***³

David's life as a shepherd was over. He was servant to the king, musically and militarily. Saul placed him over the men of war. (1 Samuel 18:5)⁴

I suspect that Saul was being shrewd here. Honoring the popular David probably lifted Saul's sagging ratings in the polls.

But the unintended consequence of bringing David on to his leadership team was that it brought David and Jonathan together.

Jonathan and David united as friends (vv. 1, 3, 4)

[18:1] Now it came about, when he had finished speaking to Saul, that Jonathan committed himself to David, and Jonathan loved him as himself...[3] Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

¹ David has already been anointed by Samuel to succeed Saul and become the second King of Israel. But his ascension to the throne will not take place until King Saul dies - and that will be many years in the future.

² Saul knew David, but not David's family. Hence his question to General Abner, ***[1 Samuel 17:55] “Whose son is this young man?”***

³ This was Saul's practice. ***[14:52] Now the war against the Philistines was severe all the days of Saul; and when Saul saw any mighty man or any valiant man, he attached him to his staff.***

⁴ It is unclear who knew about David's anointing. It would appear that Saul did not know of David's anointing, while Jonathan may have known.

[4] Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his military gear, including his sword, and his bow, and his belt.

I doubt if David, the eighth son of Jesse, had much to give Jonathan in return, but reciprocity was not needed. The gifts of the king's son sealed a covenant of loyal love between these two.

David and Jonathan had the two essential ingredients for building the kind of friendship that God uses to shape trusting, loving souls.

One, they were both deeply committed to the Lord.
Two, they were deeply committed to each other.

That's a friendship with God in the middle. Sound good? Sound like what your heart hungers for?

I'll bet that every one of us here today would love to enjoy that kind of friendship. That kind of friendship is precious when life gets messy.

It is what Jesus had in mind when He told His disciples, ***[John 15:13] "Greater love has no one than this, that a person will lay down his life for his friends."***

It is what we all want. And we should know that the essential foundation for this kind of a soul-shaping friendship is God.

Based on what we'll see of David's and Jonathan's friendship, the superstructure that rises from that foundation consists of:

- a willingness to take risks for our friend (19:1-7).
- a readiness to seek our friend's good, even at the expense of the friendship (20:1-42).
- an eagerness to encourage our friend to live for God (23:16-18).

First, we'll watch as Jonathan takes a huge risk for David. To fully understand the risk, we need to understand how toxic life had become for David in Saul's palace.

Friends Take Risks for Their Friends (19:1-7)

Royal Relations Turn Sour (1 Samuel 18)

David's popularity (v. 7)

After his defeat of Goliath, David became enormously popular in Israel. One of the songs that Jewish women sang went like this:

[1 Samuel 18:7] "Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands."

Obviously, Saul loved the first line. He hated the second line.

Saul's jealousy (vv. 8-9)

Saul became insanely jealous of David. He was so consumed by fear that David would steal his throne that, at least as I count them, he made at least six attempts on David's life.

The first attempt came when David was playing music to soothe Saul's madness. Saul muttered to himself, ***[18:11] "I will pin David to the wall."*** He hurled his spear at David, just barely missing.⁵

In one later scheme to kill David, though, Saul made a tactical error. He told his plan to his son, Jonathan.

Friendship as Advocacy (1 Samuel 19)

Saul's tactical "error" (v. 1a)

[19:1a] Now Saul told Jonathan his son and all his servants to put David to death...

If Saul had really wanted David dead (and he did!) he should never have told Jonathan about this plot.

⁵ See 1 Samuel 18 for one of Saul's more gruesome attempts to kill David. Saul set the dowry for his daughter at 100 foreskins of the Philistines. David foiled Saul's plot and killed 200 Philistines, winning the right to become Saul's son-in-law.

Jonathan was David's friend. So, of course, Jonathan warned David of his father's plan.

Jonathan's risky warning to David (vv. 2-3)

[2] "My father Saul is seeking to put you to death. Now then, please be on your guard in the morning, and stay in a hiding place and conceal yourself."

This was a risky move. Working against the wishes of the king was dangerous, even for the king's son.

That's OK. Jonathan saw that his friend, David, was in danger, and he took action.

But Jonathan did more than warn David. He approached his father.

Jonathan's risky approach to his father, the king (vv. 4-5)

Jonathan reminded his father that David had fought and killed Goliath. David helped establish Saul's reign. David kept the people of Israel from Philistine bondage. His message: *"Dad, you really don't want to kill David. He's your most loyal soldier. David is not your enemy!"*

On this occasion, Jonathan's risk paid off.

Well, Saul came to his senses. He **[6]...listened to the voice of Jonathan, and Saul vowed, "As the LORD lives, David shall not be put to death."**

Great story. They didn't exactly all live happily ever after, but on that one day, Jonathan rescued his friend.

But there was no guarantee that Jonathan's risky move would be successful. He laid his life on the line for David.

He didn't know if his approach to his father would result in David's deliverance or his own death.

But he was David's friend. And friends take risks for their friends.

If you would be the friend God would have you be to your friends, you will be willing to take risks for them.

Taking time to apply: You, a risk-taking friend...

A defining element of friendship, at least friendship as God intended it, is a willingness to risk safety and comfort for our friend.

A friend takes a phone call at an inconvenient hour. For a friend, you drop what you are doing and attend to her crisis. (Yes, I know about boundaries - but we are talking about a FRIEND!!)

You would take a bullet, throw yourself in front of a bus for your friend. You would advocate for your friend. You pray for your friend. You would fast for your friend.

Jonathan's bold love for David gave David a taste of God's love with skin on. The bold love you give to a friend today - be it risking life and limb or \$\$\$ or reputation - gives them a taste of God's love, too.

As we keep reading David's story, we learn of more murderous plots by Saul. One of them has Jonathan, again, coming to David's rescue.⁶

This time, he risked himself...and something else.

The palace grapevine was buzzing with rumors of Saul's renewed plans to kill David. So, David went to see Jonathan, and told him about Saul's most recent scheme.

Friends Value Friends More than Friendship (20:1-42)

⁶ Saul had already tried to kill David (19:9-10), but David escaped by having his wife, Michal (Saul's daughter), use the household idol as a decoy to deceive Saul into thinking that David was asleep and sick in bed (19:11-17). David then went to visit Samuel at Ramah, reporting Saul's attempt on his life.

David Voices His Fear to Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:1-4)

[1]...*“What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he is seeking my life?”*

This time, Jonathan didn't know about his father's plans. He couldn't believe that his father was trying to kill David AGAIN.

But David insisted that Saul was out to get him,⁷ and Jonathan listened.

So, together they put a plan in place that would give guidance to David if Saul was trying to kill him. Here's the plan.

The Friends Devise a Plan (1 Samuel 20:5-23)

David would miss meals at Saul's table - on purpose - for three days. Saul would notice David's absence because it was the time of a new moon when everyone was supposed to gather for meals.

David will hide out away from Saul's house.⁸ When Saul asks - and he will surely ask - *“Where is David?”*, Jonathan will tell him that David has gone to Bethlehem to offer a sacrifice with his family.

Saul's response to this “story” will let Jonathan know whether David can safely return to be with Saul or not.

It didn't take long for Jonathan to discover exactly what his father was thinking.

Saul's Rage (1 Samuel 20:24-34)

The first meal that David missed didn't cause a stir. Saul assumed that David was absent for innocent reasons.⁹

⁷ See 1 Samuel 20:3.

⁸ It is not clear from where Saul was ruling at this time; it could have been his hometown of Gibeah, mentioned in 1 Samuel 10:26. Or, it might have been Gilgal, the place where he was crowned King by Samuel.

⁹ He assumed that David was ceremonially unclean, presumably because of sexual relations.

But on the second night Saul asked about David's absence. Jonathan gave the agreed upon answer, *“He's with his family in Bethlehem offering a sacrifice to the Lord.”* - and Saul exploded!

[30]...*“You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? [31] For, as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established.¹⁰ Now then, send men and bring him to me, for he is doomed to die.”*

And then, when Jonathan, shouted, **[32]...*“Why must he be put to death? What has he done?”***, Saul picked up the same spear he had used to try to kill David and tried to kill his own son with it.

Thus, **[33]...*Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death.***

And Jonathan stormed away from the table, furious and grieved since his father had insulted his friend.

The next morning Jonathan went with a young servant to the field where David was hiding and sent a signal to let David know that his life was, indeed, in danger.¹¹

The end of this story is beautifully gut-wrenching.
Jonathan and David part (1 Samuel 20:35-42)

[41] *When the boy was gone, David got up from the south side, then he fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, until David wept immeasurably. [42] Then Jonathan said to David, “Go in safety, since we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying,*

¹⁰ It seems that Saul expected that his kingdom would be firmly established. But he knew better, having been told by Samuel that the kingdom was going to be ripped away from him because of his sin. (1 Samuel 14 and 15) It was true, then, that Jonathan was choosing David over himself for the throne.

¹¹ Jonathan shot a series of arrows and called out to the servant the code phrase, **[37] *“Is the arrow not beyond you?”*** which only David would understand.

'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'" Then David set out and went on his way, while Jonathan went into the city.

They were both grieving because, as far as they could see, they were saying good-bye. As far as they knew, this was the last time they would ever see each other.

They had made promises to each other of loyalty lasting for generations. Their good-byes don't violate those promises. They validated them.

But notice. Jonathan was willing to send his friend away to protect his friend.

If, because he enjoyed David's presence so much, he had said, *"I know it's dangerous, but stick around"* - David certainly would have died. Saul would have killed him.

But Jonathan loved David more than he loved the friendship with David. So, he did what would benefit his friend.

Taking time to apply: You, loving your friend more than the friendship...

It is hard to let a friendship go. It's hard to love our friend more than we love the closeness of that friendship.

Jonathan shows us that a true friend holds a friendship as the gift of God it is, always with an open hand, never with a clenched fist.

Let's say it this way: Jonathan's guiding friendship principle was to act in the best interest of his friend.

If we were to adopt such a friendship principle, it might lead to...

- a willingness to speak hard truth to our friend about something in his or her life that needs to be addressed or that needs to change.

There have been a number of Jonathans in my life - men and women - who have risked the loss of our friendship to tell me something true about me because they loved me more than our friendship.

I am in their debt, just as you will be indebted to any Jonathan who is willing to speak hard truth to you in love.

If you would be a Jonathan, you will say what needs to be said, not only the pleasant thing.

- a willingness to release our friends to pursue personal growth and new opportunities. We won't cling to them.

Have you ever NOT encouraged a friend to pursue a growth opportunity because it would infringe on your ability to get together with her?

Have you ever tried to squelch a friend's desire to serve Jesus in some new way because it might take him - temporarily or permanently - outside of your personal orbit?

This is a challenging assignment, but if we would be the friend to our friends that Jonathan was to David, we will hold those friendships loosely, with an open hand.¹²

Now let's see one more side of a David / Jonathan friendship with God in the middle.

I said earlier that David and Jonathan may have thought that they would never see each other again after they parted ways in that field.

Well, if that was what they thought, they were wrong. They did have another visit. And, as far as we know, that visit that we see here was the first time they had seen each other in years.

¹² From that day forward, Jonathan lived with a core sadness because of the loss of his friend, the future king, but he continued as the faithful son of the current king.

And it may be that here really was their final meeting. If so, it is fitting. Because here, Jonathan gave David a priceless gift.

Years have passed since they last saw each other. A lot had happened, and not much of it good for David.

He had become a fugitive, chased by Saul all over the land. He had suffered, been persecuted, lost a lot. One day, out in the wilderness, out of nowhere, Jonathan showed up.

Friends Encourage Friends in God (23:16-18)

Jonathan Purposed to Point David to God (1 Samuel 23:16)

[16] And Jonathan, Saul's son, set out and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God.

Here was David, the future king, fleeing from the current *insane* king. We can only imagine that David was deeply discouraged.

The gift of encouragement was exactly what he needed and that was the gift that Jonathan wanted to give David - but he wanted to give encouragement of a certain kind.

Jonathan wanted to raise David's eyes to God. David had been beat up. Jonathan's purpose in visiting to say, "*David, look up.*"

And who better to bring that encouragement than his friend?

Listen to the encouraging words Jonathan brought to David.

Jonathan Reminded David of God's Truth (1 Samuel 23:17-18)

[17] He said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel, and I will be second in command to you; and Saul my father knows that as well." [18] So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord; and David stayed at Horesh, while Jonathan went to his house.

So often, encouragement is exactly the tonic our friend's soul needs.

And it doesn't need to be complicated. Encouragement can consist of simply reminding our friend of God's promises and goodness and love and grace.

Discouraging things come our way all the time. They can do a number on our stability. Suffering and trials can skew our perspective.

Given all that he had suffered, David needed the God-words Jonathan had to offer. Jonathan gave them. That's what friends do.

They come alongside of us, and they say, "**GOD.**" They remind us of God and His purposes for us.

Few things change our perspective for the good like someone who gently helps us lift our sights to God. That is what Jonathan did for David. That's what encouragement is all about.

You can do that for your discouraged and hurting friend. He or she has suffered a great loss. You remind your friend of God's grace.

Your friend is facing a mountain of a challenge and you work hard to creatively encourage your friend to look to God.

Friends point their friends to God. They go out of their way to do this. They are even willing to meet their friends in the wilderness to do so.

Conclusion:

The theme of friendship winds its way all through the Bible.

We see friendship between David and Jonathan, Jesus and His disciples, and Paul and his Gospel teammates.

In one sense, friendships just “happen.” They are the gift of God. We don’t orchestrate them or create them. In another sense, though, friendships very much happen as we pursue them.

At the beginning this morning, I spoke of radishes and asparagus (asparagi?) as images of friendship.

A radish friendship isn’t all that satisfying. It requires little of us and quickly brings what little profit it will yield because we’ve only made a small investment.

But we can also commit to the pricier, but infinitely more rewarding asparagus friendship. This crop will take time and energy to develop.

They are formed in an Adult Bible Fellowship that meets on Sunday morning. Or they can form in a Care Group that meets during the week. Genuine friendships can form over coffee or meals where life meets life.

They can and do form when we serve God together, pray together, weep and laugh together.

These are friendships with God in the middle.¹³ These are friendships marked by a willingness to take risks, a commitment to sacrificial love, and by purposing to remind each other of God.

This is the friendship that David and Jonathan enjoyed.

Are you open to the idea that Jesus is challenging your approach to relationships today?

That He is saying, *“You’ve got enough acquaintances. It’s time to pursue something more. It’s time to go deep. It’s time to start being a Jonathan to a David in your life.”*

¹³ Note Ecclesiastes 4:12, where Solomon speaks of a cord of three strands that is not easily broken. That’s you, your friend, and God.

If so, there is no time like the present to reach out to a friend and be a Jonathan - today.