

SOUL TO SOUL

**SERIES: A LIFE OF PASSION:
THE STORY OF DAVID.**



Catalog No. 20150920
Samuel 18:1-30
7th Message
Scott Grant
September 20, 2015

1 Samuel 18:1-30

Os Guinness writes, “We are always prone to envy people close to us in temperament, gifts, or position. Thus mothers are more likely to envy other mothers, writers other writers, lawyers other lawyers, politicians other politicians, golfers other golfers, ministers other ministers, and so on.”¹

Did he have to say ministers?

In our day, we with our ever-expanding social networks, we also have more opportunities to be envious. Recent studies suggest that feelings of envy increase with Facebook use.² Most people don’t open up about their problems on social media. In most posts, people seem happy—happier, perhaps, than you, and happy doing whatever they’re doing without you.

What do envy and its twin, jealousy, do to us? What do envy and jealousy do to our souls? After David defeated Goliath, Saul became both envious and jealous of David. What happened to him? What happened to his soul?

Knit souls

1 Samuel 18:1-5:

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ²And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father’s house. ³Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. ⁵And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him, so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul’s servants.

Jonathan and Saul have different reactions to David and his victory over Goliath.

Who David is and what he has done have affected Jonathan in a deep way: the word “soul” is used in connection to Jonathan’s reaction to David no less than three times in three verses. Jonathan feels a deep love for David and a deep connection to him. Jonathan makes a covenant with David, foreshadowing the covenant that the Lord would make with David in 2 Samuel 7. Moreover, Jonathan gives David his robe, his armor, and his weapons, symbolically renouncing his right to the throne of his father and granting it to David. When Saul tore the prophet Samuel’s robe, Samuel told Saul that the kingdom was being torn from him and being given to his neighbor (1 Samuel 15:27-28). David, who now owns the robe of Saul’s son, has become Saul’s neighbor. Jonathan’s actions represent another tear in the robe of Saul’s kingdom.

On the other hand, we are told nothing of Saul’s soul; we are only told what he does. Saul’s reaction to David is entirely utilitarian. While Jonathan loved David with his own soul, Saul is only concerned with how he can profit from David’s military prowess. Jonathan gives to David, but Saul takes him from his father’s house. Literally, Saul would not “give” him back to his father’s house. He’s saying, in so many words, “he’s my son now”—a son for whom he feels no affection.

Ironically, Saul had tried to fit David with his clothes, armor, and sword for David’s confrontation with Goliath, but he refused them, knowing that he could not defeat the enemy outfitted like Saul (1 Samuel 17:38-39). However, now, after David’s victory over Goliath, would be an appropriate time for Saul to make such an offer to David—and to throw in his throne as well. Yes, Saul should give to David as Jonathan has given to him: he should give him the kingdom.

Saul’s son, Saul’s servants, and all Saul’s people respond positively to David, but Saul himself remains aloof.

How about your soul? What’s going on in your soul? The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. Is your soul knit to Jesus, the son of David? Who Jesus is and what he has done: how does he affect you?

How does David affect Saul?

Misreading what's going on

1 Samuel 18:6-9:

As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. ⁷And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,

“Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”

⁸And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?”⁹And Saul eyed David from that day on.

In the wake of David's defeat of Goliath and Israel's defeat of the Philistines, the women come out to celebrate the victory. Their song does not extoll the triumphs of David over the triumphs of Saul. Saul is the commander; David is the warrior. Scholar Bruce Waltke explains: “The laws of Hebrew poetry require that the greater, Saul, be named first and the lesser, David, second, and that the smaller number be mentioned before the higher.”³ Moreover, if David has struck down his ten thousands, he did so for Saul and for Israel. Furthermore, although the women lionize David, they do not demean Saul; in fact, they come out to meet Saul, not David.

Saul, though, is in no mood to celebrate. Giving in to envy and jealousy, he misreads what's going on. The Lord has won a great victory for Saul and for Israel through David, but instead of celebrating, Saul fumes. And Saul wonders “what more can he have but the kingdom?” Well, David should have the kingdom. He will have the kingdom. As readers, we know it, because Samuel secretly anointed David (1 Samuel 16:13). Somehow, even Saul, in his paranoia, knows it. But he doesn't know David. He sees David only as ambitious. More than ambitious, David is destined.

Grammarians make a distinction between envy and jealousy. Envy is wanting what someone else has; jealousy is worrying that someone will take what you have. Saul is both envious and jealous. He wants David's popularity, and he's worried that David will take the kingdom from him.

If you give in to envy or jealousy, you may misread what's going on. If you're vigilant to protect your position, you'll become sensitive—even hypersensitive—to any potential threat or rival. Through the lens of envy or jealousy, you will see threats and rivalries where none exist. Like Saul, you will feel slighted when no slight is intended. A Russian proverb says, “Envy looks at a juniper bush and sees a pine forest.”

First, Saul misreads what's going on. Next, he opens the door to evil.

Opening the door to evil

1 Samuel 18:10-11:

The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. ¹¹And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David evaded him twice.

We already know that the Spirit has departed from Saul because of his disobedience, which literally opened the door for “an evil spirit from the Lord” to torment him (1 Samuel 16:14). Once again, we literally read that an “evil spirit from God” torments Saul, this time rushing upon him. Again, we will read, in verse 12, that the Lord had departed from Saul. This time we're left with the impression that Saul's envy and jealousy opened the door for the evil spirit. Literally, the women's song was “evil” in his eyes (verse 8). If you attribute something good to the work of evil, you open the door to evil. In that the evil spirit is “from God,” we're left with the impression that God has granted the evil spirit's request to rush upon Saul. (See Job 1:6-12, where Satan proceeds “from the presence of the Lord” to torment Job.) God honors human choice, at times giving people over to what they, in their depravity, want.

When the evil spirit first tormented Saul, David was summoned to play the lyre to soothe him (1 Samuel 16:14-23). The Lord may have sent an evil spirit, but he also sent David to make it go away. Now, the only one who can soothe Saul is also the one who enrages him. What a conundrum! Literally, David is playing the lyre with his “hand” while Saul has a spear in his “hand.” Although Saul would seem to have the advantage (isn't the spear mightier than the lyre?), he fails to pin David to the wall. In fact, he fails twice. The man who holds lyre and possesses the Spirit will prevail over the man who holds the spear and lacks the Spirit—and he will do so without lifting a hand against him.

If you give in to envy or jealousy, you may open the door to evil. Thus you may experience destructive impulses that seemingly come from someplace else or wild mood swings that seem to be beyond your control. You may lash out unpredictably. You may find yourself behaving in self-destructive ways, even biting the hand that feeds you. If you give in to envy or jealousy, you may feel as Saul felt: tormented.

Has envy or jealousy ever made you feel good? John Gielgud was considered a fine actor. Laurence Olivier was considered a better actor. Said Gielgud: "When Sir Laurence Olivier played Hamlet in 1948, and the critics raved, I wept." [Guinness, 73.]

First, Saul misreads what's going on. Second, he opens the door to evil. Next, he fights against God.

Fighting against God

1 Samuel 18:12-16:

Saul was afraid of David because the Lord was with him but had departed from Saul.¹³ So Saul removed him from his presence and made him a commander of a thousand. And he went out and came in before the people.¹⁴ And David had success in all his undertakings, for the Lord was with him.¹⁵ And when Saul saw that he had great success, he stood in fearful awe of him.¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David, for he went out and came in before them.

The explanation for David's success is this: "the Lord was with him." Conversely, the explanation for Saul's failure is this: "the Lord . . . had departed from Saul." Saul's stunning inability to dispatch David with his spear seems to have convinced him of the Lord's disposition toward each of them. Now, in addition to being envious of David, Saul becomes fearful of him. If the Lord is with David and has departed from Saul and if Saul considers David his enemy, he is rightfully fearful, for if he makes David his enemy, he makes the Lord his enemy. Moreover, if the Lord had departed from Saul and if the Lord is with David, then Saul will remove David from his presence. Furthermore, if Saul can't dispatch David with his spear, then he will dispatch him to the battlefield. However, David succeeds as a military commander. After all, the Lord is with him. Saul therefore fears David even more.

Saul hates David, but the people love him. Earlier, we learned that Jonathan loved David. Now "all Israel and Judah," both north and south, loves him. It's understandable that Judah is inclined toward David, for David hails from Judah, in the south. But even Israel, in the north, where Saul is from, has fallen for David. It seems that Saul's enemy has won over even his own people.

If you give in to envy or jealousy, you may find yourself fighting against God, whether you know it or not. God makes each of us different and places us in different environments. If you bemoan your gifts and your place and envy someone else's gifts and place, you're telling God, in so many words, that he doesn't know what he's doing. You probably wouldn't word it this way, but you're fighting against God.

The composer Salieri, in the film *Amadeus*, puts it this way, though. He's envious of Mozart, and he deems God "unjust" for blessing Mozart with extraordinary talent and not him. Salieri tells God, "You are the Enemy," and he sets out to destroy Mozart, whom he calls "the Creature" and "the Incarnation."

First, Saul misreads what's going on. Second, he opens the door to evil. Third, he fights against God. Next, he uses his daughter.

Using others

1 Samuel 18:17-19:

Then Saul said to David, "Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you for a wife. Only be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "Let not my hand be against him, but let the hand of the Philistines be against him."¹⁸ And David said to Saul, "Who am I, and who are my relatives, my father's clan in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to the king?"¹⁹ But at the time when Merab, Saul's daughter, should have been given to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite for a wife.

Saul had earlier pledged his daughter to any man who killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:25). Now, finally, Saul offers his daughter to David, but instead of doing so free and clear, he attaches another condition: David must continue in Saul's service as a warrior. Earlier, when Saul dispatched David to the battlefield, his reasons for doing so were opaque. Now, by attaching a condition to the

offer of his daughter, his reasoning comes into focus. If Saul couldn't kill David with a spear in his "hand," then he hopes that the "hand" of the Philistines will do the job. Not only does he use his daughter as bait, he also uses the Lord's name in vain, urging David to "fight the Lord's battles" when in reality he only wants David to be killed in battle.

David responds artfully. On the one hand, his words convey humility. On the other hand, they serve to remind Saul of his earlier pledges. Who is David? David slew Goliath; as such, he should be given Saul's daughter regardless of whether he fights the "the Lord's battles." Who are his relatives, his father's clan in Israel? Based on David's defeat of Goliath, they should be exempt from taxes "in Israel" (1 Samuel 17:25).

Both David's humility and his subtle reminders have no effect. In the end, Saul gives Merab to another man.

If you give in to envy or jealousy, you may find yourself tempted to use others, even those closest to you—even God, for that matter—to help you prevail over rivals, real or imagined. In one way or another, those whose minds are influenced by envy or jealousy often enlist others in their cause. They force friends to take sides. To them, sacrificing other people to protect their positions or advance their causes is worth the price. To such individuals, people aren't people; they're pawns. Some individuals are so controlled by envy or jealousy that they consider using people to be a normal way to live. They force people to take sides. For such individuals, there's no middle ground: you're either for them or against them. They assume that everyone's using everyone, so they don't give it a second thought. As Bob Seeger sings in a different context, "I used her / She used me / But neither one cared."⁴

First, Saul misreads what's going on. Second, he opens the door to evil. Third, he fights against God. Fourth, he uses his daughter. Next, he isolates himself.

Becoming isolated

1 Samuel 18:20-27:

Now Saul's daughter Michal loved David. And they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. ²¹Saul thought, "Let me give her to him, that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." Therefore Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." ²²And Saul commanded his servants, "Speak to David in private and say, 'Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you. Now then

become the king's son-in-law.'" ²³And Saul's servants spoke those words in the ears of David. And David said, "Does it seem to you a little thing to become the king's son-in-law, since I am a poor man and have no reputation?" ²⁴And the servants of Saul told him, "Thus and so did David speak." ²⁵Then Saul said, "Thus shall you say to David, 'The king desires no bride-price except a hundred foreskins of the Philistines, that he may be avenged of the king's enemies.'" Now Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. ²⁶And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son-in-law. Before the time had expired, ²⁷David arose and went, along with his men, and killed two hundred of the Philistines. And David brought their foreskins, which were given in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. And Saul gave him his daughter Michal for a wife.

Saul sees Michal's love for David as an opportunity to do away with his enemy. For the second time, he speaks to David about becoming his son-in-law, which reminds us both that Saul reneged the first time and that he failed to bring an end to David at the hand of the Philistines. It also reminds us that David twice evaded Saul's spear. Not only does Saul use his daughter's emotions, he also feigns affection for David himself, instructing his servants to tell David that he delights in him. At least Saul doesn't tell David that he loves him, though by this time pretty much everyone loves David but Saul. On the other hand, no one—neither his people nor his servants, neither his son nor his daughters—is said to love Saul. Saul has isolated himself—from the people he is leading, even from his own children.

Once again, David is self-effacing, at least on the surface. David may be poor, but he is no longer a man of no reputation, and Saul would therefore be wise to treat David well. Saul, though, uses David's supposed poverty to his advantage by demanding the death of a hundred Philistines instead of money for a bride-price. Saul demands the foreskins of the Philistines, proof that David has scalped the Philistines of their potency.⁵ Saul is demanding more than valiance, as he did in the case of his first daughter; he's demanding that David put himself in harm's way a hundred times so that the Philistines will have repeated opportunities to kill him.

Saul failed twice with his spear. He failed with one daughter; now he fails with another daughter. Moreover, David kills twice the number of Philistines demanded by Saul. Saul sees no other recourse than to give Michal to David.

If you give in to envy or jealousy, you may end up isolating yourself. If you misread what's going on, if you open the door to evil, if you fight against God, if you use people, how do you think you will view the people around you, and how do you think they will view you? You'll be suspicious of them, and they'll be suspicious of you. You'll keep your distance from them, at least emotionally, and they'll keep their distance from you.

Finally, it should not be lost on Saul that he can't win.

You can't win

1 Samuel 18:28-30:

But when Saul saw and knew that the Lord was with David, and that Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him, ²⁹Saul was even more afraid of David. So Saul was David's enemy continually.

³⁰ Then the commanders of the Philistines came out to battle, and as often as they came out David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed.

The narrator has twice noted that the Lord was with David; now even Saul sees it. If the Lord is with David, and Saul is king of the Lord's people, then Saul should welcome the Lord's presence with David. In verse 12, Saul was "afraid" of David. In verse 15, his fear escalated as he "stood in fearful awe" of David. Now, Saul is even "more afraid" of David. Alas, Saul sees David, who has successfully fought the Lord's battles and is now his son-in-law, as a threat—and as a perpetual enemy.

And David? He goes from victory to victory against the Philistines, who are just as impotent against David as Saul, much to Saul's chagrin. David's name, once little known in Israel, is now highly esteemed.

A fable is told of an eagle that was envious of another eagle that could fly better than it could. One day the bird saw an archer and said to him, "I wish you would bring down that eagle up there." The archer said he would if he had some feathers for his arrows. So the envious eagle pulled one out of his wing. The arrow was shot, but it didn't reach the rival eagle because it was flying too high. The eagle below pulled out another feather, then another—until it had lost so many feathers that it couldn't fly at all. The archer turned around and let fly with another arrow—and killed the helpless bird below.

Finally, if you give in to envy or jealousy, you can't win. Nothing Saul tries works in the end. In fact, everything he tries backfires. Even if you manage to defeat a rival, what will defeating a rival do to your soul? You won't win there. In your soul, you won't win.

How about your soul? What's going on in your soul?

Jewish leaders and the Son of David

Just like Saul, the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day were "very angry" and "displeased"—not with David, of course, but with Jesus, the Son of David, because he articulated a radically inclusive vision of the kingdom of God. The women sang songs of David; likewise, the children sang songs of the Son of David. Just as Saul was irritated with the women, the Jewish leaders were irritated with the children. Saul had David in his sights, but David evaded him; the Jewish leaders had Jesus cornered, but somehow he, like David, escaped, because it wasn't his time. Jesus, like David, was commissioned to fight the Lord's battles. David fought Goliath and the Philistines, but Jesus fought Satan and his demons. Saul, unable to put David to death, hoped that the Philistines would do the job; the Jewish leaders, incapable of putting Jesus to death, handed him over to the Romans. Saul tried to pin Jesus to the wall; the Jewish leaders, by handing Jesus over to the Romans, tried to pin him to a cross. Finally, they succeeded.

Then again, they failed. First, when Jesus died on the cross, he won the war he was fighting—the war against Satan. Saul struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands, but Jesus struck down Satan himself, along with his demons. Second, he didn't stay dead. David won a bride by defeating the Philistines. Jesus, who won his war with Satan, also won a bride by doing so. Who might that be? It's us! Those who believe in Christ constitute the bride of Christ, the people Jesus went to war to win. Saul's efforts to do away with David backfired: David only grew stronger. The Jewish leaders' efforts to do away with Jesus also backfired: they thought they won, but their victory was their defeat, and Jesus' defeat was his victory—and ours.

You can't lose

Who Jesus is and what he has done: how does he affect you? What's going on in your soul? The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. How about your soul? Have you given your life to Jesus, the Son of David? If you have, did you know that your soul has been knit to his soul? The apostle Paul says so. Speaking of those

who have given their lives to Christ, Paul says, “But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1 Corinthians 6:17). In your soul, if you have given your life to Christ, you are experiencing union with him, regardless of whether you feel it.

What does it mean that your soul has been knit to the soul of Christ, that you are united with him, that you are one with him? It means many things, of course, but in the context of 1 Samuel 18, it means this: you can’t lose. It means, according to Paul in Romans 8, that we are “fellow heirs with Christ,” that “all things work together for good” for us, and that we are “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:17, 28, 38). Astoundingly, God draws up evil into his purposes so that that evil works to our advantage, as it worked to the advantage of David in 1 Samuel 18, as it worked to the advantage of the Son of David in the gospels.

If that is the case, if giving your life to Christ means that you actually benefit from that which would destroy you, why do you need to envy anyone? Why do you need to be jealous of anyone? You’re more than a conqueror: you are threatened by no one, and you don’t need to defeat anyone. No one can take away your place in the kingdom. Even if it seems as if you possess “nothing,” you possess “everything,” as Paul says (2 Corinthians 6:10). In fact, “momentary affliction”—even affliction at the hands of the likes of Saul—is producing for you an “eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17). The Lord is with you, just as he was with David. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me” (Psalm 23:4).

Evil can do its worst, but we will be here next Sunday, playing our lyres and singing our songs, and if it does its worst, we will play better and sing stronger.

If you give in to envy and jealousy, you can’t win. If you give your life to Christ, you can’t lose. It remains, then, for you to face in to the challenge of believing that God uses evil for good in your life. Granted, it’s not easy to believe but there it is: a stunningly sublime biblical truth.

Okay, what if you give in to envy or jealousy? A thousand years after Saul raged against David, Saul of Tarsus, like his namesake, raged against followers of the Son of David, but Jesus stopped him in his tracks,

blinded him so that he could see, and transformed him into the apostle Paul, who went on to write that “we are more than conquerors.” Jesus transformed Saul of Tarsus; he can transform you.

If you haven’t yet given your life to Christ, give him your robe, your armor, and your weapons. Give him your life. Renounce the right to rule your own life and give it to Christ—and your soul will be knit to the soul of the Son of David.

(Endnotes)

¹Os Guinness, *Steering through the Chaos: Vice and Virtue in an Age of Moral Confusion* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2000), 74.

²Maria Konnikova, “How Facebook Makes Us Unhappy,” (*The New Yorker*, September 10, 2013).

³Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 644.

⁴Bob Seeger, “Night Moves” (Capitol Records, 1976).

⁵Waltke, 644.