

1 Samuel 20 — Getting Behind God's Work Is More Important Than Me

September 18, 2022

Good morning CrossWinds! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. We are continuing our study in the book of 1 Samuel. Today we are in 1 Samuel 20. Take out your notes. If you want, turn to 1 Samuel 20 in your Bible. We are at the point in the story where God rejected King Saul as king. David was privately anointed king by Samuel the prophet. God was raising David up as God was bringing Saul down. The problem was that King Saul didn't like it. To him, experiencing God slowly taking away his position as king was like having a tooth pulled without novocaine.

Since David's victory over Goliath in 1 Samuel 17, Saul was jealous of David and even tried to kill David. In 1 Samuel 18, Saul twice tried to assassinate David with a spear. Three times he tried to kill David by setting him up to die on the battlefield. Each time David survived and his name became more infamous. Last week, in 1 Samuel 19, Saul was determined to kill David again. 1 Samuel 19 gave us four short escape stories. We saw three ways God saved David's life using his invisible hand. God used ordinary people and perfect timing to save David's bacon.

In the last story, God stopped working behind the scenes and used his visible hand to miraculously protect David. When Saul sent soldiers to arrest David, the Holy Spirit acted like a force field around him, keeping the soldiers from touching him. When Saul came to kill David, the Holy Spirit made Saul prophecy, then, like a tractor beam, God reeled Saul into Ramah like a hooked fish reeled in from the water. Finally, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, when

Saul arrived at Ramah, he stripped naked and prophesied, and then the Holy Spirit acted like a taser knocking Saul out cold for 24 hours. You would think getting zapped by a Holy Spirit taser and the embarrassment of waking up naked would knock some sense into people. If I were Saul, I would stop trying to kill David. It didn't work that way. When Saul woke up, he was just angrier and more vindictive.

Today in 1 Samuel 20, with Saul out cold from the Holy Spirit knockout, David took the opportunity to run for his life. Where did David run? Two miles back to Gibeah. He went to talk to Jonathan, his best friend. This chapter will teach us about friendship, but there is much more than friendship in these verses.

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came and said before Jonathan, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" 1 Samuel 20:1 (ESV)

Does anyone sense the panic in David's voice? Saul was constantly trying to take David's life. In 1 Samuel 19, Jonathan had a courageous conversation with his father, King Saul. Saul promised to be at peace with David. Since then, Saul's jealousy of David got the best of him. He broke his promise to his son and made several more attempts on David's life. For David, these were all brushes with death. At this point, David is emotionally spent. Why does your father keep trying to kill me? What have I done?

This is not the same David that walked into battle against Goliath. The confidence we saw that day is gone on this day. It is not that David does not believe God will protect his life. It is not that David hasn't seen God protect his

life. It is that after someone tries to kill you over a dozen times, it takes an emotional toll on you. You are frazzled.

Can anyone identify with David's feelings? We know God loves us. We know Jesus died for us. We know we are forgiven and the most blessed beings in the universe through Jesus, but sometimes we are so worn out that we are broken. What we know is true and what we feel is true are different. If you have been at that broken point in life, then you can identify with David at this moment.

And he said to him, "Far from it! You shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so." 1 Samuel 20:2 (ESV)

Jonathan speaks to him in his brokenness, "David, that is not true. My father is not trying to kill you. He made a promise to me and to the rest of the family to be at peace with you." Jonathan felt his father was always open with him. If his father's feelings had changed about David, surely Jonathan would be one of the first to know it.

It seems hard to believe that Jonathan would be completely unaware of the multiple attempts Saul made on David's life in the last chapter when Saul decided to break his promise to his son. Last week, Saul threw a spear at David and it lodged in the wall. He must have had the plaster redone before Jonathan saw it. He tried to kill David at Jonathan's sister's house. Somehow Saul kept the truth about the attempted murders away from his son and the public eye. The multiple squads of soldiers he sent to kill David and his 24 hours of being knocked out naked were things he kept from his son and the public eye. How he did that, I have no idea. What this tells me is that Saul was a skilled liar. He was good at deception. Like Satan, lying was his native tongue. Saul had no problem

lying to his own son and breaking promises to his son. This gives you an idea of the extent of depravity in Saul's heart. As we will see in a moment, while Saul was a good liar, Jonathan was not a good liar. He couldn't even tell a good lie because he was accustomed to telling the truth.

But David vowed again, saying, "Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he thinks, '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 Samuel 20:3 (ESV)

David tells Jonathan, I am not joking. Your father is lying to you. I am only one step away from death. Jonathan was not there the three times Saul tried to pin David to the wall with a spear. They were razor-close calls where one less step would have spelled death.

Jonathan sees David in this complete panic and does what a good friend would do in this situation. He simply asks, "How can I help you?"

Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." 1 Samuel 20:4 (ESV)

David had a plan that he hoped would reveal Jonathan, and everyone else, Saul's true feelings about David.

David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit at table with the king. But let me go, that I may hide myself in the field till the third day at evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city, for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the clan.' If he says, 'Good!' it will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. 1 Samuel 20:5–7 (ESV)

Let's deal with the obvious. David just asked Jonathan to lie to his father. That is not good. The Bible tells us that lying is breaking one of the Ten Commandments. This passage is not telling children they should lie to their parents. These verses tell us what happened, not what should have happened.

Before we throw David under the bus for asking his best friend to lie for him, remember that David was extremely stressed. He was not making the best choices. He was not making the best requests of his friend. The amazing part is that even though David asked Jonathan to do a deceptive thing, God still used it for his good purposes despite the wrong choice.

While we are in these verses, I should take a moment to explain new moon feasts. In the Jewish world, new moons were little holidays when everyone was expected to be around the table.

Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. Psalm 81:3 (ESV)

David, as a son-in-law to the king and a general in the king's army, would be expected to be at the feast.

Therefore deal kindly with your servant, for you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you. But if there is guilt in me, kill me yourself, for why should you bring me to your father?" 1 Samuel 20:8 (ESV)

At this point, David was pleading with Jonathan for his help. David said you brought your servant into a covenant of the Lord with you. This covenant was a relationship in which David and Jonathan promised to be faithful and loyal to one another.

At this moment, David didn't know whom he could trust. Saul was committed to killing him. There were spies all around him. When David felt abandoned and alone, he went to the one friend who promised before God to be loyal, faithful, and true, that is, Jonathan.

David also asked Jonathan to "deal kindly" with him. That is the Hebrew word Heseb. It means to show loyal love. When the chips were down in David's

life, he needed someone who would be faithful to him and who had promised to always show loyal love to him. That person was Jonathan, his faithful friend.

I was in a premarital counseling session this week and talking to the couple about marriage. I reminded them that marriage is based on a covenant. Just as David and Jonathan had made a covenant before God to be faithful and loyal friends in thick and thin, in marriage, you make a covenant before God to your spouse that no matter what happens, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, you will be a faithful and loyal partner to your spouse until death do you part. In the covenant of marriage, you speak the truth to one another, and when the world is falling apart, you can go home to the safe place of being with one another, where you can spill your guts safely. While David and Jonathan are not in a marriage covenant with one another, they have covenanted before God to be faithful and loyal friends to one another.

Some of you may say, "Well, this is good for married people, but I am single. Where do I run to that is a safe space and a safe person when my world is falling apart? I don't have a friend like Jonathan. I don't have a spouse. What about me?" When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are reminded of the new covenant Jesus made with us by means of his blood. All of us can run to Jesus. No matter how bad our day, no matter how bad our choices are when we run to Jesus in repentance, we know his covenant love is still in place. He is faithful to us for better or for worse, richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health. Jesus showed his loyal love to us by dying on the cross in our place for our sins while we were dead in our sins. Jesus always shows faithful and loyal love to us even

when we don't show faithful and loyal love to him. Folks, when the world is falling apart around us, the place where it is always safe to run for loyal, faithful love is Jesus, even more than a faithful spouse or a loyal friend.

And Jonathan said, "Far be it from you! If I knew that it was determined by my father that harm should come to you, would I not tell you?" 1 Samuel 20:9 (ESV)

Jonathan declares David's innocence and his own ignorance of any of his father's plans to kill him.

Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?" And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field. And Jonathan said to David, "The LORD, the God of Israel, be witness! When I have sounded out my father, about this time tomorrow, or the third day, behold, if he is well disposed toward David, shall I not then send and disclose it to you? But should it please my father to do you harm, the LORD do so to Jonathan and more also if I do not disclose it to you and send you away, that you may go in safety. May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father. 1 Samuel 20:10–13 (ESV)

David had the plan to find out Saul's true feelings. Jonathan had a plan to safely communicate to David his father's true feelings. Jonathan promised to tell David the truth about his father's feelings.

Jonathan closes by saying, "May the Lord be with you, as he has been with my father." We are never told how Jonathan learned that David would succeed Saul as king, but at this point, it is clear that Jonathan knew he would not be the next king and that David would reign in his place. Rather than Jonathan insisting on his own will and trying to make himself king, he put self-promotion aside and decided to get behind God's will instead of fighting against God's will like his father. If it was God's will that Jonathan becomes less in life and David becomes more in life, that was ok with Jonathan because what is

more important in life is getting behind God's will, not insisting on Jonathan's will. Jonathan teaches us a lesson.

God often works through people that let go of their ego to get behind what God is doing instead of focusing on what is best for them.

To you, is it more important that God's will and work are accomplished or that what is good for you and most comfortable for you is accomplished? Let me give a practical example. We are struggling to find people to work in the nursery. When we ask people to help, the answer is often I hear is that I don't want to serve in the nursery because it is no fun in the nursery. The nursery doesn't build me up. They don't serve coffee in the nursery. You can't sing in the nursery. The diapers stink in the nursery.

The problem is that when you run a church, young parents need a nursery. You can't reach young families with Jesus if you can't love and serve them with experiencing a few minutes of peace because of a nursery. In a church, a nursery is part of building Christ's kingdom and reaching families. Right now, at CrossWinds, there is a real need in that area. We can come to church planning to sit, sing, and sip coffee and build ourselves up or we can be like Jonathan and make less of ourselves and come to church intent on getting behind what God is doing and building others up, even people in the church nursery.

If you don't like the nursery. You can serve as a greeter. We are woefully short on them. It only involves coming to church ten minutes early, smiling, and shaking hands. Surely all of us can do that. God accomplishes his will in this

world through people who are committed to getting behind what God is doing instead of getting behind what is best for them and most comfortable for them.

If we want to be a man or woman like Jonathan, we need to ask ourselves what God is doing and get behind it to build God's kingdom. We have to give up trying to build our own kingdom and make ourselves little kings.

If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord, that I may not die; and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth." 1 Samuel 20:14–15 (ESV)

Jonathan knows that in this process of showing faithful love and friendship to David and as the transition between his father as king and David as the king took place, Jonathan could lose his life. When this was all over, Jonathan knew he might not be alive. The day's tradition was that when a new king took over, the old king and all his children were killed to remove rivals to the throne. That could happen to Jonathan, but he was loyal to God's choice for the next king anyway.

And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the LORD take vengeance on David's enemies." And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul. 1 Samuel 20:16–17 (ESV)

Jonathan was not just saying he was for David, but he was also against David's enemies. This was setting loyalty to David over his father. How did this work out?

Jonathan hoped David would be king and he would be with David as his friend, second in command.

And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this." 1 Samuel 23:17 (ESV)

It didn't work out that way. Jonathan died defending his father on Mt. Gilboah. When David came to the throne, he kept his promise to Jonathan and didn't kill his child but took care of him.

But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. 2 Samuel 21:7 (ESV)

Next, Jonathan revealed his plan to inform David of his father's intentions toward him.

Then Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. On the third day go down quickly to the place where you hid yourself when the matter was in hand, and remain beside the stone heap. And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. And behold, I will send the boy, saying, 'Go, find the arrows.' If I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you, take them,' then you are to come, for, as the LORD lives, it is safe for you and there is no danger. But if I say to the youth, 'Look, the arrows are beyond you,' then go, for the LORD has sent you away. 1 Samuel 20:18–22 (ESV)

If Jonathan told the boy to come back to him, that meant it was safe for David to come back. If Jonathan told the boy the arrows were beyond him, that was code for telling David to run.

And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever." 1 Samuel 20:23 (ESV)

The matter about which they had spoken was the future reign of David as king and the promise between them.

Jonathan now needed to go back to his father and carry out the plan.

So David hid himself in the field. And when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. The king sat on his seat, as at other times, on the seat by the wall. Jonathan sat opposite, and Abner sat by Saul's side, but David's place was empty. Yet Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to him. He is not clean; surely he is not clean." 1 Samuel 20:24–26 (ESV)

Saul noticed David's absence, but since it was a ritual feast, he figured David had suffered some kind of ritual defilement. This speaks well of David's character and his careful observance of God's law.

Apparently, it didn't occur to Saul that after attempting to kill David three times with a spear, David might not want to sit next to Saul during dinner when Saul was holding a steak knife.

But on the second day, the day after the new moon, David's place was empty. And Saul said to Jonathan his son, "Why has not the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?" Jonathan answered Saul, "David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. He said, 'Let me go, for our clan holds a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to be there. So now, if I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away and see my brothers.' For this reason he has not come to the king's table." 1 Samuel 20:27–29 (ESV)

Jonathan responded with the proposed lie. Unlike his father, Jonathan was not a good liar. In Hebrew, Jonathan used slightly different words than David requested. The phrase "let me get away" may have inadvertently given away the game. In Hebrew, the word Jonathan used in this phrase means "let me escape." It was the same word used earlier in 1 Samuel to describe David successfully eluding Saul's other attempts on his life. Jonathan did not mean to tell his father this was another of David's successful escape attempts, but since he wasn't a good liar, he let it slip.

Then Saul's anger was kindled 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, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?" 1 Samuel 20:30 (ESV)

A sign of Christian maturity is when someone can keep their temper under control. In this verse, Saul did the exact opposite. He was out-of-control. He abused and insulted his son and his wife. He told Jonathan he was the son of a

perverse and rebellious woman. He threw Jonathan's mother under the bus calling her a perverted woman. I don't know about you but I wouldn't let anybody speak about my mother that way. Of course, the truth was that Jonathan was the son of Saul, a perverse and rebellious man. Saul like to accuse people of the things he was guilty of himself. When Saul said, "You have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame." This is a way of Saul saying to Jonathan, as my son, I am ashamed of you. You are terrible. Then when he said, "you have done this to the shame of your mother's nakedness," this is a Hebrew colloquialism for, "I wish you hadn't even been born."

These are incredibly hurtful things for any father to say to their son. I am ashamed of you. I wish you hadn't been born. Those words are like toothpaste. They come out of the tube real easy but you can't put them back.

Then Saul said,

For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established... 1 Samuel 20:31 (ESV)

If you have come from a home with abusive parent, you know how painful these kinds of words can be. Most children will do anything to keep peace in the family when dad is acting this way.

With Saul's poisonous words lodged in Jonathan's heart, he tries to use them to manipulate Jonathan to making him give up David.

...Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." 1 Samuel 20:31 (ESV)

Do you want to be my son? I am ashamed of you. Do you want me to be proud of you? You know where David is hiding. Bring him to me right now so I can kill him.

Jonathan, to his credit, didn't cave under his father's pressure. He stood up to his dad.

Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" 1 Samuel 20:32 (ESV)

Look how Saul responded.

But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. 1 Samuel 20:33 (ESV)

That was the understatement of the year! Saul wants to kill David. He tried to kill his own son because Jonathan wouldn't rat on David and give up his location.

How would that make you feel as a son if your father tried to kill you because you wouldn't help him kill an innocent person?

We need to take a moment to reflect on the horror of what took place. When Saul hardened his heart against the Lord and rejected God, he had no idea he would degrade to the point where he attempted murder, even against his own son. Saul never took seriously the perverting power of sin and the danger of falling under God's judgment.

This is a warning for us. If we dabble in sin, and instead of repenting, we harden our hearts against the Lord and continue in sin, we will be horrified when we see what sin will do in our lives when it is left to grow unchecked in our hearts. It will lead us to places we don't want to go, and we will do things we never imagined doing. Sin leeches into all aspects of our hearts, turning us into vile people like Saul.

The book of Hebrews warns us about the deceitfulness of sin with these words.

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13 (ESV)

From this point forward, we will see there is a change in Saul’s approach. He doesn’t just set himself against David but against anyone who supports David.

And Jonathan rose 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 disgraced him. 1 Samuel 20:34 (ESV)

If my father tried to kill me, I would lose my appetite too.

In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy. 1 Samuel 20:35 (ESV)

It was time for his appointment with David. He needs to tell the bad news to David.

And he said to his boy, “Run and find the arrows that I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. And when the boy came to the place of the arrow that Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the boy and said, “Is not the arrow beyond you?” 1 Samuel 20:36–37 (ESV)

That was the prearranged code for David to flee. Then Jonathan said these words to the boy looking for his arrows.

And Jonathan called after the boy, “Hurry! Be quick! Do not stay!” So Jonathan’s boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master. 1 Samuel 20:38 (ESV)

Do you think those words were intended for the boy? They were not. They were for David telling him to get out of town as fast as he could.

But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter. And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, “Go and carry them to the city.” And as soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and fell on his face to the ground and bowed three times. And they kissed one another and wept with one another, David weeping the most. 1 Samuel 20:39–41 (ESV)

David came from his hiding place, bowing three times. David was the anointed future king, but he was not yet king. He bowed three times to show great respect to Jonathan, the king's son.

The fact that they kissed one another is something we should talk about. Some modern commentators looking at these verses through a modern twisted American culture lens see this as evidence that David and Jonathan were in a homosexual relationship. That is crazy. The fruit loop commentators who make that claim have no idea what they are talking about. This did not take place in modern American culture. This took place in a middle-eastern culture 3,000 years ago. Even today in the middle east, men greet one another not with a handshake but by kissing one another on the cheeks. When we have Jonathan and David kissing one another as they hug and weep together, that is a normal way for these two close friends to grieve their separation as David, from this point forward, will be running for his life. David and Jonathan, even though they are close friends, may find themselves on opposite sides of a battlefield.

Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.'" And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city. 1 Samuel 20:42 (ESV)

After their tears, Jonathan let David go in peace. They promised before God that there would be peace between them and their offspring forever and peace between them as the two closest of friends were now forced to become enemies.

Application

This is a long story, but what can we learn from it? Here are a few points of application that came to mind as I thought about this chapter.

1. **Jonathan is an example of someone who chose to be faithful to his future king, even if it cost him his family and his life.** He knew David would be king, and he was loyal to David, even if it involved standing up to his father, who may kill him. What a great example for us. In this world with everything trying to lead us, we too must make hard decisions to follow Jesus, our coming and future king, even if it alienates us from our family and friends. I wonder if Jesus had Jonathan in mind when he spoke these words.

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:26 (ESV)

2. **Jonathan is an example of a life lived by covenant, not convenience.** David and Jonathan covenanted with one another to be at peace and to be loyal friends. Even when it became hard for Jonathan to keep his promise to David, he stuck by his word and almost lost his life for doing it. Jonathan is a great example of someone whose goal in life was to be faithful to his word, not just do what was easy and convenient at the moment. Living by our promises, not what everyone else is doing now, is a challenge for us today. As Christians, we are called to live this way. We are husbands and wives that live faithful to our covenant with our spouse when so many other people don't. We are men and women in business who keep our promises even to our hurt. Just as the faithfulness of Jonathan's covenant-keeping character sticks out to us in this chapter, and we are drawn to it, as Christians, we want to have a

covenant-keeping character that stands out in this world, and other people are drawn to this quality of Jesus lived out in our lives.

3. **Jonathan reminds us that God often accomplishes his work in this world through people who are committed to what he is doing, even if it is not convenient for them.** If I want God to accomplish his work in this world through my life, it begins by sacrificing my time and ego to get behind what God is doing. Today, we have to ask ourselves if we are like Saul and committed to building our own kingdom at any price or if we are more like Jonathan, the kind of person God uses in this world. The kind of person who is willing to make building their own kingdom a distant second to building God's kingdom and serving Jesus the coming king. My friends, getting behind God's work is more important than me.



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