

August 4

Lesson 10 (NIV)

A COVENANT BETWEEN FRIENDS

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 15:12-17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 18-

20

1 SAMUEL 18:1-5

¹After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ²From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. ³And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

⁵Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well.



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1 SAMUEL 19:1-7

¹Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David ²and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. ³I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

⁴Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. ⁵He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then

would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”

⁶Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.”

⁷So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

KEY VERSE

Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.—1 Samuel 18:1

COVENANT IN GOD

Unit 3: Covenant: A Personal Perspective

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Retell the story of the friendship between Jonathan and David.
2. Describe the significance of the covenant between Jonathan and David.
3. Make a plan to be a better Christ-honoring friend to another person.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Promise Keepers
- B. Lesson Context
- I. A Covenant Made (1 SAMUEL 18:1–5)
 - A. United in Friendship (v. 1)
BFFs
 - B. Bound in Service (v. 2)
 - C. Formed in Love (vv. 3, 4)
The Meaning of Gifts
 - D. Sent in Service (v. 5)
- II. A Covenant Observed (1 SAMUEL 19:1–7)
 - A. A Plot (v. 1a)
 - B. A Plan (vv. 1b–3)
 - C. A Defense (vv. 4, 5)
 - D. A Promise (v. 6)
 - E. A Reunion (v. 7)

Conclusion

- A. Covenant Keepers
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Abraham	Ay-bruh-ham.
Bethlehem	<i>Beth</i> -lih-hem.
Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
Ecclesiastes	Ik-leez-ee- as -teez.
Goliath	Go-lye-uth.
Leviticus	Leh-vit-ih-kus.
Philistines	Fuh-liss-teenz or <i>Fill</i> -us-teenz.

Introduction

A. Promise Keepers

In the 1990s, the Promise Keepers organization took Christian men by storm in the U. S. Tens of thousands from many backgrounds—different denominations, different races and ethnicities, even non-Christians—would drive hundreds of miles to fill football stadiums to praise God together in song, prayer, and preaching. The key theme of the movement was integrity. A Christian man should be a man of his word: a promise keeper to God, family, friends, acquaintances, and everyone else.

Of course, this directive is not just for men. All God's people need to be promise keepers. Spouses need to keep commitments to each other. Children and parents must build trust by keeping their word. Employers and employees must act in accordance with hiring agreements. We can learn from those who went before us how to keep faith in our relationships.

B. Lesson Context

In the Christian arrangement of the books of the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Samuel are included with the historical books (Joshua-Esther). They record the transition from theocracy (being governed by the Lord) to monarchy (being

governed by an earthly king). The books of 1 and 2 Samuel can be divided into these sections:

- The end of the period of the judges ([1 Samuel 1-8](#))
- The Lord's selection and rejection of Saul, Israel's first king ([1 Samuel 9-15](#))
- The Lord's selection of David and the fall of Saul ([1 Samuel 16-31](#))
- The establishment of David's throne ([2 Samuel 1-10](#))
- The sin of David and consequent flight from Jerusalem ([2 Samuel 11-18](#))
- The reestablishment of David in Jerusalem ([2 Samuel 19; 20](#))
- The legacy of David ([2 Samuel 21-24](#))

Samuel is a pivotal figure in the history of Israel, being the last of the judges and the first of the prophets (see [Acts 3:24; 13:20](#)). The Israelites, tired of the abuses of Samuel's sons, demanded that Samuel give them an earthly king "like all the other nations" ([1 Samuel 8:20](#)). This flew in the face of God's desire for Israel to be a priestly, holy nation under his rule ([Exodus 19:6; 1 Samuel 12:12-16](#)).

The Lord required Samuel to proclaim the negative consequences of becoming like the nations by having an earthly king ([1 Samuel 8:11-18](#)), but God still chose to

grant their request. The Lord selected Saul, but Saul did not faithfully carry out the Lord's commands (13:7-14; 15). Thus the Lord instructed Samuel to tell Saul of his rejection and then to anoint David to be Saul's heir even while Saul still lived (13:14; 16:1).

I. A Covenant Made (1 SAMUEL 18:1-5)

King Saul met David for the first time during a confrontation with the Philistines. Young David killed the giant Goliath, leading to a rout of Israel's enemies (1 Samuel 17:1-54). After this great victory, Saul met with David, who formally identified himself as the son of Jesse from Bethlehem (17:55-58). Jonathan, son of Saul, also had seen David's victory over Goliath and presumably was present when David appeared before the king.

A. United in Friendship (v. 1)

1. After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.

The word translated *spirit* is seen once here in English, but actually occurs three times in the Hebrew. Though it has a relatively wide range of meaning, here it most nearly means "self," one's whole

being.

With so many nuances, however, there is no reason that the writer could not also intend the reader to note other meanings. For instance, *spirit* can also be used to contrast with *body* to include the will and emotions (Isaiah 10:18). This would suggest that Jonathan loves David with his innermost being. The word *spirit* can also refer to the life of a creature, suggesting that Jonathan loves David forcefully, as though his life depends on it (Deuteronomy 19:21; Isaiah 38:16). In short, Jonathan loves David as he loves *himself*.

The phrase *became one* translates the same verb that reads "closely bound up with" in Genesis 44:30, describing the relationship between Jacob and his youngest son, Benjamin. Similarly, Jonathan's *spirit*, both will and emotion, is bound with David. This speaks to the commitment of one to the other. Their allegiance is not created merely out of a sense of duty but out of deep emotional and even spiritual attachment.

Together these two Hebrew concepts, *spirit* and *became one*, demonstrate the genuineness and intensity of the bond between the two men. Though this verse focuses on Jonathan's affection for David, other texts make clear that the feeling is mutual (see 1 Samuel 20:42; 2 Samuel 1:26; 21:7).

BFFs

In the shorthand lingo of modern social media, *BFF* stands for “best friends forever.” Earlier generations talked about “soul mates.” Both terms refer to pairs of people who seem so perfectly matched psychologically and emotionally that they understand each other almost intuitively. Though many examples are fictional, taken especially from love stories, *BFFs* can also be found in the real world. Some marriages are examples of this; others find their *BFF* in lifelong friendship.

David and Jonathan seem to have been *BFFs*. They were united in spirit more deeply than just enjoying each other’s presence; they were united in what they knew to be best for God’s people. Jonathan was the heir apparent of King Saul, but he later comes to accept that God had chosen another man to put on the throne. The best *BFFs*, like Jonathan and David, are united in wanting what God wants. How does your *BFF* relationship spur you on to serving the Lord?

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

How can we ensure that our friendships are genuine and not simply founded in a desire for gain of some sort?

Digging Deeper

Under what circumstances, if any, would it be appropriate to draw up a general rule of friendships that is based on a single bad experience with a “fair-weather friend”? Why?

B. Bound in Service (v. 2)

2. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family.

This verse interrupts the story of Jonathan and David to briefly resume the story of Saul’s action regarding David. The Hebrew word translated *kept* can suggest choosing or selecting—as in [Isaiah 44:14](#), in which certain trees were selected but not removed. This is the idea here; Saul selects David for a place in his court.

The second clause elaborates on what it means for Saul to take David. The king values David’s contributions in his court and military and so requires him to remain by the king’s side. This marks the end of David’s career as a shepherd (but see [2 Samuel 24:17](#); [Ezekiel 34:20–24](#) regarding David as a shepherd of God’s people).

C. Formed in Love (vv. 3, 4)

3. And Jonathan made a covenant

3. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.

There are two types of formal covenants: those between equals and those between a superior and an inferior. The most significant covenants in the Old Testament are made between people and the Lord (examples: [Genesis 9:17](#); [17:1-22](#); [2 Samuel 7:1-16](#)). Covenants between various people also occur: states and their representatives, kings and their subjects, military leaders and their soldiers, and individuals. Within the last category we see marriage portrayed as a covenant between a husband and a wife.

The *covenant* between Jonathan and David can be argued as one of power imbalance because Jonathan is the son of the king. A strong case can also be made that this covenant is made between equals. Jonathan and David clearly share mutual love (see commentary on [1 Samuel 18:1](#)).

4. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

Formal covenants in the ancient Near East are comprised of distinct parts. These may be enumerated as follows: (1) identification of the giver; (2) the historical prologue; (3) stipulations of the participants; (4) storing and public reading; (5)

witnesses of the covenant; (6) blessings for keeping and curses for violating the covenant terms; (7) a ceremony for ratification including a verbal affirmation; and (8) sanctions pronounced on a violator of the covenant terms.

Our passage describes only one of the elements of a covenant, the ceremonial act: Jonathan's giving David garments (see a similar act in [Genesis 41:41-43](#)). These probably represent various aspects of his royal status. The Hebrew word translated *robe* is an outer garment worn by people of status. We see wearing it such people as priests ([Exodus 28:4](#)), prophets ([1 Samuel 15:27](#)), royalty ([1 Samuel 24:4](#); [2 Samuel 13:18](#)), the wealthy ([Job 1:20](#)), and government officials ([Ezra 9:3](#)).

The *sword* and *bow* are weapons of warfare. The *belt* is used to bind up the tunic so that one can be ready for freer movement, especially in battle ([Psalm 45:3](#)), and to carry the sheath for the sword ([2 Samuel 20:8](#)). Giving these items is more than a symbol of friendship; it is a pledge of Jonathan's military loyalty to David.

THE MEANING OF GIFTS

Gifts can take on many different meanings based on any number of different circumstances. Sometimes gifts express gratitude, as when dinner guests

bring flowers in appreciation for the invitation they have received. Other gifts are meant to manipulate, like when merchandisers offer free items to entice us to buy something. Then there are Christmas and birthday gifts which may be genuine gifts of love or, in some cases, merely offered because it is customary to give something on those occasions even though the giver has no significant connection to the recipient. Sometimes gifts are used to confirm a relationship. The presentation of a diamond engagement ring confirms the love a couple has for one another and the commitment to continue growing in love together.

Jonathan's gifts to David confirmed his loving commitment. Jonathan saw in David a true friend. By his gifts, Jonathan was saying, "I pledge my friendship and loyalty to you." Like Jonathan, we can and should give gifts that honor our promises to our loved ones. What gifts will you give to honor yours?

—C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

What could be some modern equivalents of the way Jonathan expressed friendship with David? Why?

Digging Deeper

Think of nonmaterial things as well as tangible objects. Be prepared to explain the nature of the equiva-

lence.

D. Sent in Service (v. 5)

5. Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well.

This verse concludes the scene between Jonathan and David and summarizes the information that follows (1 Samuel 18:6, 7, not in today's text). David's wise behavior shows that the Lord has blessed him. Wisdom is frequently contrasted with foolishness in the Bible—with the assumption that God both gives wisdom and blesses those who demonstrate it (1 Samuel 13:13; Proverbs 1:7; 3:35; Matthew 7:24-27; etc.). As long as he acts wisely, David can expect to continue to be successful in his service not only to the king but also to the Lord.

The people accept David and approve of Saul's decision to send him out to fight their battles. David's forays habitually result in success (1 Samuel 18:30; 2 Samuel 5:2). Emphasizing that everyone, even Saul and his court, accepts David foreshadows the conflict to come.

II. A Covenant Observed

(1 SAMUEL 19:1-7)

After the events in 1 Samuel 18:1-5, all

After the events in [1 Samuel 18:1-5](#), all seems well. The situation begins to fall apart as Saul grows jealous of David due to the adoration of the nation ([1 Samuel 18:7, 8](#)) and as an evil spirit torments Saul ([18:10](#)). The king twice attempts to kill David ([18:11](#)). But no matter how Saul schemes, the Lord is with David and keeps him safe ([18:12-30](#)).

A. A Plot (v. 1a)

1a. Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David.

We see again the nature of Saul's fear and jealousy. Notice the progression. First, Saul personally tried to end David's life ([1 Samuel 18:10, 11](#)). Then Saul tried to achieve the same result by stealth ([18:17](#)). Now things have progressed to point where the king openly tells *his son and all the attendants to kill David*.

B. A Plan (vv. 1b-3)

1b-3. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David and warned him, "My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I'll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out."

These verses emphasize Jonathan's

positive regard for David, in spite of all the paranoia evident in King Saul, Jonathan's *father*. The covenant that Jonathan has made with David prevents him from obeying his father's orders to kill David. This puts Jonathan in a difficult situation. In order to save his friend, he has to disobey his father. And the king can certainly punish his son any way he sees fit for such an act of rebellion!

Jonathan chooses to honor his covenant with David and makes a plan to protect him. David is told to *go into hiding* in a certain *field*, presumably where Saul commonly goes (see [1 Samuel 20:5, 19](#)). Then Jonathan will do two things. First, he will *go out* there with his father, and then he will *speak to him about* David. This is to gauge Saul's reaction to the conversation in order to report it to David (see [20:12](#)).

C. A Defense (vv. 4, 5)

4a. Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, "Let not the king do wrong to his servant David;

Jonathan gives his exhortation in the third person (*let not the king*), which is meant to be deferential rather than commanding. He begins by exhorting his father not to *do wrong to ... David* (see [1 Samuel 20:32](#)). The Hebrew used makes clear that Jonathan asks Saul not to sin

against David. Though sin is usually understood as an offense against God alone, those sins against God are frequently also sins against other people (Genesis 42:22; Exodus 10:16; 1 Corinthians 8:12; etc.). Sinning against David would mean bringing him to harm. Jonathan emphasizes his earnest plea using forms of the Hebrew word translated *do wrong* three times in short order while speaking to his father (see 1 Samuel 19:5).

Jonathan's address of his father as *the king* speaks also to the honor and responsibility of that position. The king must do what is right in the eyes of the Lord (Deuteronomy 17:14–20). Jonathan fulfills the command to argue for justice that the king should fulfill (Proverbs 21:8; Jeremiah 18:20).

Referring to David as the king's *servant* makes clear the difference in power and status between those two. But even though the king has the power to do as he pleases with and to his servant, the king must honor the Lord in all decisions. David is loyal to the king, and it would be evil to harm a loyal servant (see 1 Samuel 22:14; 25:21; Proverbs 17:13).

4b, 5a. “he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all

Israel, and you saw it and were glad.

Jonathan gives an insurmountable reason for not harming David: David has done no wrong to King Saul—quite the opposite, in fact! Evidence of David's good work is recounted in that he took *his life in his hands* killing the Philistine giant Goliath (1 Samuel 17:50, 51). The result from *the Lord* was *a great victory for all Israel* (17:52, 53). Jonathan then reminds his father, who was an eyewitness to all this, that he was *glad* when it all happened.

5b. “Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”

Jonathan concludes his argument by returning to his beginning exhortation and turning it into the rhetorical question we see here. A rhetorical question is designed to make a point rather than get an answer.

The answer itself is obvious: the king should not kill *David ... for no reason* because then the king himself would become guilty and deserving of death (Deuteronomy 19:10–13). Jonathan describes David's life as *innocent* because David has acted faithfully as a servant in the court of Saul. David has never given Saul any reason for Saul's anger.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways we can act to

defend an innocent friend without jeopardizing our own credibility in the process?

Digging Deeper

What types of situations might call us *not* to defend a friend, either to protect ourselves or to do what is ultimately best for the friend in question? And if there are limits to loyalty, what are they?

D. A Promise (v. 6)

6. Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.”

Jonathan’s argument has the desired effect. *Listened to* means both to hear and to act in accordance with what is heard, as when the Lord told Abraham to “listen to whatever Sarah tells you” ([Genesis 21:12](#)). Similarly, the exodus from Egypt was initiated because God not only heard but acted on the groaning of the children of Israel ([Exodus 2:24, 25](#)).

Saul’s obedience to Jonathan’s pleading culminates in taking an *oath* in the name of *the Lord: David will not be put to death*. Taking oaths is equivalent to making a covenant and a vow ([Deuteronomy 4:31](#)). The Lord expects the king to keep his vow ([Numbers 30:2](#); see also [Matthew 5:33–37](#)). [Deuteronomy 23:21–23](#) declares that vows must be kept, while [Ecclesiastes 5:4–6](#) reminds the reader that break-

ing a vow angers the Lord. Thus by swearing that David will live, Saul binds himself to do all in his power to protect David.

What Do You Think?

What are some techniques to keep a vouching-for situation from resulting in more emotional “heat” than the “light” of facts and reason?

Digging Deeper

Should you focus on reducing emotional “heat” (and run the risk of appearing defensive) or on increasing the “light” of reason (and run the risk of allowing emotional characterizations to stick)?

E. A Reunion (v. 7)

7. So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

David emerges from his prearranged hiding place after hearing the proper signal. Jonathan informs him of Saul’s change of heart, and as a result David is in Saul’s presence *as before*. This phrase calls back to mind how well David and Saul had worked together initially after defeating the Philistines. David’s service in Saul’s court is no less valuable than his military service ([1 Samuel 16:14–23](#); [18:13](#); [19:8](#)). At least for the time being, Saul desires that David live and thrive in the

king's court as in times past (but contrast 19:9–15; 20:31, 33).

What Do You Think?

If a church were to have a ministry to reconcile conflicts between friends and family members, what would such a ministry look like?

Digging Deeper

Consider further how churches in a given area could band together to do this.

Conclusion

A. Covenant Keepers

His covenant with David put Jonathan in a difficult situation. When he learned of the king's unjust plot on his closest friend, he risked (at best) alienation from his father and (at worst) death. Nevertheless, Jonathan was true to his covenant with David without being disloyal to his father, reconciling Saul and David. The Lord is pleased when we are covenant-keepers. That's true for simple promises, such as being on time for dinner, or major ones, such as honoring marriage vows.

B. Prayer

Dear Lord, help us follow Jonathan's example of keeping covenant as we are faithful to the promises we make. We

pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Honoring covenants, commitments, and contracts honors the Lord.



Visual for Lesson 10. Point to this visual as you ask what elements your learners see that they experience or desire to experience in friendships.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with **NIV Bible**
Student

Into the Lesson

Distribute handouts (you prepare) with the following quotes on each. Ask class members to mark each sentence with either a + for *agree* or a - for *disagree*. Ask those willing also to mark! if they have experienced the statement.

1. "A friend is someone who knows all about you and still loves you" (Elbert Hubbard).
2. "There is nothing I would not do for those who are really my friends. I have no notion of loving people by halves, it is not my nature" (Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*).
3. "I would rather walk with a friend in the dark, than alone in the light" (Helen Keller).
4. "Friends are part of the glue that holds life and faith together" (Jon Katz).
5. "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" (Abraham Lincoln).
6. "Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow ripening fruit" (Aristotle).

Alternative. Have each student number 1 through 6 on a blank piece of paper. Then read the statements above and have

students mark each as *agree* or *disagree*. Discuss their responses. Then have volunteers tell how one of the sentences has proven true for them.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Acquaintance ... or Friend?" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Ask students if they agree or disagree with the quote. Taking no more than one minute, have them complete the "Remembering My Friends" section as indicated.

Lead into Bible study by saying, "Today we'll look at a story of friendship to see how it confirms or contradicts these quotes. Maybe we'll decide something new about friendship in the process."

Into the Word

Briefly summarize the story of David and Saul that precedes today's printed text. Write the following questions on the board or include them on the handout (you prepare) with the quotes above. The answers in parentheses are given only for the teacher's reference. 1-What was the nature of the friendship between David and Jonathan? (*that of a formal covenant*) 2-How did the two friends seal their covenant? (*by personal gifts to David, indicating Jonathan's complete loyalty to him*) 3-What happened when times got tough? (*Jonathan interceded with Saul on David's behalf to save his life*) 4-What risk

did the friend take that demonstrated his friendship? (*Saul could have turned on Jonathan, killing him as well as David*)

Ask a participant to read [1 Samuel 18:1-5](#) while other class members listen for answers to the questions. Briefly summarize the events from the end of [1 Samuel 18](#). Then ask a participant to read [1 Samuel 19:1-7](#) as class members listen again for answers to the questions. Ask volunteers to give their answers.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Demonstrating His Friendship” activity from the reproducible page. Ask students to complete this activity in pairs as indicated and share answers.

Into Life

Lead class members to think again about the quotes. Ask, “How does the story of David and Jonathan’s friendship reflect the truth or show a problem with [a quote you point out]?” After covering all six, form students into pairs to respond with each other to the following prompts:

- *I have a friend who has stuck with me in tough times.*
- *I know a person who needs the friendship I could offer.*

Challenge class members to (1) find a way to thank a friend for his or her loyalty or (2) take steps to become a friend

by reaching out with an offer of help.

Alternative. Ask class members to complete individually the chart in the “Strengthening Our Friendship” activity from the reproducible page. If time allows, ask volunteers to share what they’ve written.