

LOVE AND DEVOTION TO OTHERS

5

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 19:1-7;
23:1-18; 2 Samuel 9

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him, “The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you.”
(1 Sam. 19:4)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	Sept. 28	Timothy, My Brother and Coworker	1 Thessalonians 3:1-6
T	Sept. 29	David Slays Philistine with a Stone	1 Samuel 17:41-51
W	Sept. 30	David and Jonathan Bond Together	1 Samuel 18:1-5
Th	Oct. 1	Saul Jealous of and Fears David	1 Samuel 18:12-18
F	Oct. 2	Jonathan Asserts David as Next King	1 Samuel 23:14-18
Sa	Oct. 3	David Provides for Jonathan’s Son Mephibosheth	2 Samuel 9:1-10a

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

In 1966, country singer Sammy Kershaw recorded a song entitled “Politics, Religion and Her.” The title expresses the singer’s willingness to talk about with his friends and family anything at all since the love of his life has left him... EXCEPT religion, politics, or her! Without fully agreeing with Kershaw, it seems obvious that politics and religion, at least, are certainly full of controversial issues.

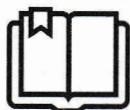
In recent months, political controversies have been dramatically played out in the public media. It is very difficult to get people to express concerns or suggest solutions when the discussion gets overly heated. Taking any middle or mediating position is almost impossible.

What do we do when our elected officials get so tangled up with conflicting opinions that they cannot seem to reach any agreements? How can the logjams be undone? We have witnessed such snarls before in our government, but they seem more frequent and more difficult to untangle now. Greater

civility between our elected officials would no doubt help, but cynicism seems to be spreading among our citizenry, and cynicism is very difficult to overcome.

Working within a system with obvious tensions is difficult. Clearly, the problems have to be recognized and acknowledged. The more tense the situation, the more complicated is any effort at solving the issues or bringing reconciliation between opposing parties. Should the effort even be made? If so, by whom, and at what cost?

Dear God, you know how difficult it is to bring reconciliation. Grant that we may examine our situation and resolve to be part of the solution and not the problem. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 19:1-7

19:1 Saul spoke with his son Jonathan and with all his servants about killing David. But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David. ²Jonathan told David, "My father Saul is trying to kill you; therefore be on guard tomorrow morning; stay in a secret place and hide yourself. ³I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak to my father about you; if I learn anything I will tell you." ⁴Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul, saying to him, "The king should not sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have been of good service to you; ⁵for he took his life in his hand when he attacked the Philistine, and the Lord brought about a great victory for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced; why then will you sin against an innocent person by killing David without cause?" ⁶Saul heeded the voice of Jonathan; Saul swore, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death." ⁷So Jonathan called David and related all these things to him. Jonathan then brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence as before.

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

JONATHAN, SAUL, AND DAVID

The books of Samuel are our primary sources for information concerning the beginnings of monarchy in ancient Israel. They are not "history" in the modern sense of the word but rather a collection of stories about the principal figures remembered from the monarchy's inception. The collection's title, First

and Second Samuel, is based on Samuel, the last of the judges who governed Israel before there was a king figuring prominently. At the Lord's direction, Samuel anointed Saul to be Israel's first king (1 Sam. 9:27-10:1) then anointed David when Saul fell out of favor (vv. 15:10-31; 16:6-13).

The stories about Saul begin in 1 Samuel 9 and continue until Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31. Within this narrative are stories about Saul's son Jonathan and David, who would become king after Saul's death. While a long account of David's kingship is preserved as 2 Samuel, David's rise begins during Saul's reign.

Initially David found favor in Saul's eyes and had great success as a warrior (18:5). But when David returned from battle with the Philistines, he was praised as being even greater than Saul. Angry and jealous (vv. 6-9), the king even tried to kill David (vv. 10-12). The narrative explains Saul's behavior by reporting "an evil spirit from God rushed on Saul." Though it is difficult to think of an evil spirit being sent by God, this idea is more palatable than the existence of an evil deity equal to God in power. Reflecting on Saul's behavior, a contemporary analyst might conclude that Saul suffered from bipolar disorder mixed with paranoia. Regardless, David's renown marked a decided change in the relationship of David and Saul.

Jonathan maintained his close friendship with David. He was able to intervene in Saul's attempt to kill David (19:1-7), but his appeal only briefly deterred Saul. Soon, David had to flee (vv. 11-12). Later, David turned again to Jonathan to learn of Saul's intentions. Warning David of Saul's persistent determination to kill him, Jonathan helped David escape once again (20:1-42).

Twice when Saul was seeking to kill him, David had the opportunity to kill Saul. But David still considered Saul God's anointed and would not violate this relationship (24:10; 26:23). After the first occasion Saul acknowledged that David would one day be king (24:20). Saul asked David not to wipe out all of his family, and David swore not to do so (vv. 21-22).

Thus, after Saul and his sons were killed in battle (31:1-7), David found Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan. David restored land to Mephibosheth and assured him he would be cared for and kept safe (2 Sam. 9:1-13).

② Was David being overly loyal, naively optimistic, or something else?

LOVE AND LOYALTY

Kershaw was right; there are some things one cannot talk about within a family. For Jonathan, David threatened to become one such topic. In Jonathan, we see demonstrated two sides of a common problem: love for and loyalty within family pitted against love and loyalty for those outside.

The biblical tradition of honoring one's parents is firmly rooted in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Community is central to Israel, and the family is the basic building block. For Jonathan to observe this commandment, he had to walk a fine line.

Clearly Jonathan felt an obligation to and a love for Saul, but he also recognized that his father was at times temperamental, to say the least. Jonathan also had a deep regard for David, who had become an enemy in Saul's eyes.

This kind of tension is common between parents and children. What one generation considers acceptable, the other does not. Most adults have experienced such problems as adolescents and face the same difficulties dealing with their own and other children.

Jonathan presents an interesting and challenging model. He goes to his father and tries to lay out the facts. He doesn't reprimand his father but first tries to reason with him. Jonathan points to David's faithful service to Saul, to the way he risked his life for his king. But, he adds, David has not sinned against Saul; he has only done good deeds. With this statement, Jonathan turns the conversation into a theological discussion. If what he has said is true, then why does Saul threaten to kill David without cause?

At this point, Saul understood what Jonathan was getting at. Saul was the one about to break the commandment not to kill because of his jealousy of David. Jonathan simply pointed out the inconsistency in Saul's behavior, and Saul was able to see it and repent (turn away), at least for the moment, from the evil he was contemplating.

Certainly, disagreements within families and nations are not always readily ironed out. While love and loyalty are intertwined, they are not the same. One can love one's family even while disagreeing with family members on serious matters. One can turn away from some family values—which may be judged as being disloyal—while still loving and honoring the family. Sometimes

the greatest loyalty and respect for another, whether family or friend, is shown by resisting a particular idea or position.

⑦ Jonathan demonstrated deep love and loyalty to both Saul and David. What is at stake in intervening in a conflict? Winning? Minimizing casualties?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

Families, churches, organizations—yes, and states and nations—all struggle with various forms of conflict. People have conflicts within themselves. We have been called by God to be peacemakers! So what are we to do?

Certainly, we can find opportunities to intercede on behalf of others. During the cold of winter, we can seek assistance for those who are homeless to get them out of the weather. This requires great skill and patience. A common but oft-ignored complaint of homeless people is the fear that someone will steal their meager belongings. One way we might help is assisting professionals who are working to provide protected storage areas for storing personal belongings. Most importantly, we need to listen before we can effectively intercede.

Sometimes, however, intervention for the sake of peace may take more dramatic forms. When the United States was deeply mired in a war in Southeast Asia, great controversy arose about the nature of loyalty. This ambiguity continues to be a problem. To follow the commands of one's nation without examining the justice of the action being dictated is not necessarily showing loyalty. In that past conflict it became common to condemn people for disrespecting the flag of the United States. Today, we see the flag on all sorts of clothing, in decoration on automobiles and motorcycles, and in other surprising places with no intention of disrespecting it or showing disloyalty.

To be prejudiced against others or show them disrespect is wrong. Bullying weaker persons, harassing immigrants, and keeping others from having opportunity because of language, age, or gender are forms of disloyalty to our nation's consistent values. We should name such behaviors as disloyal and question why anyone would sin against others by demeaning or segregating them. We can work to correct such behaviors.

Jonathan's action on behalf of his friend David was also an act on behalf of his father Saul. He cared for both. He wanted neither

to sin against the other, an important point for consideration as we seek to correct injustice and bring peace to warring factions. Those concerned about the dangers associated with climate change, for instance, obviously find it difficult to find common ground with those who believe the whole issue to be false. Any intervention is all the more difficult when one side seems to be more just or fair. Nonetheless, as best we can, we need to consider and care for all perspectives. While obviously not easy or even possible in some situations, we should try to take this position of equanimity.

⑦ **What does it mean to intercede for another? What costs will be involved?**

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture that may be helpful for your study.

1. Saul's animosity toward David was rooted in fear and jealousy. Public adoration of David after the confrontation with Goliath seems to have initiated it (1 Sam. 18:6–9).
2. Jonathan's deference toward David would have fueled Saul's fears. Jonathan's removal of his robe and putting it on David (v. 4) is symbolic of transferring the monarchy from the house of Saul to the house of David.
3. After the Lord rejected Saul as king, an evil spirit tormented Saul (16:14). This torment can be seen to explain Saul's homicidal outbursts directed both at David and at anyone defending him (19:9–10; 20:30–33).
4. Saul's attempts on David's life over the years were both overt and covert (18:10–11, 17, 20–25; 19:9–16).
5. David did not counter Saul's aggression with aggression of his own. David's respect for the office of king held firm, even when the one occupying the office was hostile toward him (24:4–6; 26:8–11).