



## COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### **First Sunday Service - Sunday, March 3**

Join us at 5:00pm for our First Sunday service. We'll pray together, hear a short message, and share a potluck-style meal. The theme for dishes is "Casseroles."

### OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

#### **Drop-In Meals Ministry (We are looking for an additional 5-10 volunteers)**

Every Sunday, a team of volunteers provides dozens of meals for our neighbors in need. Volunteers can help prepare food, set up tables, serve meals, connect with our guests, and help clean up. For more info, e-mail Andrew Gilson:

[andrew@hopefellowshipchurch.org](mailto:andrew@hopefellowshipchurch.org)

#### **Welcome/Hospitality Team**

Each week, a team of volunteers provides space for members, attendees, and guests to connect in meaningful ways through greeting at our front doors and providing refreshments after each service. For more info, e-mail Andrew Gilson:

[andrew@hopefellowshipchurch.org](mailto:andrew@hopefellowshipchurch.org)

### **CG DISCUSSION NOTES**

Adapted from Tim Chester, *1 Samuel For You*

Immediately after the Philistines have been routed: "Jonathan [Saul's son] became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself." (**18:1**). "One in spirit" is literally "knitted together". The same word is used to describe Jacob's relationship with Benjamin, his favourite son. Jacob's life, we are told was "closely bound up [or knitted together] with the boy's life" (Genesis 44:30). And so it will be for Jonathan and David. David essentially becomes part of Saul's family, as well as of his court (1 Samuel **18:2**)

It's easy to think of David and Jonathan as of similar ages—but they weren't. David was thirty when he became king (2 Samuel 5:4). Saul reigned for forty years (Acts 13:21). So David must have been born in the tenth year of Saul's reign. Jonathan was already fighting with Saul during the third year of his father's reign (1 Samuel 13:1, see footnote); and an Israelite soldier needed to be at least 20 (Numbers 1:3). So in the tenth year of Saul's reign, when David was born, Jonathan must have been at least 27.

This means that Jonathan is old enough to be David's father. And Jonathan is royalty, while David is a peasant farmer. Jonathan was once destined for the throne, while David is his replacement. There are many reasons why Jonathan might resent David. And yet Jonathan loves David like a younger brother.

The love between Jonathan and David is so strong (1 Samuel **18:1, 3–4**; see page 141 for more on v 3–4) that some people have suggested it was a homosexual relationship. But this lacks credibility. Homosexuality was clearly forbidden by God’s law (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). The writer of Samuel is not afraid to highlight David’s sin. But he gives no indication of any law-breaking in their relationship. Either he was ignorant of the sin, or he covered it up—neither of which is likely given his exposé of David’s adultery with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11–12. The suggestion of homosexuality probably reveals more about the sexualization of our culture than it does about their relationship. The reality is that men can have an intimate and affectionate friendship without it becoming sexual, especially when they are comrades in arms.

“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” (1 Samuel **18:5**). The army loves David—both the rank and file and the top brass.

And the women of Israel love him, too. After Goliath is killed and the Philistines are routed, as the men of the army return triumphantly with King Saul at their head, the women greet them “with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lyres. As they danced, they sang: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands’ ” (v **6–7**). We have seen how Saul’s rise to the throne included participation in a quasi-marriage feast in 1 Samuel 9.

As king he was becoming, as it were, the husband of Israel. But it is David who is now recognised as the true husband of God’s people, protecting the women from threat. It is an unconscious pointer to Jesus, the ultimate Husband, who gives his life for his bride, the church (Ephesians 5:22–33).

By 1 Samuel **18:16**, it is “David [who] led them in their campaigns”, and so “all Israel and Judah loved” him. Leading God’s people in their battles was supposed to be Saul’s role (9:16), but now it is David who is doing it, and being loved for it.

Put simply, David is a success. He does everything he is asked to do with great success (**18:5**), more success than any other officer (v **30**). But David is not simply a good fighter. The key is that the Lord is with him. “In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him” (v **14**; see also v **28**). Even more significant is **verse 12**: “The Lord was with David but had departed from Saul”.

Everyone seems to love David ... except Saul. When the women of Israel sing: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (v **7**), it is unlikely their song intentionally exalts David above Saul. Hebrew poetry often pairs items, and the word “thousands” is literally “myriads” (perhaps implying that between them Saul and David have slain “loads of people”). But nevertheless, Saul takes it as a slight. “Saul was very angry,” we are told. Why? “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” (v **8**). Saul is clearly jealous of David, and starts keeping “a close eye on David” (v **9**).

But not only is he jealous. He is also afraid—and this fear grows through the chapter. He is “afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had departed from Saul” (v

**12**); and because “Saul saw how successful he was, [and so] he was afraid of him” (**v 15**). Not only that, but when he sees how “his daughter Michal loved David, Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy for the rest of his days” (**v 28–29**). Saul does not only not love David; he hates him.

The process towards hatred begins with his anger at the song in **verses 8–9**. And “the next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul” (**v 10**). It literally “rushes” on him, just as God’s Spirit had once come powerfully upon him (11:6), but now “rushed” on David (16:13). And this bad spirit now causes him to be “prophesying in his house” (**18:10**). “Prophesying” in 1 Samuel seems to refer to more than simply speaking God’s word. It seems it can include any effect that comes from being overcome by a spirit (as we shall see again in chapter 19). Here, it involves throwing a spear at David—twice (**18:11**)! Saul’s deep-seated antipathy towards David, which is perhaps restrained by the etiquette of court, is unrestrained when he is “prophesying”.

David eludes the spear; so, in growing fear of him (**v 12**), Saul sends him away to the front line (**v 13**). But everything David does is a success and prompts growing love from Israel and fear in Saul (**v 14–16**). So Saul comes up with a plan. “ ‘Here is my elder daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the Lord.’ For Saul said to himself, ‘I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!’ ” (**v 17**). In other words, Saul encourages David with the promise of his daughter to fight with reckless ambition, in the hope that he will be killed. Envy is the mother of malice and gives birth to murder.

David responds with humility and refuses to marry her, on the basis that he is not fit to be Saul’s son-in-law (**v 18–19**). It might be a shrewd awareness of Saul’s intentions, but the way events unfold suggests it is a genuine humility.

Then Saul discovers someone else who loves David, his second daughter Michal (**v 20**). So Saul revives his plan (**v 21**). David responds with the same deference (**v 22–23**). So Saul comes up with a challenge for David. David can earn the right to his daughter’s hand by securing the foreskins of 100 (dead) Philistines (**v 24–25**). David is forcibly to “convert” 100 uncircumcised Philistines whose presence defiles God’s land.

David accepts the challenge and succeeds (**v 26–27**). Indeed, he provides Saul with 200 foreskins. Saul’s plan has spectacularly backfired. He is worse off than when he started, for now David is part of the royal house and his reputation is further enhanced (**v 28–30**). By this stage, Saul sees David as an enemy.

Chapter 19 sees three more attempts to get rid of David. None work. First, Jonathan saves him. When trying to trap David, Saul had told his servants to say: “Behold, the king has delight in you” (**18:22**, ESV). But it is a lie. The reality is that it is his son, Jonathan, who “delight[s] much in David” (**19:1**, ESV). Jonathan warns David that his father is looking to kill him (**v 2**). But he offers to intercede (**v 3**). He proclaims David’s innocence (**v 4**). He diplomatically points out that it is “the Lord” who “won a great victory for all Israel” (**v 5**). Through Jonathan’s mediation, Saul and David are reconciled and David is restored to the royal court (**v 6–7**).

But it does not last long. After further success in battle (**v 8**), Saul's jealousy seems to be provoked again. Once more, a bad spirit comes on Saul, and again he attempts to spear David (**v 9–10**). David "struck" the Philistines in **verse 8**; The same word is used twice in **verse 10** to describe how Saul, in his attempt to "pin" David to the wall, "drove" the spear into it. Saul is treating David like an enemy Philistine.

David escapes to his house. But Saul sends men to surround the house. In **verse 1**, Saul plotted to kill David "but Jonathan" intervened. The pattern is now repeated, but this time with Michal. Saul plots to kill David "but Michal" intervenes (**v 11**). She organises David's escape from a window, gives him time to make good his escape by hiding an idol in a bed to give the impression that David is sick (**v 12–16**), and covers herself by claiming David threatened her (**v 17**). Both times, Saul's plan has been thwarted by his own children.

Lastly, Samuel saves David. Now in fear of his life, David escapes to the prophet (**v 18**). But Saul sends men to capture David (**v 19–20**). God rules through his word. So here, God's king and God's word are going head to head. And when that happens, there is only ever one winner. Ultimate authority does not lie with the king, but with the word of God.

So as they approach David, Saul's men encounter a group of prophets led by Samuel—and they get caught up in the prophesying (**v 20**). Round One to God's word! The same thing happens two more times (**v 21**)—Rounds Two and Three to God's word. Finally Saul goes himself (**v 22**) "but the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night" (**v 23–24**). Round Four, and the victory, to God's word.

It is not exactly clear what happened to Saul and his men. The word "prophesying" is often used of a prophet giving a word from God. But it can also describe a frenzy—as we saw in **v 10–11**, Saul's "prophesying" involved hurling a spear at David. The implication is that "prophesying" involves coming under the influence of a spirit. That might be the Spirit of God and lead to prophesying in the sense of proclaiming God's word, but it might also lead to a frenetic loss of control. This loss of control is what happens to Saul.

In chapter 10 Saul met a band of prophets and got caught up in their prophesying. We read: "When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, 'What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (10:11). It was a cry of wonder and praise. Now something similar has happened again—Saul has once more been caught up with a band of prophets. But instead of empowering him, his "prophesying" has disempowered him so that he cannot fulfil his plan to murder David. Again "people say, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (**19:24**). But it is not a cry of praise. It is a cry of scorn.

Saul is becoming a parody of his former self—Saul, the asked-for king of chapters 13–19, is a parody of the Spirit-empowered judge of chapters 9–11. In chapter 19, Saul is

unable to carry out his intent to capture David. David is saved by Samuel—or rather David is saved by the God of Samuel.

I wonder if you recognise Saul closer to home. Maybe there is someone in your workplace who manoeuvres for power or prestige. Maybe there is someone in your church who envies the success of others. Maybe there is someone in your family whose insecurities mean they constantly compare themselves to others. Maybe that person is you. Trusting God makes all the difference. If we glory in God, then we do not need to maneuver for prestige, nor will we envy the success of others. If we find identity in Christ, then how we compare with others or what they think will not matter.

## **QUESTIONS**

1. How is God's sovereignty and protection demonstrated in 1 Samuel chapters 18 and 19? What role do these chapters play in the larger narrative unfolding throughout 1 Samuel?
2. Scripture encourages close, trusting, honest friendships between believers. Do you currently benefit from this kind of close relationship with anyone? What can you do to be more intentional about developing close friendships?
3. Saul's battle with envy toward David is showcased in the passage. Are there ways you, too, struggle with envy toward others? What are practical ways to fight against the sins of envy and coveteousness?
4. In the text, we're pointed to Christ, our true and better King. In what ways are you tempted to focus more on a kingdom of your own?

## **UPCOMING SERMON TEXTS**

2/25 - 1 Samuel 20-22:5; 3/3 - 1 Samuel 22:6-23