

## GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

**SAY:** “In our last session, we looked at the unconditional love we have in Christ. Today we look specifically at how our relationship with Him allows us to forge true friendships.”

Invite members to turn to **page 3** in the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review session titles.

**DISCUSS:** Draw attention to the picture (**PSG, p. 26**) as you introduce **Question #1: Who is your oldest friend?**

**OPTION: IN ADVANCE,** prepare to show the one-minute video clip “Kids Talk About: Friends.” The link to this video can be found at **[BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra](http://BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra)**. Use the video before the question to prompt the group or play it as follow-up to the question.

## SESSION 2

# FORGE TRUE FRIENDSHIP



### ***The Point***

Strong friendships thrive because of shared commitment.

### ***The Bible Meets Life***

We are familiar with business contracts and marriage covenants, but we rarely think of our friendships in terms of a covenant. It’s not likely a formal agreement,

but we often recognize a bond between friends that goes beyond just a shared interest or affinity. In the Book of 1 Samuel, David and Jonathan gave us an example of what such a covenant looks like.

### ***The Passages***

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:4-7; 20:10-13

### ***The Setting***

Following David’s stunning victory over Goliath, Saul promoted him and brought him into the king’s court. Soon Saul gave David command of Israel’s army. With each battle success, David became more of a hero in the minds of the people, becoming more popular than Saul. Saul’s son, Jonathan, developed a strong friendship with David. Jonathan had already commanded the army to win two significant victories (13:1-4; 14:1-46), so David’s courage likely attracted Jonathan to David.

## 1 Samuel 18:1-4

1 And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

2 And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

3 Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

4 And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.

### KEY WORDS

**loved** (18:1)—The Hebrew word covers a range of relationships in the Bible. Here it describes the idea of being knit soul to soul in desire and purpose.

*Strong friends exhibit selflessness.*

The stalemate between Israel and the Philistines ended when David killed Goliath. The Israelite army shouted out their joy, routed the Philistines, and chased them all the way to Gath and Ekron, leaving Philistine bodies all along the way. Then they returned and plundered the Philistine camp (17:52-53).

After the battle had settled down, Saul summoned David. Abner, Saul's chief military officer, brought David to Saul, who questioned David about his family background (vv. 57-58).

**1 ▶ Verse 1.** Saul's son, Jonathan, listened as his father interviewed David, and that interview changed David's life forever. Perhaps David's confidence and clarity impressed Jonathan, who admired David for his bravery, especially since Jonathan had witnessed David's glorious defeat of Goliath.

Immediately **the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David.** David's words, his faith in God, and his humility had an indelible impression on Jonathan. From this point forward, these two men would be kindred spirits.

The Hebrew word rendered *knit with* literally meant "to chain or to tie together." Jonathan pledged his soul to David, which the biblical writer emphasized by stating that

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 27).**

Highlight the illustration the author gives of the call center in India.

Reinforce the importance of true friendship by reading **The Point (PSG, p. 27): Strong friendships thrive because of shared commitment.**

**PRAY:** Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to help us develop true friendships in our group. Thank Him for the great Friend we have in Jesus.

## STUDY THE BIBLE 1 Samuel 18:1-4

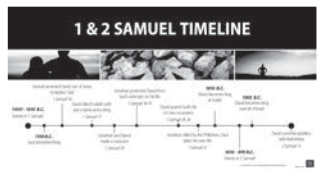


10 minutes

**GUIDE:** Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 28.

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 18:1-4.

**LEADER PACK:** Point to **Item 2: 1 & 2 Samuel Timeline.** Ask a volunteer to read the elements of the poster aloud.



**GUIDE:** Use **Bible Commentary 1** on page 29 and this page to give more background on the deep love Jonathan and David had for each other.

**GUIDE:** Use the article titled “Jonathan: Forgotten Hero” on pages 38-41 (**PSG, pp. 36-39**) to highlight Jonathan’s courage, loyalty, and bravery; as well as to point out that he often appeared to be frustrated over occurrences in his life.

**Jonathan loved him as his own soul.** The relationship between Jonathan and David surpassed the human level, for they both trusted the Lord and shared the same concerns and convictions.

Unfortunately, some mistakenly view David and Jonathan as simply young men who liked each other very much because they shared common interests. Some have even erroneously claimed that because the writer used such intimate language to describe their relationship, they must have had a sexual relationship. Such conclusions are disgracefully shallow and grossly inaccurate.

Concerning the ages of David and Jonathan, the Scriptures offer some clues. Since he could not serve in the army (15:33), David had not yet reached the age of 20 (Num. 1:3). However, since Jonathan served as a commander in the army, and given that he commanded one-third of the army and had won two great victories (1 Sam. 13:1-4; 14:1-14), he had to be a seasoned soldier and not someone in his early twenties. Some biblical scholars suggest the age difference between David and Jonathan may have been significant, as many as 20 or more years. However, since Jonathan realized they had much in common (they were both courageous and capable warriors who possessed profound faith in the Lord) as he witnessed his father and David talk, his heart would have been drawn to David with the manly esteem that comrades in the military understand. This more accurately describes the brotherhood they shared, rather than any attempt to twist the biblical description of their relationship into a sordid, ungodly one.

Actually, their relationship represented the work of the Holy Spirit that all believers should experience. God places certain people in our lives for a reason. Don’t resist this process; let God knit you to people He brings into your life. ◀

**Verse 2.** Saul had previously enlisted David to play his lyre to calm the king’s troubled heart (16:14-23). While Saul obviously would have spent some time with David, he apparently did not know his musician that well. Up to this point, David had played for Saul only as he was needed and “went and returned from Saul to feed his father’s sheep at Bethlehem” (17:15). Now, however, David’s life changed dramatically because Saul **would let him go no more home to his father’s house.**

**2** ▶ *Verses 3-4.* The biblical writer again stressed that Jonathan **loved David as his own soul**, and at some point, **Jonathan and David made a covenant**. Though we are not privy to the terms, at the very least the two men surely pledged their friendship and absolute loyalty to one another, meaning they would always look after the needs and welfare of each other.

As Saul's oldest son, Jonathan stood in line for the throne of Israel. The Lord had already rejected Saul as king because he had proven to be unfit, and therefore had instructed Samuel to anoint David as the next king (16:1-13). To seal the covenant, **Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David**. *Robe* in this case denotes a royal robe worn by the crown prince. Thus, when Jonathan gave this robe to David to wear, it equaled Jonathan renouncing his claim to the throne. Jonathan also gave David **his [military] garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle**. Together, these gifts represented Jonathan's willingness to relinquish his father's throne, to acknowledge the Lord's choice, and to express his loyalty to David.

Why would Jonathan willingly forfeit to David his right to rule over Israel? Obviously, Jonathan trusted in David's abilities as a leader. As a commander in Israel's army, he knew the kind of leader Israel needed. Although the Scriptures do not state it plainly, David and Jonathan seem to have enjoyed the kind of transparency in their relationship where nothing would have been hidden from the other.

Just as Jonathan laid aside his right to royalty and gave it to David, Jesus has done the same for His children. Jesus for a time laid aside His own robes of glory to come to the earth in order to die for us (Phil. 2:5-8). Jesus proved His uncommon love for us through the cross. Through the cross and His resurrection, Jesus established a covenant through which we might be clothed in His robes of righteousness.

God's covenant with His followers helps us to understand how we should establish covenant relationships with others. He loves us with an unfailing love. Our establishing similar covenant relationships comes only by the Holy Spirit. He alone can put the love of Jesus within the heart of a believer. This covenant love causes us to hunger after union with God and His people and binds believers together in life and purpose. Covenant love finds expression in a variety of ways stemming from the willingness to deny self completely. ◀

**DISCUSS: Question #2**  
(PSG, p. 30): **What obstacles can hinder us from forming deeper friendships?**

*(Alternate: What is your initial reaction to David and Jonathan's friendship?)*

**GUIDE:** Use **Bible Commentary 2** as well as **DIGGING DEEPER** on **PSG page 29** to explain the importance of the covenant bond in David and Jonathan's relationship.

**TRANSITION:** "As strong as the bond between Jonathan and David was, it soon would be put to the test by King Saul."

## STUDY THE BIBLE

## 1 Samuel 19:4-7



10 minutes

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 19:4-7.

**SUMMARIZE:** Point out the three types of friendships described by Aristotle (**PSG, pp. 30-31**):

**1. Useful friendships.**

*If you work alongside someone or share a common role, such as a teammate or roommate, Aristotle said it was better to be that person's friend than his enemy. This type of friendship is very common, but not very deep or lasting.*

**2. Friendships derived from pleasure.**

*Most of us enjoy being around people who amuse us with their humor. This friend comes and goes as quickly as other things that bring pleasure.*

(Continued on next page.)

## 1 Samuel 19:4-7

**4** And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good:

**5** For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?

**6** And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain.

**7** And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.

### ***Strong friends serve as advocates for each other.***

Because of David's popularity with both the army and the people, Saul considered David a serious threat to his throne. Driven by paranoia and jealousy, Saul continually plotted David's assassination or schemed so that the Philistines would kill him in battle (1 Sam. 18:10-29). Saul's fear consumed him as every attempt on David's life failed. Saul's heart had hardened beyond repentance. Jealousy and bitter animosity escalated his hatred for David.

Jonathan might not have been aware of his father's previous attempts on David's life at first. However, when Saul abandoned his cloak and dagger tactics and ordered his servants, and even Jonathan, to kill David, the king left no reason to doubt his intentions (19:1). So Jonathan warned David of the assassination plot (vv. 2-3).

When someone supports us as Jonathan said he would stand by David, it means a great deal to us. However, the true test of strength in the relationship becomes fully realized only when the person advocates for us when we are not around.

**3** ▶ **Verses 4-5.** The true strength of Jonathan's commitment came not only when he gave David information about Saul's schemes but also when he **spoke good of David unto Saul his father.** Jonathan's actions did not come without great risk to himself, thus demonstrating the depth of his commitment to David. As David hid in the field, Jonathan boldly pointed out to Saul the grievous wickedness involved in his conduct toward David. In declaring, **he hath not sinned against thee,** Jonathan delivered a needed word of correction to his father. He urged Saul to reverse his conspiracy to kill David by reminding his father about the great service David had performed. After all, David **put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine.** But in his twisted mind, Saul thought David only did that so that he could become famous and take the throne. Saul's wicked mind-set convinced him he needed to kill this grasping traitor before the traitor killed him.

By pointing out to his father that David's **works have been to thee-ward very good,** Jonathan underscored David's loyalty by attempting to bring his father back to reality. Furthermore, Jonathan suggested, when David killed Goliath, **and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel, thou sawest it and didst rejoice.** David's defeat of Goliath had motivated the Israelites to rout the Philistines soundly. Jonathan pointed out the undeniable fact that Saul knew: the Lord was with David. Why then, would Saul **sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?**

Jonathan advocated for David before his father Saul. Even more powerfully, Jesus advocates for us in the presence of God (1 John 2:1). But unlike Jonathan who pointed out David's good qualities and attributes, Jesus advocates for us by putting our sins under His blood. Jesus, our Advocate, not only forgives our sin, but He justifies us before the Father. ◀

**Verses 6-7.** For the moment, Jonathan's words made at least a temporary impression on Saul as he **hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan.** This took real humility for Saul. He could have easily said, "I'm king, and I'm right—I don't care what you say." By swearing an oath, Saul showed God had genuinely touched his heart. Note carefully: God used Jonathan as the instrument of His work—it was not the work of Jonathan.

Knowing the end of the story, Saul's promise seems hollow to us. Although Saul soon changed his mind, the promise, **As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain,** would remain accurate. Yet it would have nothing to do with Saul because he kept trying to kill David. The heart change in Saul would last only momentarily, for if good thoughts ever came into his wicked heart, they did not last. God Himself would protect David from Saul's evil intent.

### 3. Perfect friendships.

*Perfect friendships are based on goodness and virtue. This kind of friend remains a friend for life, so long as both of you live virtuous lives. This is a sacrificial kind of friendship.*

We could all use more of these perfect friendships.

**GUIDE:** Use **Bible**

**Commentary 3** to describe the way Jonathan advocated for David before his father the king. Note how Jesus does that very thing for us.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3

**(PSG, p. 32): What are practical ways we can serve as advocates for our friends?**

*(Alternate: What risks do we take when we stand up for our friends?)*

**TRANSITION:** "While King Saul was trying to eliminate David, the king's son, Jonathan, was doing all he could to keep his friend safe."

## STUDY THE BIBLE

## 1 Samuel 20:10-13



15 minutes

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 20:10-13.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 (PSG, p. 33): How can we support our friends during difficult seasons?

**GUIDE:** Use **Bible Commentary 4** on this page and page 35 to describe Jonathan and David's plan to ensure David's safety.

**SUMMARIZE:** Point to the bold affirmations Jonathan made while planning to rescue David from his father (PSG, p. 33).

1. Jonathan prayed the Lord would punish him if he did not protect David as he had promised, demonstrating his complete integrity toward David.

2. Jonathan prayed the Lord would be with David as He had been with Saul, boldly affirming Jonathan's willingness to sacrifice everything, including his claim to the throne, for his friend.

So, Jonathan played the major role in interceding and protecting David. Now he **called David, and... shewed him all those things.** Then **Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.** At least for a while, Jonathan, had successfully stood in the gap for David.

## 1 Samuel 20:10-13

**10** Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly?

**11** And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field.

**12** And Jonathan said unto David, O LORD God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee;

**13** The LORD do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father.

***Strong friends maintain and fulfill their commitment to each other.***

**4** ▶ David had no doubt about Saul's resolve to kill him. He had to leave. This meant leaving behind his best friend. In this time of crisis, Jonathan's loyalty would undergo a severe testing.

Leaving Naioth in Ramah, where he had spent time with Samuel, David went to seek out Jonathan to find out why Saul wanted to kill him. At first, Jonathan denied that possibility and insisted his father always confided in him. But David knew the truth and suggested Saul had concealed information from Jonathan because of his friendship with David (1 Sam. 20:1-3). Therefore, he proposed a passive plan so that Jonathan could learn the truth (vv. 4-9). If David didn't attend the regular new moon meal with Saul, he knew Saul would ask

where he was. If Saul responded favorably to Jonathan's explanation, it would mean Saul was at peace with David and he would have no reason to fear. If, however, Saul reacted in anger, then Jonathan would know Saul's resolve to kill David. ◀

**Verse 10.** Jonathan's loyalty demanded an unbreakable friendship and a spirit of brotherly love. David further laid out the details of his plans to prove his charge against Saul to Jonathan. He specifically asked Jonathan, **Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly?**

**Verse 11.** By now Jonathan appeared to believe David's claim might have merit. Rather than immediately answering David's question, however, Jonathan said, **Come, and let us go out into the field.** At first, this may sound strange and unexpected. But if Saul truly wanted to kill David, they had to guard their conversation. They went where curious eyes and finely tuned ears could not discern what they said.

**Verses 12-13.** Jonathan pledged his loyalty to David, promising to send word if Saul spoke favorably about David. However, if Saul intended **to do ... evil** to David, Jonathan would bring warning. To affirm his loyalty, Jonathan pronounced a curse on himself if he betrayed David. Then, amazingly and humbly, Jonathan offered a blessing on David: **the LORD be with thee, as he hath been with my father,** a blessing that acknowledged David as the future king of Israel.

In the spiritual relationship between David and Jonathan, at times David seemed stronger spiritually while other times, Jonathan showed more strength. But no matter what, their bond could not be broken. Strong friends maintain and fulfill their commitment to each other no matter the circumstances.

God loves and cares for His people; therefore, He often places people in our lives who will encourage and assist us during times of difficulty. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." Most of us know about "fair-weather" friends who abandon us when problems arise. True friends stay the course through all of life's ups and downs, no matter what the situation. When trouble comes, we find out who our true friends are.

Regrettably, people often disappoint us. However, Jesus will never let us down. He lived a perfect, sinless life. He demonstrated His faithfulness by going to the cross on our behalf to secure a once-for-all covenant. We will never earn right standing with God, but by trusting in the work of Christ done on our behalf, we can enter into a covenant relationship with God that has no end.

**DISCUSS: Question #5**  
**(PSG, p. 34): What lessons from David and Jonathan's friendship can we use to strengthen our group?**

*(Alternate: How do you typically respond when a friendship becomes complicated?)*

**OPTION:** Illustrate the strength that a friendship built on Christ can have. **IN ADVANCE,** cut five two-foot lengths of single-strand twine or yarn (something that can easily be broken when pulled). Call for a volunteer to pull on and break a single strand of the twine/yarn. Read aloud Ecclesiastes 4:12. Braid together three strands of the twine/yarn to create a strong rope. Call for a volunteer to pull on the rope and attempt to break it. Discuss how the rope represents the strength of friendships based in Christ.

**DO:** Invite volunteers to share responses to the activity on **PSG page 34: "Evaluating My Friendships."**



## LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

**GUIDE:** Emphasize **The Point: Strong friendships thrive because of shared commitment.**

**REVIEW:** Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 35;** see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

## WRAP IT UP

**GUIDE:** Emphasize that the kind of friendships we want to develop are the ones built on who we are in Christ.

**PRAY:** “Father, help us to covenant together in friendships that bring honor and glory to You.”

**NOTE:** Remind group members that **PSG pages 6-9** are there to journal one another’s prayer requests.

## LIVE IT OUT

What are some ways you can imitate David and Jonathan this week? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Say thanks to a friend.** If you have a friend who has stuck by you through everything you’ve faced, thank that person. Also, thank God for this friend, and let your friend know of your prayers.
- ▶ **Seek to be a friend to others.** Follow the example of Jonathan and David—and even more of Christ—to demonstrate a sacrificial friendship to others. Consider what you might sacrifice in order to bless that person this week.
- ▶ **Renew a friendship.** If you have a friend you have let down in past years or did not stand with during a difficult period, seek to restore that friendship. Let Christ be seen and honored as you return to being the kind of friend He calls you to be.

Remember, the number of our “friends” doesn’t matter much. It’s the quality of our relationships, based on a shared commitment to Christ, that counts.

BIBLICAL  
**ILLUSTRATOR**



Beth-shan lies some four miles west of the Jordan River. To further humiliate King Saul and his sons, the Philistines displayed their bodies by hanging them on the city walls at the city of Beth-shan, where a temple to the Ashtaroth was located.

Jonathan was the oldest son of Israel's King Saul, heir apparent to the throne. He commanded one third of Israel's standing army at the beginning of his father's reign. His name means "Yahweh gave."

Jonathan's actions revealed his character and temperament (1 Sam. 13–31). Jonathan displayed *courage* and *bravery* when he attacked Philistine outposts in Geba (13:3) and Micmash (14:1-14), resulting in a great victory.

Jonathan's *faithfulness* and *loyalty* as a friend are evident in four encounters between Jonathan and David described in Scripture. In 1 Samuel 18:1-4, Jonathan established his friendship with David by demonstrating *a spirit of generosity* by giving David his robe, armor, sword, bow, and belt. Jonathan's successful intervention between Saul and David, resulting in David's return to Saul's house, showed not only Jonathan's commitment to David but also Jonathan's *wisdom* in recognizing the benefits David brought to Saul.

Jonathan's *submission and obedience to the will of God* is the final character trait demonstrated in Scripture. In 1 Samuel 23:15-18, Jonathan encouraged David by assuring him he (David) would be king over Israel, and he pledged to David his allegiance by making a covenant before the Lord.

The excerpt above is from the article "Jonathan: All We Know" (Summer 2016), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

## SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

***"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus laid down His for us. He died for us and will bring us into a full relationship with God when we place our faith and trust in Him.***

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

## GROUPS MATTER.

Grow with other group leaders at the **Groups Ministry** blog.

[LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)