



# Community Group Discussion Guide

January 26, 2025

1 Samuel 20: 1-42 | That's What Friends Are For

## MOTIVATE

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⇒ **Starter question: What is your default response to high stress circumstances (silence, fight, flight, fear, faith, emotional outburst, emotional shut down, etc.)?**

## DISCUSS

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In 1 Samuel 19, David went on the run and feared for his life, desperately searching for safety and support. In 1 Samuel 18 David met someone who became his greatest ally and friend: Jonathan, the eldest son of King Saul. Jonathan loved David and they covenanted together to spare each other's lives. Jonathan would never be king of Israel because the Lord had chosen David to succeed Saul.

1 Samuel 20:1-42 depicts the intensity of this true friendship between David and Jonathan as well as providing an imperfect portrait of the anointed future king. David showed that he could be a man of doubt, faltering and failing in his faith, trying deceptively to scheme his way out of his problems.<sup>1</sup> (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

⇒ **Why is important to learn about both the noble and the ignoble parts of David's character? Can you relate?**

**1 Samuel 20:1-3** 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?" **2** 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." **3** 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.'"

While Saul was still prophesying before Samuel, David made his escape and came directly to Jonathan. David's questions reveal the extent of his emotions. David was convinced Saul was trying to kill him. At first Jonathan was stunned to hear about his father's plot to kill David and refused to believe it.

David didn't doubt Jonathan's integrity; he just didn't trust Saul's motives. David revealed what Jonathan could not see. Saul had kept his determination to kill David from Jonathan because he knew his son would be grieved. David needed to confirm Saul's motive. If Saul was determined to kill him, he must flee.<sup>2</sup>

⇒ **Why should we always remember that David would take Jonathan's place as future king of Israel?**

⇒ **In what ways does Jonathan begin to emerge as a beautiful Old Testament character?**

**1 Samuel 20:4-8** Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you." **5** David said to Jonathan, "Behold, tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit at table with the king. But let

<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). [Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament](#) (1 Sa 20–21). Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 141). Holman Reference.

me go, that I may hide myself in the field till the third day at evening. **6** 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. **7** If he says, 'Good! It will be well with your servant, but if he is angry, then know that harm is determined by him. **8** 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?"

Jonathan responded to David's situation in love and faithful support. Whatever the cost, Jonathan was willing to do whatever David asked. David devised a scheme to show Saul's true intentions, and together they worked out a way to help David escape—if escape was necessary.

If the king accepted Jonathan's explanation that David was absent from the Feast of the New Moon because he had gone to Bethlehem to make an annual sacrifice, David would know that he was wrong about Saul's intentions. But if Saul had a threatening reaction to David's absence, it would be a certain indication that David would never be safe in Saul's court.<sup>3</sup>

The Feast of the New Moon occurred when the Israelites offered up a sacrifice on the first day of a lunar cycle. A ritual meal would normally be associated with this event, but only ritually clean persons could eat such a meal. Because normal daily activities such as marital relations or even touching certain insects could cause ritual uncleanness, Saul's suspicions were aroused only when David was absent from a meal that did not require ritual cleanness. (*Shepherd's Notes: 1 and 2 Samuel*, page 35)

David asked Jonathan to show kindness (*hesed*) to him, if by chance he was found guilty. If such was the case, David asked that Jonathan not hand him over to his father but kill him himself. Jonathan's protest in verse 9 assured David that he still had a friend and ally.<sup>4</sup>

God often uses stressful tension in this way in the lives of the people He loves. God does not chide our feelings of frustration or fear, or even anger. But God wants us to learn to bring our feelings and needs to Him, and to let the times of testing do their character-building work.<sup>5</sup>

⇒ **Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt full of fear and anxiety? What was God trying to teach you during the difficult time?**

**1 Samuel 20:9-13** 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?" **10** Then David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?" **11** And Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out into the field." So they both went out into the field. **12** 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? **13** 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.

The last part of the plan involved how David would be notified if Saul's response was negative. If Saul's response was positive, David could immediately come out of hiding. But if Saul was seeking to kill him, David could not risk showing himself.

⇒ **How does Jonathan continue to point David to God?**

**1 Samuel 20:14-17** If I am still alive, show me the steadfast love of the Lord, that I may not die; **15** and do not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever, when the Lord cuts off every one of the

<sup>3</sup> Philbeck, B. F. (1972). [1 Samuel](#). In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The teacher's Bible commentary* (p. 174). Broadman and Holman Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 142). Holman Reference.

<sup>5</sup> Richards, L. O. (1987). [The teacher's commentary](#) (p. 217). Victor Books.

enemies of David from the face of the earth.” **16** And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the Lord take vengeance on David’s enemies.” **17** And Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him, for he loved him as he loved his own soul.

Before finalizing the plan, David reminded Jonathan of the covenant they had made based on their steadfast love (*hesed*) for each other. Jonathan pledged his commitment by swearing an oath to David, giving reassurance he would carry out the plan and send David away safely if Saul desired to harm him. Jonathan also wanted reassurance that David would show him and his family the same unfailing kindness.<sup>6</sup>

The steadfast love between Jonathan and David is loyal and powerful. There is no one English word that can fully describe the beautiful and complex Hebrew word *hesed*. God loves with this steadfast love, and He enables His loved ones to love one another the same way.

But there is more going on here than a story about two friends. Jonathan spoke directly and prophetically about David’s future rule, which is a new theme in the books of Samuel. These words legitimized David as the rightful successor to the throne of Israel and underscored the future relationship between the houses of Saul and David. It’s no accident that Jonathan articulated God’s providential plan during David’s lowest point. We believers have time when we are desperate, doubting, faltering, and failing in our faith. We need to be reminded of God’s sovereign reign.

- ⇒ **Beside your family or spouse, do you have a friend that you love with steadfast [*hesed*] love?**
- ⇒ **What qualities of a friend would cause you to trust them with steadfast [*hesed*] love?**

**1 Samuel 20:18-23** Then Jonathan said to him, “Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, because your seat will be empty. **19** 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. **20** And I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I shot at a mark. **21** 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. **22** But if I say to the youth, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you, then go, for the Lord has sent you away. **23** And as for the matter of which you and I have spoken, behold, the LORD is between you and me forever.”

Jonathan worked out a signal for David. While David was hiding in the field, Jonathan would shoot three arrows into the air near the side of a prominent stone heap. Jonathan would send a boy to retrieve the arrows. David’s answer would come in the manner Jonathan spoke to the boy. If Jonathan gave one set of instructions, David was safe. But if he gave another set, David must flee. Before Jonathan left David, he reminded him that “*the LORD is between you and me forever.*”

- ⇒ **How did Jonathan show he recognized that the Lord would ordain which way the matter turned out?**
- ⇒ **Why did David need a friend like Jonathan who consistently pointed him to God? Do you have or need the same kind of friend?**

**1 Samuel 20:24-29** So David hid himself in the field. And when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food. **25** 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. **26** 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.” **27** 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?”

<sup>6</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 142). Holman Reference.

**28** Jonathan answered Saul, “David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem. **29** 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.”

The stage was set for the festival. David was hiding in the field, and the king was sitting in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan. On the first day of the festival, David’s seat was empty, but Saul said nothing. He concluded that David must have been ceremonially unclean. When David did not show up the second day, Saul asked Jonathan where “the son of Jesse” was. Following their prearranged plan, Jonathan related that David had asked permission to return to Bethlehem to his family for a special sacrifice.<sup>7</sup>

⇒ **Why is the use of the “son of Jesse” rather than David’s name significant?**

**1 Samuel 20:30-34** 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? **31** For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die.” **32** Then Jonathan answered Saul his father, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” **33** But Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him. So Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. **34** 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.

Saul’s unexpected outburst explains why Jonathan and David finally realized they must abandon all hopes of reconciliation. To Saul, David not only threatened Saul’s kingship, but also threatened Jonathan and the hopes of a family dynasty in Israel. It had become necessary, in Saul’s mind, to take David’s life.

David’s absence at the king’s table was more than a simple mistake in proper etiquette. However, no one, especially Jonathan, was prepared for the extreme reaction of Saul. After hearing Jonathan’s explanation, Saul exploded into a full-fledged tirade in which he insulted and accused Jonathan.

When Jonathan tried yet again to defend David’s motives, Saul reached for his spear to kill even Jonathan. In burning anger Jonathan got up from the table. He knew he had to warn David, but it grieved his heart. He was truly sorry about his father’s shameful treatment of David. As a good friend, Jonathan supported David. Saul, on the other hand, allowed selfish sin to destroy not only his relationship with David, but also more importantly, the relationship with his son.<sup>8</sup>

⇒ **Saul’s jealousy and anger caused him to blow up in an extreme and shocking manner. When does your anger cause you to react in an ungodly way?**

⇒ **How do you prepare yourself to react to personal jealousy and anger, so that you do not blow up in an emotional outburst?**

**1 Samuel 20:35-39** In the morning Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David, and with him a little boy. **36** And he said to his boy, “Run and find the arrows that I shoot.” As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. **37** 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?” **38** And Jonathan called after the boy, “Hurry! Be quick! Do not stay!” So Jonathan’s boy gathered up the arrows and

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 143). Holman Reference.

<sup>8</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 144). Holman Reference.

came to his master. **39** But the boy knew nothing. Only Jonathan and David knew the matter. **40** And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, “Go and carry them to the city.”

The next morning Jonathan took a boy out to the field where he was to meet David. Jonathan instructed the boy to retrieve the arrows he shot into the air. As the boy ran, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him. Then loudly Jonathan called out the fatal question: Is not the arrow beyond you? This was the signal to David that his life was in danger.

Jonathan’s commands to the boy were intended for David, but the boy did not know this. Jonathan had the boy bring the arrows back quickly and then sent him to town with the weapons. This provided David and Jonathan a private moment to bid each other farewell.<sup>9</sup>

⇒ **God’s direction of these events placed David in a position to live as fugitive from Saul. How do you reconcile this knowing David had stayed faithful to God?**

**1 Samuel 20:41-42** 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. **42** 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.

Once they were alone and fully understood the dreadful circumstances, David and Jonathan were overcome with emotion. This text powerfully illustrates the depth and intensity of their relationship. David got up from his hiding place and bowed down with his face to the ground three times before Jonathan to acknowledge his superiority as Saul’s son. David did not forget his place. Jonathan was a royal prince; David was not. They wept together, and David wept the most.<sup>10</sup> Recognizing that David must leave, Jonathan gave a farewell speech, reminding David of their mutual oath of friendship. They swore an eternal covenant to each other in the name of the Lord.

Neither of them knew what the future held, and neither of them knew if they would see each other again. As it turned out, the two would see each other one more time (1 Samuel 23:16–18) before Jonathan’s death. David would grieve deeply over Jonathan’s death (2 Samuel 1:17–27), but as David promised, he kept the covenant with Jonathan’s descendants (2 Samuel 9:1–13).

Because Jonathan was a godly man, his friendship with David honored the God of Israel. David was Jonathan’s friend regardless of the cost. This friendship was based on love, integrity, and faithfulness.<sup>11</sup>

- ⇒ **Grief and loss are a very common and difficult experience. Where did Johnathan and David find their hope and comfort to deal with their grief and loss?**
- ⇒ **Where do you find hope and comfort to deal with your grief and loss?**
- ⇒ **How do you minister to someone experiencing grief and loss?**

## TRANSFORM

**1. Make personal application:** The essence of the relationship between David and Jonathan was one that involved promises of mutual protection. They were committed to looking out for each other. Jonathan did all he could to protect David; likewise, David looked after Jonathan and his family. But the whole arrangement depended on the covenant relationship with its fierce loyalty and hesed love. What God used to hold His sovereign plan together was the glue of relational faithfulness.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 144). Holman Reference.

<sup>10</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 144). Holman Reference.

<sup>11</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, pp. 144–145). Holman Reference.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 300). Zondervan.

- ⇒ *Do you have any personal experience with relational faithfulness?*
- ⇒ *How do you start and nurture a relationship of relational faithfulness?*
- ⇒ *How does the glue of relational faithfulness hold you together when you are suffering through grief and loss?*

**2. Pray:** Thank God for the friendships with which He has blessed you. Ask Him if your deepest friendships are characterized by relational faithfulness and loyal “hesed” love. Ask God what lessons you need to learn through your experiences with grief and loss. Praise God that faith in His sovereign plan will carry you through difficult circumstances.

## STUDY

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Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- [\*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament, 1 and 2 Samuel.\*](#)
- *Holman Concise Bible Commentary, [The Historical Books](#), 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 115–117.
- *Holman Old Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 141-149.
- *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, page 174.
- *The Teacher’s Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, page 217.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel* pages 297-330.