

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



Friend & Brother

Then David chanted with this lament over Saul and Jonathan his son...
“From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
And the sword of Saul did not return empty.
Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life,
And in their death they were not parted;
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.
O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet,
Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.
How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!
Jonathan is slain on your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
You have been very pleasant to me.
Your love to me was more wonderful
Than the love of women.
How have the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!”

2 Samuel 1:17, 22-27

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*the writings of
david s lampel*
For 451

a man after david's heart

LANGUAGE IS, ADMITTEDLY, FLUID. Words, their spelling and meaning, have always evolved over time. For example, the words “calculator” and “computer” originally referred not to a device held in the hand or a binary machine but to persons, and the term “making love” used to be all about romance and the spoken word, not sex. Nevertheless, in a fallen world and plasticized society the trajectory of this fluidity of language is invariably in descent. Certain words in our vocabulary have traditionally carried greater weight than others, but now these bright and shining exceptions are being demoted, and thus being rendered meaningless—and unexceptional.

Like handing out trophies and ribbons to school children just because they showed up and participated in an event, we are now handing out exalted labels and descriptions just for drawing breath. In a world sadly deficient in character, we are imagining character, by use of language, where little exists; we are inventing excellence where none exists by use of extravagant language once reserved for *true* excellence.

The last time I stood before a check-in desk, answering the questions posed by an employee filling out a form, my every mundane response was acknowledged by an artificial, meaningless approbation. When asked for my ZIP Code and I answered, “50273,” the clerk responded with

a bright and cheerful, “Perfect!”

Well now, did he mean by this that the ZIP Code 50273 was a perfect place to live? Or did this mean that he assumed I was a drooling idiot who would struggle to recall where I lived, so to prepare me for the next tough query he had to prime me with an encouraging, “Perfect! What a good boy.”? Or perhaps the truth is that this youngster had never learned or been taught, during all his many classes on self-esteem and the glories of socialism, just what the true definition of the word “perfect” is.

We have done the same with the word “hero,” and don’t get me started on how we have tragically diminished the word “awesome.” Then, of course, for some time now one has been able to click on a screen icon and instantly become a “friend” of a total stranger. But the word “friend” is to mean more than that.

It once did.

Frie·da (frē/dā) [G. < OHG. *fridu*, peace: see FREDERICK] a feminine name
***fried·cake** (frīd/’kāk/) n. a small cake fried in deep fat; doughnut or cruller
friend (frend) n. [ME. *friend*, friend, lover, akin to G. *freund*, prp. of Gmc. **frijon*, to love (whence OE. *freon*): for IE. base see FREE] 1. a person whom one knows well and is fond of; intimate associate; close acquaintance 2. a person on the same side in a struggle; one who is not an enemy or foe; ally 3. a supporter or sympathizer [a friend of labor] 4. something thought of as like a friend in being helpful, reliable, etc. 5. [F.] a member of the Society of Friends; Quaker —*vt.* [Archaic] to act as a friend to; befriend Quaker —*vt.* [F.] a member of the Society of Friends; Quaker —*vt.* [F.] a member of the Society of Friends; Quaker —*vt.* [F.] a member of the Society of Friends; Quaker —*vt.* [F.] a member of the Society of Friends; Quaker
friend at court a person in an influential position who is friendly toward one and able to help him
friend·ly (-lē) *adj.* —*li·er*, —*li·est* [ME. *frendli* < OE. *freondlice*] 1. like, characteristic of, or suitable for a friend, friends, or Quakers 2. attachment between friends; amicable 3. supporting; helping; favorable [a friendly wind] 4. showing friendly feelings; ready to be a friend 5. [F.] same as TONGA —*adv.* in a friendly manner; as a friend —*adv.* in a friendly manner
Friendly Islands same as TONGA
friend of the court same as AMICUS CURIAE
friend·ship (-ship) n. [ME. *freondscipe* < OE. *freondscipe*] 1. the state of being friends 2. attachment between friends 3. friendly feeling or attitude; friendliness
fri·er (frī/ər) n. same as FRYER
Frie·sian (frē/’zhən) *adj.*, n. same as FRISIAN
Fries·land (frēz/’lənd, -land/, Du. *frēs/’lānt*) province of the N Netherlands, on the North Sea: 1,310 sq. mi.; pop. 496,000; cap. Leeuwarden

The first event we learn of in the life of Jonathan, son of Saul king of Israel, is his victory over the Philistines at Geba. The last event we learn of in the life of Jonathan is his death at the hands of the Philistines at Mount Gilboa.

Between these two markers, the story of Jonathan is almost too good to be true. His life stands not just as one example; he is the original die from which all loyal, selfless friends are cast. Jonathan was a determined friend to the younger David even when such loyalty worked against his own self-interest. He was the eldest son of the first king of Israel. As such he was next in line to the throne, yet his allegiance to David, the Lord's anointed to succeed Saul, was unwavering.

Jonathan was older than David; by how much we cannot say, but well before David, the youngest son in his family and called by Saul a "youth," was anointed by Samuel and met Goliath, Jonathan was already leading men into battle for his father the king.



All recorded history is, by its very nature, a subset of actual history. Not everything that has ever occurred since Day One of Creation has been chronicled, and certainly not everything that every person has ever thought in any given moment has been recorded for posterity. To this axiom God's written word subscribes. We do not know anything about Jonathan as a youth, and we can only surmise or guess the reason why he so quickly—as written, even instantaneously—acquired such a profound bond with the younger David.

Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, young man?" And David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite." Now it came about when he had finished speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself.

1 Samuel 17:58-18:1

There was between the two men a common, and perhaps binding, trait: bravery and assertiveness in battle. What David showed to-

ward Goliath, boldly stepping out from the quaking ranks of his countrymen to meet alone the towering champion, Jonathan had already demonstrated against the Philistine garrison at Geba in Benjamin, and again at the Philistine outpost guarding a pass leading to their main camp at Micmash.

Common also between the two men was that their bravery was not based on arrogance or braggadocio, but a trust in God. To his armor bearer Jonathan said,

"Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few."

1 Samuel 14:6

To the taunting Goliath, the unarmored David answered,

"You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this

assembly may know that the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands."

1 Samuel 17:45-47

But perhaps the strongest impetus that drew the two men together was something deeper, something mystical. Integrity is drawn to integrity, righteousness to righteousness; faith is attracted to faith. At that moment in history, shortly before his encounter with Goliath, in the very place where just over a thousand years later Jesus the Christ would be born, a dramatic change of command took place.

*Iron sharpens iron,
So one man sharpens
another.*

Proverbs 27:17

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.

1 Samuel 16:13-14

David son of Jesse was now imbued with the Holy Spirit. To a man of integrity and faith like Jonathan, that made David irresistible. If David was a man after God's own heart, he was also a man after Jonathan's heart.

In the deepest, truest sense of the word, Jonathan and David were now friends. Real friends. But they would soon become even more.

a new dynasty

ING SAUL'S ARMOR DID NOT FIT DAVID, but Jonathan's did.

Then Saul clothed David with his garments and put a bronze helmet on his head, and he clothed him with armor. David girded his sword over his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. So David said to Saul, "I cannot go with these, for I have not tested them." And David took them off.

1 Samuel 17:38-39

The giving or exchanging of clothes or battle dress was a common custom in ancient times, and no less in the middle east. It bestowed honor, and was used as a pledge of friendship. In this case, it was a visible outward sign of the covenant just made between the two men.

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor, including his sword and his bow and his belt.

1 Samuel 18:3-4

Here, however, the gift and the giving represented far more. Beyond a sign of covenantal devotion, this was Jonathan transferring to David his place as heir apparent to the throne. Jonathan may not have consciously known that David had already been anointed king; it is possible that word had spread to the royal family, but it is also possible they knew nothing of what had transpired in Bethlehem between Samuel and Jesse's sons.

Nonetheless, just as the Holy Spirit communicated to Elizabeth that the pregnant teenager standing before her was to be the mother of the Messiah, that same Spirit could have communicated to Jonathan that the youth standing before him would be the next king of Israel.

Once again the Spirit of God connects His children with each other even as He connects all of us to the Father. He informs, He enlightens, He lifts us out of our own self-interests to think more highly of a friend and brother than ourselves.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord would come to me?"

Luke 1:41-43

a complicated life

IF WE ARE HONEST we must admit that the relationship between Jonathan and David reads more than a little strange in our present culture—a bit too cloying for what passes between typical males of our time. Indeed, there are some who claim that Jonathan and David were an early homosexual couple. To our shame that conclusion speaks more about *our* time, rather than that of the tenth century B.C.

During our visit to Egypt in the early 1980s Linda and I frequently observed on the streets of Cairo men walking arm in arm. When we apprehensively inquired about this with our Egyptian acquaintance, he smiled at our western ignorance and patiently answered, “No. They are just friends.”

It is ironic that as we have reached a level of societal “sophistication” in which there is a general acceptance of sexual love between men, there is so little understanding of innocent, non-romantic affection between men, which, where it exists, is more often than not labeled as “gay.” Jonathan and David *loved* each other: a deep, genuine, authentic, visceral love—expressed especially by Jonathan for David in the biblical accounts.

Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.

1 Samuel 20:17



Jonathan son of Saul repeatedly put himself in harm’s way for the sake of his friend David. His position was tenuous, and dangerously complex: his father was the king of Israel. Saul was chosen by God and anointed by Samuel, but

because of his arrogance, bad choices, and outright rebellion the Holy Spirit in Saul had been replaced by an evil spirit, resulting in eccentric, even bizarre behavior in the king. Apparently his favorite method of expressing displeasure in someone was to attempt to pin them to the wall with his spear. This Saul tried at least twice with David, when he was assigned to bring peace to the mind of the tormented king with his harp, and once with his own son.

Then Saul’s anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are

choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die.” But Jonathan answered Saul his father and said to him, “Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” Then Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down; so

Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death.

1 Samuel 20:30-33

The easiest path for Jonathan would have been for him to take the side of his father against David. But his love for David, along with his integrity and faith, would not permit this. In spite of the very real dangers to life and limb, Jonathan remained loyal to his friend. But even this unswerving loyalty took a form beyond all reasonable measure. Jonathan did more than just choose sides; he committed himself, in a sworn covenant with David before the Lord, to



a new dynasty under the kingship of David. Jonathan swore to be by David's side when he became king.

Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God. Thus he said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and

you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also." So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house.

1 Samuel 23:15-18

As far as we know from Scripture, this was the last time David and Jonathan were with each other.

the end

IN ONE FATEFUL DAY in the year 1010 B.C., in the heat of battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, Jonathan son of Saul, two of his brothers, and the king himself are killed. A fourth son of Saul, Ish-bosheth, would reign as king for the next two years until assassinated by two brothers in his armed forces. Thinking to be rewarded by David for removing the last obstacle to him becoming king over all Israel, they are rewarded, instead, the same as the hapless Amalekite who claimed to have a hand in the death of Saul: death for themselves, for killing "a righteous man in his own house on his bed" (2 Samuel 4).

Jonathan never got to be king, and he never got to serve his dearest friend, David, who would rule over Judah and then over all of Israel for forty years and six months. He did have a family, including a son named Mephibosheth, who was made a cripple at the age of five in his nurse's "hurry to flee" when word came to them

of Saul and Jonathan's death in battle. In keeping his covenant with Jonathan, King David would later grant Mephibosheth all properties that had belonged to Saul and his family, and he "ate at the king's table regularly" (2 Samuel 9).



grounded in love

JONATHAN SON OF SAUL was one of the most honorable individuals in all of recorded history. He embodied the finest qualities any man would desire in himself. Within the parade of Old Testament saints—Abraham, Moses, Joseph, even David himself—Jonathan's life rises to the top.

What set this man apart from the rest was not just his good and noble character, but his extraordinary, unbounded love for David. There is no evidence that Jonathan harbored any ulterior motives for such devotion; if he had any such motives, he would have been better off moving *against* David, rather than supporting and defending him.

The analogy is not perfect, but, in a sense, Jonathan is a type of Christ Jesus, who also relinquished His throne out of love for others. For Jesus this was a temporary loss, and Jonathan did not die *for* David, but both of them manifested an other-worldly love for those who could offer them little in return—an unselfish, costly, even sacrificial love.

Jonathan was a “friend” to David, and by his definition that was a high calling, a deep and profound level of relationship. Jesus says the same; this present world's definition of that word is little more than plain dirt compared to the solid gold concept defined by Jesus.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”

John 15:12-15

The Lord Jesus calls us “friend” when we obey Him by loving each other as He loves us. And how is that love defined? By a willingness to lay down one's life for a “friend.” If our purpose is to grow into the image of Christ, then this is to be part of it. Christians are to know, to demonstrate, to feel, to *live* a level of friendship unknown to this fallen society.



Christians like to refer to each other as brothers and sisters, because we are fellow members in the family of God in Christ. In practice, however, that term is nothing more than a stick-on name tag if there is not love behind it. Like Jonathan in his love for David, we call each other brother or sister because that appellation is grounded in a foundation of love.

*Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.*

*Before our Father's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.*

*We share our mutual woes,
our mutual burdens bear,
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.*

*From sorrow, toil, and pain,
and sin, we shall be free;
and perfect love and friendship reign
through all eternity.*

John Fawcett