

# Reconstructing Manhood

## Pursuing Life-Preserving Friendships

Rough Transcript

Michael Aitcheson

### Patrick Morley:

We want to welcome you. We do have a special guest speaker and our series Reconstructing Manhood this morning. He and I have become friends. We actually probably had our first lunch, what, a decade ago or something like that. In fact, he used to work at Man In The Mirror as one of our night team of people who called donors when he was in a seminary, at Reform Theological Seminary where he is a graduate with a Masters of Divinity degree.

I don't know why we took 10 years to have a second lunch, but we did. There is a great chemistry that he and I enjoy. I've told him, he reminds me so much of another friend that I had, a guy named Tom Skinner, who was really my best friend, and even his mannerism. It's just been a thrill for me to be looking forward to having him, Mike Aitcheson, be with us this morning. Mike is married. He has four children. He comes from the city of Miami where he grew up. He went to the University of Kentucky where he played football. The name of his church here down on Gore. Gore, right? Gore Street is Christ United Fellowship. It's a PCA church. He and Lucy have daughters. Mike is going to be speaking to us this morning. I wonder if you would give a very warm rousing Man In The Mirror welcome to our guest speaker today, Mike Aitcheson.

### Michael Aitcheson:

Pat, I wish I could take you with me everywhere I go, and even have you do some post message crowd stirring comments. Sometimes you're not always loved the same way you leave as the way you enter. Well, I am so excited to be here with you all this morning. Again, thank you, Pat. Much of that time that it took to reconnect is on me. I'll go ahead and take the blame up front for that. Certainly, without a doubt have respected you from up close and from afar for years.

My last name's Aitcheson, and I understand we have a connection there and that was one of the first things over which we bonded. There are about seven different spellings of that last name and about as many ways to pronounce it. Joining me also this morning is my friend, a son in the faith and a congregant of our church, Caleb McDonnell. Wave your hand back there. Ordinarily, Caleb and I would be meeting at o'dark thirty over some coffee and our Bible study in Timothy. But as it is now, he gets to watch me up here this morning and then tell me all the ways I need to improve next time we're together.

So this morning, I want to talk to you all about friendships, specifically as it relates to relationships. I'm going to use First Samuel Chapter 18 versus one through five as our starting point. Then, we're going to navigate, we're going to fly over the arc of David and Jonathan's friendship together. We're going to fly over that arc over years of drama, a saga of being chased by the king, and we're going to see how friendship is used by God, how it's a gift of God to navigate the foxhole of life. Because life is a battle and there are many enemies that threaten to undo us and God gives us friendship as a way to navigate those realities.

First Samuel 18 verse one says, "As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the son of David. And Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. And David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him so that Saul set him over the men of war. And this was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants." Let me ask the Lord's blessing over our time.

Our father, we love you because you first loved us. This is your word and we ask for your help now. We pray that you sent forth your Holy Spirit to remove the veil off our blind eyes, the block out of deaf ears, and turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. Empower me now for this, your service. Use me. Lord, may my words be faithful to you. What is not, you let it fall to the ground. Have mercy on us now, we praying Jesus name. Amen.

Friendship is unnecessary. Like philosophy, like art, it has no survival value. Rather, it's one of those things which gives value to survival. C.S. Lewis. Friends are people who know you really well and like you anyway. Friends are God's gift for not letting you choose your family. Ouch. I wonder if any of my family members think that about me. Love is blind. Friendship tries not to notice. They all read of revel row. No medicine is more valuable, none more efficacious, none better suited to the cry of our temporal ills than a friend to whom we may turn for consolation in time of trouble, and with whom we may share our happiness and time of joy.

We see that friendship is essential to surviving life. It has been that way from whatever BC, until now. The ancients have written about it. At biblical antiquity, it's been documented. God called Abraham a friend. He was a friend to Moses. You move on forward, BC, Cicero, you fill in the blank. After Jesus, Augustine, monks, all the way down till now. Friendship is an essential element to surviving life. Friendship is something that God gives us, that images his relationship to us in one aspect.

It's one of those glorious things that God gives us to remind us that He is with us always. And so what I want to do this morning is just tease out a few attributes of friendship that I believe is essential for us to pursue. My theme is pursuing life, preserving friendship. These are some things that are worth friendship. The pursuit of friendship is worth our time. It's worth our investment. It's worth our energy. The Bible gives us clear expression of this, and perhaps you have already experienced that in your life. If you have, I want to affirm you. If you have not, I want to encourage you to move in that direction.

I've got nine attributes that I want to tease out. Now, you must know this. Pat told you I'm a PCA pastor, which usually means three points and anywhere from 35 minutes to one hour. Now, the less points I have the longer the messages. So you all are on luck this morning, because I have nine things to tease out.

The Big Idea this morning is **Intentional Relationship**. Friendship is an intentional relationship characterized by nine attributes. There are more, but I'm going to tease out the attributes that we find in the life of David and Jonathan: compatibility, commitment, advocacy, attunement, transparency, self-sacrifice, protection, comfort, and zealous encouragement. We go back here to First Samuel 18 and we see that David has just come off of a military victory. One of his greatest victories, one of the victories that signaled that this is God's man. When everyone was running from Goliath, David ran to him and took him out in the name of the Lord of Host, in the name of the true and living God. So we see here that after David was selected, God places him in battle and blesses him with victory. His favor is shining brightly upon David and we see David's faith come out brightly. We see that this is man who trusts God with his life in the most dreadful of circumstances and God puts his stamp on this man.

Not only that. The people around David in this military conquest recognize that there is something special about this man. But someone even more special than all of those people recognize something.

This man named Jonathan, who was heir to the throne, Jonathan was Saul's son, the King of Israel at the time. And we see here, in this introductory statement about their friendship, that Jonathan recognizes something about David. The text tells us that Jonathan, after David finished speaking, just loved him as his own soul. This is the kind of love that you have for a friend. This is deep inside. This is a strong kind of love.

And what did we see here? Jonathan saw a man who was compatible to him. Because Jonathan was a man of war as well. Jonathan had some military victories as well. He said, "That's my dude." That's the kind of guy that I can roll with. He likes the same things that I like. He doesn't like everything, but there are some core values about this man that are important, that are true for this man that are just as important for me. We see a commitment here. We see compatibility, we see commitment. Jonathan, the text tells us, and Jonathan, verse three, "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as his own soul."

That word there in the Hebrew is berith. It means to pledge. It means to come to an agreement. It means to give yourself to something. It's an oath. And what we have here is a declaration by Jonathan, that you are my dude, that you are my boy. You are my friend. I've got your back. I am bonding myself to you. This is an unconditional type of bond. This is a bond that you make before the presence of God, and say that I am in this with you all the way. Compatibility, commitment.

Then, we see attunement. Jonathan stepped out of the way of being king. Something that he had the right to. All right, you've got this thing called primogenitor. The oldest son is usually the one who inherits, in ancient custom, is usually the one who inherits all of the father's possessions. He's the one who becomes a steward and an overseer of all the territory and all that good stuff after the father's absence.

But he has the right to refuse it. It's not fixed. We know that when we read the Bible that God doesn't always work that way. His ways, He turn tends to turn things upside down. Now, what we don't realize is at what point Jonathan realizes that David is the man. But what we do know here is that perhaps when Jonathan gives his stuff over to David, he may be doing this unwillingly, but this is definitely God's sign. This is a sign of what God is up to. This was the man that Samuel went and sought out. Here goes the heir saying, "Take all of my kingly regalia." What that did was foreshadow. That was a stamp that David is indeed the man. So friends, good friends are those who are attuned to you and recognize God's calling on your life. They don't get in the way of that even if it means more glory for you than them. They step out of the way and they celebrate you. They don't envy you. They're attuned to who you are and they want you to be thrust into God's calling for your lives.

We have compatibility, commitment, attunement. Matthew Henry said Jonathan had formally set upon a Philistine army with the same faith and bravery with which David had now attacked a Philistine giant so that there was between them a very near resemblance of affections, dispositions, and counsels, which made their spirits unite too easily, so quickly, so closely that they seemed, but as one soul in two bodies. None had so much reason to dislike David as Jonathan had because he was to put him by the crown. Yet none guards him more. If Aristotle said that friendship, a good friendship, is like two souls sharing the same ... one soul sharing two bodies. Evidently Matthew Henry thought the same thing, too.

You see, Jonathan refused his rights. Jonathan gave up something significant. Jonathan was the one who was most to be threatened by David. Not really Saul. God had already left Saul. The kingdom's been torn from him. That had been pronounced on him. But the one who was next in line was the one who was to be threatened the most. And he said, "I give it up because I recognize that this is God's man." A friend will do that for you. Recognize that God has a calling on your life and thrust you towards it even if it means they have to step back.

We move on to First Samuel chapter 19. The drama continues. So we would think here that, oh, okay, Jonathan gets the regalia. I mean, David gets the regalia. He's ready to move on. He's in the court. Now, Saul didn't let him go back. But it does not stop right there, gentlemen. What I skipped over was a whole series of life-threatening encounters. Saul gets jealous of David because his time is up and the rest of the episode with Jonathan and David is characterized by Saul trying to take David out. Not just hurt him, but kill him. So one long drama of being pursued by the king. What do we see as we move from 18 to 19? We see advocacy.

Saul stands in the gap. I mean, Jonathan stands in the gap for David. We see here in First Samuel 19, and Saul spoke to Jonathan, his son, and to all his servants that they should, what, kill David. Here is the man that just defeated Goliath, just saved Israel. Saul celebrated him, said, "I'm not sending you back to your daddy's home. You come and you hang out with us." Made him a captain over one of his platoons. Then, he turns around and now he wants to kill him. You talk about being in a whiplash organization. Hired one day and killed the next. That's what was going on here. He was invited to the King's court and the King wanted to take him out right after that.

But Jonathan, it says, "Saul's son delighted much in David. And Jonathan told David, 'Saul, my father seeks to kill you. Therefore, be on your guard in the morning. Stay in a secret place and hide yourself and I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are. And I will speak to my father about you. And if I learn anything, I will tell you.' And Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul, his father, and said to him, 'Let not the King sin against his servant, David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his deeds have brought good to you. For he took his life in his hand and he struck down the Philistine. And the Lord worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it and rejoice. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause? And Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore as the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death. And Jonathan called David and Jonathan reported to him all these things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul and he was in his presence as before.

We can relax now. Got a friend who stood up for me. Got a friend who advocated for me. Where I was weak, my friend was strong. He stood in the place of the king and said to the king, "You cannot do this. This is unjust. This man just saved our nation and here you turn around out of envy and you want to kill him." These are the kind of friends we need in our life. When our back is up against the wall, they say, "Stop, let me handle this for you. Let me stand in the gap for you. You go to a safe place and I will advocate for you." But I wish I could end the story there. Because if you keep reading, you will see that an angry spirit came on Saul and he went after David again. Went after him again. Tries to work through, he tries to even work through David's wife. David escapes again.

Then, we get to First Samuel 20 where the drama continues. David worries about Saul's actions once again, and he and Jonathan vow to care for each other and for future generations. And this episode is intense and filled with homicidal fury. We go there to First Samuel 20, "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?" So here we have a man that's exhausted. Have you ever been worn down? Have you ever been beat up? Have you ever been at the end of yourself and needing somebody to be there for you?

Here's what Jonathan says to David. We see transparency. Jonathan says in verse nine, "And Jonathan said, 'Far be it from you, for if I knew that it was determined by my father that harm should come to you, would I not tell you?' Jonathan's out of the loop. Jonathan thinks everything is okay so what he says to David is, listen, David, you have my word. I'm being open with you. I'm being transparent that if this were the case, I would tell you, verse 10, "Then David said to Jonathan, 'Who will tell me if your father answers you roughly?' Who will tell me? He's holding him accountable to his word. Jonathan says, verse

11, "And Jonathan said to David, 'Come let us go into the field.'" So they both went out into the field. We see self-sacrifice.

Can't read through everything. I encourage you to go ahead and read through the narrative. He tells him, "I'm going to go out there, do some target practice. If my father is angry with you, I'll shoot an arrow. I'll send a young man to go far away. That's how you know you need to run." All right. If it fall short and I tell him, 'Come back', you know everything is okay.'. And we see self-sacrifice. When we go down to verse 30, "After inquiring about David, 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 a son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?' Gosh, have mercy. He is enduring some serious emotional abuse from his own daddy. He is tearing him down to the ground. Look at verse 31. "For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Therefore, send and bring him to me for he shall surely die."

What do we see here, brothers? We just had a father revoke the blessing from his son. The King just said, "You aren't going to be the king as long as this man's alive." He essentially called him a nobody. But what we see in this moment here, Saul, I mean, Jonathan refuses his right. Why? Because he knows that this is God's man. So he's willing to stand in the line of fire, endure all sorts of dehumanizing words, emotional abuse, psychological abuse, all this for his friend.

He also did something else. Look at verse 33, "But Saul hurled his spirit at him." To do what? To strike him. Jonathan knew that his father was determined to put David to death. David, how do I know that my dad doesn't like you? Because he tried to kill me to get to you. Can you imagine what's going on there at this banquet? Saul gets upset, takes a turkey leg, takes a bite out of it, throws it at the wall. Tells his son he's a nobody. And by the way, let me show you that you're a nobody. Takes a spear and hurls it at his son.

This is a true friend. This is a friend that's enduring a whole lot of mess for David. I want you to see, this is borne out of a commitment to love this man. Keep that in mind. He pledged himself to him and Jonathan, we see, so we have transparency, self-sacrifice, protection. And what happens in verse 35? "In the morning, Jonathan went out into the field to the appointment with David and with him a little boy. And he said to his boy, 'Run and find the arrows that I shoot.' As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. 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?' Verse 38, "And Jonathan called after the boy, 'Hurry, be quick. Do not stay.' So Jonathan's boy gathered up the arrows and came to his master."

Jonathan said, "I've got you." He stood in the way. He was transparent. He sacrificed himself and he did all that was necessary to protect and to preserve the life of his friend. He kept his word. He kept his word. He dramatized it. He spoke it and then he dramatized it. He warned David of Saul's intentions. But we also see something else that's important. A friend who provide comfort in our hard times. We as men like to run it alone. We like to buckle down and grit up and think that we can handle every and anything on our own. But see, behold what God's gift is to us? In verse 40, "And Jonathan gave his weapons to his boy and said to him, 'Go and carry them to the city.'"

Verse 41, "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, and David weeping the most." what do we see here, brothers? We see the man that just killed Goliath. Killed Goliath. David is a bad man. Make no mistake about him. He's a bad man. Took on lions, bears, and all kinds of stuff, and the baddest man in the land. Took him down in the name of the Lord. But we see that David's human. We say that David has breaking points as well. No matter how tough and strong we are, it's okay to recognize that we have limitations and God meets us there. What did Jonathan do? Grabbed him, kissed him, loved him, held onto him. He was there with him. Is that my time limit? He was there

with him. I knew Pat had one out there. I knew he had one out there for me. That's my five minute warning.

He had a man in the fight with him. Not only did he pledge to protect David, but he was there for David in his weakest moment. And he stood by him. Paul says, "When one weeps, we all weep; when one rejoices, we all rejoice." We all need friends who will stand there with us in our weak hour, who will be a shoulder for us to cry on, who will be a source of comfort.

We fast forward after David flees, there's many more episodes. Saul continues to pursue this man. And out of nowhere, we turn to First Samuel 23, I'll read to here and verse 15, "David saw that Saul had come to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh and strengthened his hand in God." Let me tell you what Jonathan said. This was a zealous, zealous encouragement. And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul, my father, shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel and I shall be next to you. Saul, my father knows this.' And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. And David remained at Horesh and Jonathan went home."

Jonathan saw him out, pursued him in his time with trouble to remind him that God has a calling on your life. Don't give up. The last time they were with each other, David was at one of his lows. Jonathan saw him out and say, "You remember that you're going to be the king." This is the man who was the heir to be king telling this man, "It's yours. Everything's going to work out. Remember my generations. Remember my descendants. Remember the covenant that we made and God is with you." We need people in our life who will not only comfort us in our time of trouble, but who will build us up when we seem to be falling apart. We need zealous encouragement. We need people who will speak life. We need people who will stand in the gap and lift us up from the ash heap.

And friends, what does this friendship point us to? Who does this man Jonathan point us to? Because Jonathan, I'm sure, failed somewhere along the way. He was a human. He had limitations. But there is a greater friend in Jesus Christ who fulfills all these attributes perfectly without fail. Jesus said to his disciples in John, chapter 15, he said to them, "Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this than a friend lays down his life for another." And that's the friend that we have in Jesus Christ. That's what the friendship of Jonathan and David points us to: the friendship that we have in Jesus Christ. He promises to be with us always, even to the end of the age. He promised that we can come on Him and find rest when we're weary because His yoke is easy and his burden is light. That's the sweet friendship we have in Jesus.

But he doesn't leave us there. He gives us practical blessings. People with flesh and blood to remind us of these realities as we navigate the harsh complexities of life. Because what you saw with David was an image of the life, the battle we have to fight. It's not easy. We need people who are with us to help us get through this difficult journey of life.

As I close, I was in a leadership collective. I am in one. And our sage in the group told us about an experiment that one of the really smart schools did. They situated people at the bottom of a hill with a backpack on. They asked them, "How much did the backpack weigh?" And they gave them the weight. They said, "How steep was the hill?" And they told them how steep the hill was. The second round, they had someone next to them. They said, "How much did the backpack weigh?" It weighed less. "How steep was the hill?" It was actually a little bit flatter. You know why that's the case? Because when you have someone with you in life's journeys, it changes your perceptions about the hardship that you're facing.

And this is the kind of friend that we have in Jesus. One who carries the burden for us. He gives us friends in this life to remind us of that reality. So, are you pursuing these types of friendships, brothers? If you are, praise God. I would that you excel in that. Do you have a friend like this who will be with you

and point you to the greater friend that we have in Jesus Christ? If not, I pray that you would find friends like that. And I pray that if you don't know the friendship of Jesus Christ, that you would come to a saving knowledge of him because that's a friendship that endures for all eternity.

Lastly, men, go be that friend to someone else. Let us pray. Our God and our father, we thank you for your blessing. We thank you that you call us friends through your son, Jesus. We pray that you would strengthen our hearts in this journey, even as we navigate the hardships. I pray, Lord, that you would raise up friends for us; that you would raise up friends for these men; that we would cultivate these friendships to your glory and our good. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.