

GOD IS CLOSER THAN YOU THINK

When Love Demands Sacrifice

1 Samuel 18 & 20

Created by *Dale Obmair*

Big Idea: *Sacrifice, which involves the lonely process of letting go of something, brings us into a unique fellowship with God.*

This past Friday marked the anniversary of Pat Tillman's death. Perhaps you caught one of many new stories that ran that day, reminding the nation of a life cut way too short. Tillman was notable for several reasons. The people who were closest to him talked about the passion he had for life. His relentless abandon on the football field earned him a scholarship to play for the Arizona State University, where he graduated in three and a half years. In 1998, he was drafted by the Arizona Cardinals and eventually worked his way into the starting line-up, where he set a record for the most tackles in one season.

But Pat will always be remembered most for putting his football career on hold in 2002. His patriotism drove him to join the armed forces and become an Army Ranger. After he served in Iraq during 2003, people in the world of professional football tried to persuade him to apply for discharge, which he most likely would have been granted after his combat experiences. Pat wouldn't hear of it. He had made a three-year commitment, and he was going to honor it. He was in eastern Afghanistan on the evening of April 22, 2004 when his unit came under enemy fire. Pat had already made it to safety, but he turned back to assist his fellow soldiers. He was killed in the skirmish.¹

Every generation that has ever gone to war has stories like that to tell. The man who drew enemy fire as a diversion so that his squad has a chance to escape. The man who pushed a buddy out of the way as an incoming shell hits. The man who jumped on the live hand grenade and saved his comrades. In moments of extreme danger, certain individuals rise to selfless levels of heroism.

Do you ever wonder if you have that inside? If it was your friend, or your wife, or your child, would you willingly give your life for their benefit? Well, I would like to think so.

Then you get home from work and find that plans you have made conflict with the plans of your spouse. A couple of weeks later, your child needs braces...and the cost roughly equals the amount you have been saving to take a cruise. Far too often, we find ourselves caught between what we want and what others may want or need. How heroic are you feeling these days? The thing is, to sacrifice a cruise to buy braces doesn't make the newspapers. And in those moments when we have to make an anonymous sacrifice, we don't feel very important or noble. We usually just feel lousy.

At least, I do. My selfishness goes to war with my sense of responsibility in those times. The good news is that my sense of responsibility usually wins. The bad news is that it gets almost beat to death in the process. So in those moments, I need to be rejuvenated by examples of the type of heroic sacrifice that can help me aspire to see the value of selflessness.

¹ Based on information derived from www.patillmanfoundation.net.

One of the best examples of that type of heroism comes from the Bible. The name of David is more closely associated with heroism than perhaps any other name in the Old Testament. But in this story, he isn't the main hero. David may get the spotlight most of the time in our thoughts and memories, but off at the edge of the shadow is another figure. He met David after the great battle with the giant.

1 Samuel 18:1

¹After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond of love between them, and they became the best of friends. (NLT²)

What did the two see in each other that was so magnetic? The Bible doesn't really say. Personally, I can't help but think that it had to do with the intensity of the patriotism they sensed in each other's heart. David was fresh off his victory with Goliath. Jonathan himself was something of a national hero as well. Just three chapters before that, Jonathan had charged up the side of a hillside with his armor-bearer and killed twenty of their enemy. For a while, national pride surged and the men of Israel stood up to the bullies that lived in the country next door. But all too soon, they fell back into their timid ways. How lonely Jonathan must have felt when he believed that he was the only one that had the backbone to stand up to the abuse. And then, along comes a young man who had the same faith and the same courage.

Together, they led their nation's armies to great victories. And it didn't take long for the people to realize that there was something very special about this David. Pretty soon, it was obvious that they admired David as much or more than any member of the royal family.

The worlds of law and corporations know only too well that they have to pay attention to a specific type of condition that has the potential to erode ethical standards and practices. The phrase that describes this condition is **conflict of INTEREST**. Honest judges admit when a personal concern might influence their rulings in particular cases, and they withdraw. Lawyers have to declare when the interests and well-being of one client might threaten another client. They have to make a choice.

As the popularity of David multiplied, King Saul began to see his young champion as a threat.

1 Samuel 18:10-12

¹⁰The very next day, in fact, a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave like a madman. David began to play the harp, as he did whenever this happened. But Saul, who had a spear in his hand, ¹¹suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David jumped aside and escaped. This happened another time, too, ¹²for Saul was afraid of him, and he was jealous because the LORD had left him and was now with David. (NLT)

It didn't matter to Saul that David had done nothing wrong. It didn't matter to Saul that David had served his king and his nation with great valor. It didn't matter to Saul that David was his son's best friend.

And it didn't matter to David that Saul was an insane maniac. Saul was still the king and David was still his servant.

In 1968, a student at Harvard wrote out a set of statements that he called, "The Paradoxical Commandments."³ As you listen to these "commandments," consider just how willing you are to follow them...

² Scriptures marked "(NLT)" are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation copyright © 1996 by [Tyndale Charitable Trust](#). Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers.

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Be good anyway.

Honesty and frankness will make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

People need help but may attack you if you try to help them. Help them anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It is never between you and them anyway.

David's loyalty did not depend on whether or not Saul deserved it. David's devotion was not determined by whether or not he would profit. Neither was Pat Tillman's. In 2001, Pat received an offer of \$9 million to play football for the world champion St. Louis Rams. But he turned down the offer because he wanted to remain loyal to the team that drafted him. In a world where loyalties are up for sale, Pat Tillman stood out from the crowd.

Are your loyalties for sale?

But what about Jonathan's loyalty? After all, if anyone should have been conflicted over the popularity of David, surely it should have been Jonathan. Jonathan was the crown prince. The throne...the honor and adulation of the people...the power of the monarchy...all of these belonged to Jonathan by birthright. I suppose it would be accurate to say that he had been preparing for them and looking forward to them for his entire life. And now, here is this shepherd boy – for that is what David had been before he killed the giant – this shepherd boy was stepping into his way. Jonathan had every right to be wary of David.

Here is where I believe Jonathan proves to be the hero of this story. He put all of that aside. He knew that some things were more important than his dreams.

At the climax of the movie *Spider-man2*, Peter Parker (aka Spiderman) is locked in a confrontation with the villain Doc Ock. Initially, Dr. Otto Octavius had been a physicist who was working on a machine that would produce a new power source for the world. But a malfunction transformed Octavius into a crazed maniac. Now, his machine was spinning out of control, jeopardizing the entire city. As they struggle, there comes a moment when Peter speaks to Doc Ock about a conversation they had before his transformation. He repeats Octavius' own words, "Sometimes to do what is right, we have to be steady and give up the thing we want the most, even our dreams."⁴

³ Kent M. Keith, from *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Student Agencies, 1968)

⁴ *Spider-man2* (Columbia, 2004) was written by Alvin Sargent, Alfred Gough, Miles Millar and Michael Chabon. It was directed by Sam Raimi. Copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com and Christianity Today, International. Submitted by Pam Harris-Anderson, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

Most people in our generation are more concerned about their rights than they are about *the* right. Maybe from a human perspective, Jonathan has the right to turn against David. But Jonathan was more concerned about doing right than preserving his rights.

Can I get personal for a moment? Is there tension in one of your relationships right now because of some conflict of interest? Do you feel like somebody at work or at home or in your neighborhood is getting in the way of your pursuit of a dream? Maybe they are stepping on your rights in some way? Or maybe you are the one expecting everybody else to sacrifice so that you can get what you want?

Our **LifeTeam** is involved in a study right now called *Surrendering To Christ Together*. Each lesson begins with a brief story to jumpstart the discussion. This week, the story is about Kirk and Molly, a couple with two kids and two careers. As their youngest was entering school, Kirk got the career opportunity of a lifetime. But it meant relocating, and Molly was devastated. She didn't want to move. Her career had been pretty much in neutral while she limited her work schedule to care for the kids. Now, she was in a position to move forward again. But if they moved, the combination of starting over and the limitations she would face because of Kirk's commute would pretty well destroy her career opportunities. She finally agreed to the move.

And then God began to work on Kirk. He began to realize how much Molly had sacrificed for his career – staying home with the kids while he worked late and giving up weekends so he could study for his masters' degree. In the end, he decided to stay where they were – to sacrifice what he wanted for the sake of his wife.⁵

How could Kirk do that? How could Jonathan put David before his own dreams? Here are two practices that make such sacrifice possible.

First, we all need to **realize our God-given roles**.

I don't know when it was or how it happened exactly, but somewhere along the line Jonathan realized that God was not calling him to be the king. Or maybe it was the realization that God had chosen David. As tensions between Saul and David continued to escalate, Jonathan put together a plan that would allow him to uncover his father's true intentions and, if necessary, send David away to safety. In the conversation he had with David to describe the plan, Jonathan makes a statement the hints at his recognition of and respect for David's calling.

1 Samuel 20:14-15

¹⁴*And may you treat me with the faithful love of the LORD as long as I live. But if I die,*
¹⁵*treat my family with this faithful love, even when the LORD destroys all your enemies.*
(NLT)

Do you see it? I think Jonathan is looking ahead and seeing David on the throne. Certainly, there is a desire to seal the friendship between them, but there is more to this statement than that. It's as if he is already putting himself in a position of service and dependence on his king. Jonathan clearly understood the role God wanted him to play in this drama.

Years later, a man that we call John the Baptist put this thought into a phrase. In the early pages of the New Testament, John emerged as a towering force in the area around Jerusalem. If they had existed at that time, all the major news networks would have sent crews out to report on his activities and capture sound-bytes for their listening audiences. We know that the religious leadership sent representatives out to hear what the man had to say. But a few months after he captured the public's attention, John introduced another young teacher. Before

⁵ Brett & Dee Eastman, et al. *Surrendering To Christ Together*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005. Page 34.

long, people began to be more interested in what this teacher had to say than in what John had to say. People began to go to the second teacher to be baptized more than they came to John. That bothered John's friends, but it didn't bother John.

John 3:30

³⁰*He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.* (NLT)

John knew the role God had prepared him and called him to play in the drama. Maybe that is the problem with a lot of us. We don't know or don't care enough about what God intends. We get trapped into thinking that we'll find fulfillment by chasing our own dreams. Today, I challenge you with the thought that you are far better off and will be far more satisfied if you focus on what God has envisioned for your life. That is not a passive thing that you can just sit back and let happen. If you sit back and let things happen, you will naturally gravitate toward selfishness. You have to actively choose the study and discover your God-given role. You will probably have to experiment a little. You may have to make some sacrifices along the way...maybe sacrifices in your career or in your free time. But in the end, this is your responsibility before God and I trust that you will experience the greatest satisfaction.

Now, I just mentioned a very important word in that statement. It is the word **trust**. It is important for you to apply this second practice in your life because this practice has the potential to make you very vulnerable. Sacrifice means that we are answering **the call to elevate GOD and OTHERS** over and above our own pursuits and interests.

As far as the world is concerned, the most precious prize an Olympic athlete can win is a gold medal. But according to an article that appeared in *USA TODAY* during February of 2002, the Olympic athletes themselves treasure another type of medal as well. It is made of a bolt.

During the 1964 winter games, bobsledder Tony Nash from Great Britain drove his time into second place after the first run down the course. Then they made a devastating discovery. During the run, a bolt in the rear axle of their sled had been sheared. They could no longer compete.

At the bottom of the hill, the Italian team heard about the problem. Since they were in first place, you would think this would be wonderful news because it meant that their closest competition had been eliminated. But Eugenio Monti, the Italian driver, didn't want to win that way. Without a moment's hesitation, he took the bolt from the rear axle of his own bobsled and sent it up to the top of the hill. With a new bolt, the British team won the gold medal. Monti's Italian team ended up with a bronze.

Monti's act of sportsmanship did not go unnoticed. The story spread very quickly throughout the games. All Monti would ever say was that Tony Nash didn't win because of the bolt. Tony Nash won because he was the best driver. While that might have been, the fact remains that Nash couldn't have won without Monti's gift. So a new award was created in the Olympics and the first was given to Eugenio Monti. It is called the De Coubertin Medal for sportsmanship, named after the founder of the modern Olympics. It is one of the noblest honors that can be given to an athlete.⁶

I wonder if some of us need to practice a bit of De Coubertin sportsmanship today in our lives. Is there something that you need to give up in order to elevate God to a higher place in your life? Is there something you need to give up in order to elevate your spouse, or a neighbor, or a co-worker?

⁶ *USA Today*, 2/17/2002. Copied from www.PreachingToday.com, copyright © 2005 by PreachingToday.com and Christianity Today, International. Submitted by Marti Pieper, Charleston, SC.

Philippians 2:3-4

³Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. ⁴Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing. (NLT)

I know it can make you feel vulnerable to do that. I know that it can be lonely. But I also know that when you make those types of sacrifice, you are taking gigantic steps in the footsteps of another get example from the Bible. In fact, I can't think of anything more Christ-like that you could do than to give yourself up for others.