

2 Samuel 1:19-27
Remembering Saul and Jonathan
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How we remember those we love and those we've lost is intimately important to us as humans, as people who live and love. Some of you know that the Indianapolis Mini Marathon has become something of an annual tradition for me. But this year's race was particularly significant. As I crossed the finish line last year I was met by Amy who said to me: "next year I'm doing this with you." So this year I ran the race with her in my heart every step of the way. A memorial of sorts to her.

But there's another powerful memorial that happens along the way. As the thousands upon thousands of runners and walkers come out of the tunnel and onto the track in Speedway and begin the 2.5 mile slog around the track, we are met by a sobering reminder. Poster sized photo after photo of Indiana's fallen service men and women, who have given their lives for our country since 2002—this generation's heroes.

Name after name, face after face, family after family, who sacrificed all they had in service. And with every year, the line of photos grows longer, and longer.

I was initially struck by this memorial 7 years ago when I noticed one of the first names along the line, a man named Brett Hershey. I did not know Brett, but he was a roommate and dear friend and brother in Christ to my brother John.

We go to places, memorials, monuments, whether they're in Washington DC, or the Indy Mini, or Falls Cemetery to pay tribute and remember. Or as author and Theologian Miroslav Volf writes in telling his own harrowing experience of political violence and persecution in the former Yugoslavia, to remember rightly in an age of violence.

How do we remember rightly? How do we honor and pay our tributes to the lives of those we love, while at the same time recognize that war, and the human life it consumes, and the families it tears apart is not God's intention for the flourishing of his creation?

If you put the Scriptures side by side with the New York Times or Fox News—especially the Old Testament—they might not appear all that different from one another. Seems conflict and turmoil is the same yesterday, and today, and will continue to be until Christ and his Kingdom comes in full, but it always and will always be a symptom of a world in which sin still exists, and it will always be a symptom in a world in which the human will is not ultimately bent in obedience to the sovereign reign of God.

But even still, how do we remember and pay tribute rightly? Even this question is one that Scripture speaks with such compassion. Poetry may be the best language

And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said:

“Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult. “You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. “From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. “Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions. “You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. “How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle. “Jonathan lies slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. “How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

David laments over Saul and Jonathan, because he cares deeply for them. Lament is much deeper than just a feeling sorry for someone or something. Lament is an expression of love that comes deep down in our guts, from the marrow of our bones. In the New Testament, when Jesus is moved with compassion the Greek word *Splankazomai* literally means to be moved in his guts. Did you know that nearly 70% of the poetry of the Psalms is lament. Lament is difficult and even seems contradictory, but in order to live fully we must also face death totally.

David was a man who lived life fully, he was not reserved in his expression. David cries out in worship and adoration, he mourns deeply, David dances before his troops nakedly. Let that one sink in. But the truth is David honored human life with all of his emotion and physicality. Life matters. And the degree to which we lament and feel deeply reflects the degree to which we cherish one another's lives.

I wonder if our modern culture has lost something of the full-bodied expression of grief and lament, when it comes to how we report and receive the evening news. Catastrophes of famine and environmental destruction, war and violence in our schools sometimes gets relegated to the closing moments of a news cast. Or has become so common place that death has become normalized, we've gotten used to hearing about it. But the tragedy is that without a place for lament, we lose sight of the value of human life, life that is God-breathed, Christ-redeemed life, it just becomes news.

And what we see in David's lament for Saul and Jonathan, is that every human life is infinitely valuable, even when the relationships of human life are...complex and complicated.

Saul hated David. In order to grasp the full weight of this text we need to know a little more about King Saul and his tenuous relationship with David. Saul's relationship with David was strained from the start. Saul's time on the throne of Israel could only be described as a failed state from the beginning. Earlier in 1 Samuel 13 Saul, the newly appointed King finds himself in a skirmish with a neighboring country and instead of relying on God as the one who leads with Saul, he took it upon himself to push God out of the leadership circle of Israel and assume the role as God and King. For which the Prophet Samuel hears God say: "I regret my choice of Saul for King."

So, having the crown and God's anointing pass to the boy David, as you can imagine David wasn't Saul's favorite. From that time on David was Saul's arch enemy. He was pursued, exiled in the

wilderness, on the run for his life for years. But do you know what remained firmly in place in David's mind all the while? God's anointing of Saul. **David chose to see what God did in Saul's life as greater and more important than anything that Saul did to David's life.** Even though Saul made life difficult for David, pursuing him to the ends of the earth as they knew it, Saul's hatred for David didn't cause David to dehumanize Saul—his pursuer.

What a powerful lesson for us. You may have people in your life who make life difficult for you, it may be a coworker or boss, it may be a family member who feels victimized in some way and is now lashing out irradically because of it, it may even be a more impersonal force like a conflict or a political leader that is causing grief or frustration in your life. If we allow others to determine our lives, we will be brought in as collateral damage from sin. Another person's sin and faithlessness doesn't have to dictate our decisions as well.

The amazing thing about the life of David is that when he was being pursued to his death by Saul, David prayed for, honored, and even showed mercy to Saul. There was a moment in the cave at Engedi in 1 Samuel 24 when Saul is relieving himself and has no idea the David and all of his men are inches away from him in the cave. And even though he has the perfect opportunity to take Saul's life, David spares him. Because David is not shrunk or diminished by Saul's hate, but David is enlarged and expanded by the mercy of God and the trust in God's sovereign will and anointing. Instead of turning to hate, Dave grows in love for Saul.

In his translation *The Message*, Eugene Peterson expresses David's lament thusly:

**Oh, oh, Gazelles of Israel, struck down on your hills,
the mighty warriors—fallen, fallen!
Don't announce it in the city of Gath,
don't post the news in the streets of Ashkelon.
Don't give those coarse Philistine girls
one more excuse for a drunken party!
No more dew or rain for you, hills of Gilboa,
and not a drop from springs and wells,
For there the warriors' shields were dragged through the mud,
Saul's shield left there to rot.**

**Women of Israel, weep for Saul.
He dressed you in finest cottons and silks,
spared no expense in making you elegant.**

And Jonathan, Jonathan who was so dear to David, closer than a brother. But it was a love and friendship that neither one could ever really savor. Jonathan had a relentless commitment to his father, and as a result, it kept him from joining David in the wilderness. And David's commitment to the sovereign choice of God kept him from enlisting his friend into his wilderness journey.

David and Jonathan had the kind of friendship that brought out the best in each of them. Do you have a friend like that? A friend who maybe you don't see all that often, but when you do even though time and distance may come between you, you're able to pick up right where you left off. I had a chance to spend a weekend with friends like that when they came to support me and my

family at Amy's funeral. Deep spiritual and emotional friendship, the kind of love CS Lewis says is the kind we can imagine between angels.

The way David laments for Jonathan displays the depth and beauty of their friendship.

**The mighty warriors—fallen, fallen
in the middle of the fight!
Jonathan—struck down on your hills!
O my dear brother Jonathan,
I'm crushed by your death.
Your friendship was a miracle-wonder,
love far exceeding anything I've known—
or ever hope to know.**

There are two things here in David's lament that bear mentioning about David's Lament:

David, in the opening verse of this morning's text says this lament should be taught. David not only mourned the loss of his best friend and his tragic, yet still anointed King, but he ordered others should learn it as well. How we deal with loss shapes our lives it shapes our cultures. The more we humanize and remember rightly the depth and inherent value of every human life, the more cautiously and delicately we will approach the things that consume human lives. Lamentation and memory, keep our loved ones from drifting from beloved but departed into the realm of mythology and folklore.

David told the people to teach one another about Saul's anger and revenge, his enmity; and teach one another about Jonathan's bravery, his kindness, and friendship. Take seriously the tension Jonathan knew and felt as the son to a maniacal father and King, and dear friend to the man who was pursued by the king. Take seriously the struggle of grappling with the stories of honest, dutiful, and caring men and women, who may also be brought into a very evil situation. Remember those relationships rightly, navigate that tension between honoring, loving, and paying tribute to the human life, created, sustained, and redeemed by Jesus Christ, while also remembering that sometimes goodness can be coopted for destructive purposes.

Eugene Peterson writes poetically: "Pain isn't the worst thing. Being hated isn't the worst thing. Being separated isn't the worst thing. The worst thing is failing to deal with reality and becoming disconnected from what is actual. The worst thing is trivializing the honorable, and desecrating the sacred."

The second thing that comes through in this passage is David's deep understanding of the value of human life. You will notice that even though David never fails in giving honor to Saul as God's anointed, it was Saul the choice of God, not the leader of a nation that commanded David's allegiance and admiration. People and their stories matter to God, their stories should matter to us. When we look to the symbols of our nation we would do well to remember that what really matters is not the ideology or symbols they represent, but the people whose lives have been spent, given, sacrificed, in its creation. And those lives and stories allow us to celebrate, grieve, swell with pride, and shake our fists in anger. Because our experience as the people of God, whose allegiance is first and foremost a different Kingdom, can allow us to see the tension of gratitude for how God has blessed us, and grief for its imperfection

This is the value of lamentation, the language of grief, the purpose of memory, in the in between times.

It is really interesting where this passage lands in the story of David's life. It's the midpoint, it's the pivot place where David goes from being the anointed King whose on the run from Saul, to the ruler of God's people Israel. This lament serves as a point of connection between life to death to life. And without the act of lamenting we will be tempted to skip over, segment, relegate the painful parts of life to the cul-de-sacs of our hearts. But David takes the painful, the memories of his struggles, and uses them to move forward as God's man in a new day, making the most of loss, without getting bogged down by it. And letting his life become poetry. Yours can too. And God loves poetry.