

The Power of Covenant Community

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[0 : 0 0] All right, so we're going to jump into the sermon now. If you have your Bibles, turn to 1 Samuel 18. If you don't have your Bibles, it's on the screen behind me. If you are newer to One Harbor, we typically preach through the books of the Bible.

We just finished Hebrews last week, and that's kind of our main diet. But we do supplement every once in a while with topical sermons, and this is kind of a standalone. Next week, we're jumping into a new sermon series where we are going to look at the Old Testament, some of the Old Testament stories, and finding Jesus in them.

Because the point of the Bible isn't that Jesus only shows up in the New Testament. He is actually, we see Him showing up in the Old Testament in incredible ways, and all of the Bible points to Him.

But today, what I want to do is I want to speak on something that is pivotal to following Jesus. What does it look like to be a disciple of Jesus? And if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, I want to say, man, I think today's sermon will help you understand what that looks like, what it looks like to follow Jesus.

So when you take your first step of faith, you cross that line of faith following Jesus, you enter into this personal relationship with God, right? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You get access.

[1 : 1 2] You get brought in into this relationship with Him. And I can remember as an eight-year-old boy at a kid's camp being so impacted for the first time, going from knowing about Jesus, growing up being a pastor's kid, growing up in a household where I had heard about Him.

And Jesus became someone in stories that was really cool and fun to sing about, and He became very real. Like in that moment, I remember thinking, if I open my eyes, I think I'm going to see Jesus standing right in front of me.

And that both put me in awe, it put me in fear. And then when I surrendered my life to Him and repented of my sins, I received this amazing grace and love that I've never experienced before.

And again, it is hard to describe what that experience is like. And so you enter into this personal relationship, and it's a relationship that continues on and has continued on for all of us for the rest of our lives, right?

Those of you who have crossed that line of faith. But I also say that it's not just entering into a relationship of it's just me and Jesus. God saves us into that personal relationship with Him.

[2 : 1 8] He also saves us into this covenant community called the church, God's family. Now, to understand what this fully means, we need to learn what the Bible teaches us about covenant relationship.

To say you're a part of a church is one thing, but to really understand what that means and the fullness of what it means to be part of a covenant community, man, it is good to dig in and see what the Bible says about covenant relationships.

And that's what this sermon is about. This sermon is about the power of being in a covenant community. So let me start by asking us this question. What is a covenant relationship? What does that mean? What does it mean, and what does it look like to be in a covenant relationship?

You know what I love about how God teaches us in His Word? He doesn't use dictionary terms. He actually tells us stories. To explain what covenant relationship looks like, He says, look at these people and how they did it throughout history.

And so one example we're going to look at is from 1 Samuel 18, verse 1, and it says this. As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, it's the story of David. He, David, had finished speaking to Saul.

[3 : 23] The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul 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 sent 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.

As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, which is Goliath, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing to meet King Saul with tambourines, with songs of joy and with musical instruments.

And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very angry. And this saying displeased him.

[4 : 34] He said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands. And to me, they have ascribed thousands. What more can he have but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day on.

When we read this account, kind of what stands out is this sharp contrast between Saul and Jonathan and their relationship to David, how they related to David.

Saul, King Saul, he comes across as petty and small. Jonathan comes across as gracious and kind and generous. And even though Saul is king, king over all of Israel, it's his son who's actually the greater man in this story.

And what we see in this story is two types of relationships before us that we can enter into. There's Saul's relationship with David, which is transactional.

It was based on what David could do for him. And what defined that relationship was fear. It says in verse 12 of the same chapter that Saul was afraid of David.

[5 : 37] But Jonathan's relationship with David was covenantal. It was based on what he could do for David. And what defined that relationship was love.

It was rooted and grounded and formed by love. It says that Jonathan's soul was knit to David's soul. And he loved David as his own soul.

In other words, he loved David as much as he loved himself. And it wasn't love by losing himself in David. It wasn't love by using David to meet his needs. It wasn't love by...

It was love. It was love by uniting with David in heart. And in covenant language, what this leads to is growth and maturity in you and in the other person you're knitted together with.

See, when your heart and my heart get knitted together, this is what it looks like. This picture right here. So you plus me equals we.

[6 : 39] So you and me by ourselves, you know, we're not as enlarged. We're not as much as we could be as we are when we're together, when we're knitted together.

And what this shows is you don't shrink as a person. Like, getting into a covenant relationship doesn't mean you shrink as a person or lose yourself in someone else. It isn't unhealthy codependency.

It is coming together in mutual love and respect and honor and care and support and giving and generosity. It's being knitted together. It's being one together in every way. Which means you don't become a smaller version of yourself.

You grow. Covenant relationships, what they do is they enlarge you. Now, this is a bit of a paradox because in some ways, being in a relationship does imply limits.

I learned this early on in my marriage when I stopped in at my dad's for an unplanned four-hour visit. By the way, I never bothered to mention that to Haley. So she's at home for four hours wondering where in the heck was my husband who just left work and was supposed to be here like, you know, three and a half hours ago.

[7 : 48] She was about to call the police and file a missing persons report. So when I got home at 9 p.m. that evening, much to my surprise, my wife was more than just a little upset with me.

Relationships mean limits. Now, if you are a hermit in the mountains, you are free to do whatever you want, whenever you want. You kind of get to live life on your own terms. And on the surface, that sounds like a life, like just boundless without any kind of limits, free from anyone else's demands.

You're only answerable to yourself. Sounds really nice. But here's the other side of that. You're also going to be limited in the love you can experience. And your life will be as small as the little world you occupy.

Now, of course, that's an extreme example. I would say none of us here are hermits just by the fact that you are here, right? But the more we press into our own independence and autonomy, the more hermit-like we become.

You could be surrounded by a ton of people and still be super lonely, still be super disconnected. And when we live that way and choosing to live that way, what we do is we shrink.

[9 : 02] We shrink as people. Our world gets smaller and smaller and smaller. We are like the Grinch. Our hearts don't grow in size. They shrink in size. But as we follow Jesus into covenant community, what it does, it opens us up to ever-increasing enlargement.

So we kind of talked about already how it works in covenant relationship. You plus me equals we. That's a bit of an enlargement. That is one level of enlargement. But in God's kingdom, he is constantly growing us and increasing us.

There is more to this enlargement. Let me show you this next picture. So there's me and there's we. And then there's an enlargement into a local church. You're brought into a bigger body of believers.

Your hearts are knitted together with a big group of people. And then beyond that, there is a knitting into the heart of the nations, God's people around the world, the global church.

And so there's this constant enlarging that is possible for you and me. And when we choose to step into covenant relationships, when we choose to pursue that, when we step into those opportunities, at every single level, we get enlarged and enlarged.

[10 : 13] And you know what? When we grow in one area, whether it's, you know, our personal relationship with someone else, like, you know, the we phase or in the local church or into the nations, as we get enlarged, it affects every facet of our lives.

We just become more loving in every way. Here's a simple example. Thinking about tonight, we kind of talked about it in our announcement. We got missionaries coming from the Middle East.

We get to hear about them, right? Now, for me saying, like, you get enlarged to the nations, that doesn't mean you go to the nations. You don't have to. You can. I'm not saying you can't, right? That is one way you can get enlarged as well.

But, man, you can get enlarged by when the nations come to you, right? When you hear about what's going on, when there's these opportunities to connect with guys that are on the ground in other places, and you hear the work that is there, and your hearts get knitted to both them and also to the work in those places, right?

So some of us might walk away from that meeting with a new burden in our heart for the Middle East. Not that we would go there, but we might support it financially and advance the kingdom of God and the work that's happening there.

[11 : 22] We also might support it in prayer. We might be burdened in prayer for the gospel to advance. But that is owning it. That is letting your heart getting enlarged to new spheres of work where the gospel is.

And you can grow that way. Of course, there's also opportunities. If you're not, like, called to full-time, like, being out there missionary, you could also be called to go and, you know, make some trips.

Get to the nations. See what's going on. Serve and support what God is doing around the world. It is so good for us to be exposed to those things, our world, and we see God's kingdom in a much bigger sense, in a much larger sense.

And that's how God often enlarges us. Our vision and our heart gets expanded outward. The more open we are to more of God's people. But covenant relationships, they don't only broaden us.

They also deepen us, too. The knitting of hearts means that your heart has to be opened up to someone. You have to do that.

[12 : 24] You can't be a closed-off person. You have to allow someone access to the deepest parts of who you are. God gives us a simple phrase to understand this right at the beginning of the Bible, Genesis 2.25.

It says, The man and women were both naked and unashamed. So everybody just got a little bit more interested, right? Or maybe some of you got really nervous. But what does it mean?

What is it implying here to be naked and unashamed? Guys, it goes way beyond physical nakedness. It is talking about being vulnerable and transparent with who you are.

It is showing people the good, the bad, and the ugly. It is refusing to put forward a false image of strength and of having it all together. In other words, you are free to be true about who you really are.

And that is what covenant relationships does. It brings you into true freedom. But in order to do that, in order to get to that place where we could be naked and unashamed, we have to push through shame, right?

[13 : 27] The opposite of being unashamed is being ashamed. And what shame does, it causes you to hide yourself. It causes you to cover up. You don't want to be exposed.

And as disciples of Jesus, we need to learn when to put our armor on and when to take it off. There is a time to have your armor on. But there is also a time to not have your armor on.

I meet with a handful of men periodically around a fire, and we are kind of looking and discovering and learning what it looks to love like Jesus. And before we get started what we do, we have this intentional liturgy.

We are going to get, it is like, okay, guys, we are going to start going. We are going to start talking. We are going to start sharing. Now is the time. Let's take our armor off. This isn't the time to keep your armor on. It is time to take it off.

It is time to be vulnerable and be transparent. And whenever you come to God in prayer or His word, it is time to take that armor off. Let God have access to the deepest part of who you are.

[14 : 28] Whenever you come to church or to community group, it is time to take the armor off, not keep it on. But that is a scary thing. And it is scary because it puts you in a vulnerable position.

You have to trust other people. As an older, wiser pastor told me once, being vulnerable means to take off your armor and give someone your sword and trust they are not going to stab you through the heart.

How many of us have had that happen to us along the years? We took our armor off at the wrong person. We gave them the sword and they stabbed us through the heart with it.

That is tough. It is hard to trust people. It is hard to come back from that when that happens, isn't it? But we are called to this. Covenant relationships demand taking our armor off.

This is what Jonathan does. Verse 4, There is a lot going on here.

[15 : 35] Jonathan, what he is doing in this action right now, he is stepping into true freedom. This is not two 12-year-old boys trading t-shirts.

That is not. These are two seasoned warriors. These are grown men. David had just came back from killing Goliath. Jonathan had already done many exploits in battle against the Philistines.

One talks about him scaling a cliff and then by himself killing 20 dudes. He was an accomplished warrior. But here we see him.

He strips himself of all pretense and shows David who he truly is. And that is the first step toward experiencing freedom in Jesus. When your identity and my identity is wrapped up by being enrobed in the righteousness of Jesus, you are freed from guilt and shame.

You are free to be emotionally vulnerable. You are free to expose those dark parts of who you are. Maybe it is the sins you struggle with.

[16 : 44] Maybe it is the sins you have committed. But you get to this point when you are so assured in your identity in Jesus and his love for you and his acceptance in you, that no matter what, his righteousness, you are robed in it, you are willing to share your wounds, your scars, your pains, your hurts, your disappointments, your failures even, including your sins.

But you do that not in a therapeutic way to be, oh, man, I got that off my chest. Man, I feel so much better. No, we do that to allow God's truth and his grace to speak into those places of brokenness and pain, right?

And that is when you truly become free. We don't just want to be known. We want to be healed. And opening your soul must also come with this desire for healing.

And that's where we open ourselves up to speak the gospel to each other. We speak it to each other in those moments. We speak it kindly and carefully and lovingly and wisely.

But we don't withhold that truth because that truth package is a part of that grace. God wants to speak his truth into you as well, into those places of hurt and brokenness. He is, after all, the great physician.

[18 : 05] And he gets in there into our hearts. And like a mechanic or a skilled physician, he is working and tweaking and making what is wrong right. So, yes, when these moments happen, when we're in covenant relationship, man, there's honesty.

And we cry and we empathize and we mourn sin and all of its damages. But we also need it to lead to healing or repentance. And that is where we grow into the fullness of freedom. We're both fully known, fully loved, and fully embracing God's transforming grace.

And in that freedom, we are enlarged. We are enlarged with a greater capacity now to receive more love and more grace and more truth.

But our ability to give it to others also increases. That's the other good side of that. Like, we're so full of more of grace and more of love and more of God's truth that now God can pour out more of that from us to others.

And they can experience the same way. And we don't just give our leftovers to people. We don't give our leftovers in covenant community. We give our best, which is another aspect of what Jonathan does in giving David his clothes and armor and weapons.

[19 : 20] In covenant, you give others your best for their success. See, the way the world works that we're shown all the time is that, hey, use people to build yourself.

Use people to build your platform. But in covenant, you use your platform. You use your abilities, your strength, your possession to build others.

Saul made David his servant, right? That's what we see here. Saul made David his servant. Jonathan made David his brother. See the difference there? Saul, transactional relationship.

I'm going to be better than him. I got to be better than him. Jonathan, he made David his brother. Saul kept himself superior. Jonathan elevated David to be his equal.

Remember, David just got back from killing the giant, which means he is still a shepherd boy in shepherd's clothes with a sling and a palace of warriors. What Jonathan is doing here is elevating David, giving him a princely tunic, his weapons of war.

[20 : 26] And what it is saying is saying to David, you belong, not just as a servant, but as a prince just like me. And I would argue also that Jonathan is giving these in faith.

And he is a God believer. He knows and believes and trusts and follows. He wants God's kingdom to come. And these gifts, they're prophetic in the sense that they are speaking into David's future.

And they did. Jonathan equipped David for his new role. And in verse 5, it says, David went out and was successful wherever Saul sent him. Now, I'm not saying he was successful because Jonathan gave him the right stuff.

But those tools for the task enabled him under the power of God and the purpose of God to go and accomplish those things. And so what happened is that Saul set him, set David over the men of war.

His position and his profile became more and more elevated. He began to experience more and more success as a warrior. And the result was that it was good in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

[21 : 32] Jonathan elevated David here by giving him his best. It's not his leftovers. He gave him his best. And in doing that, Jonathan enlarged his own life by stepping into God's plan and his purpose for another person.

Particularly David in this story. And Jonathan saw David as this successful warrior chosen by God. And that also, he was anointed to become king.

That was not hidden on him. He knew that. And so he doesn't get jealous. He doesn't get jealous. He supports it. He doesn't fight with God. He doesn't fight against God. He tucks into the plans and purposes of God.

Remember, Jonathan here is next in line for the throne. When Saul dies, it was him who should become king. But he refused to be defined by that.

He refused to be defined that he was a successful warrior. He was willing to give those things up. And to give them to David. And to support what God was doing in David's life. So Henry Nguyen says that we build false identities around three lies.

[22 : 40] Three lies. We build false identities about ourselves around. It's this. I am what I do. I am what I have. And I am what others think and say about me.

And most of the lies that we believe, most of the pretense and the false ideas about ourselves that we hold on to are a response to one of those three lies that we're believing.

And what that happens when our lives are built around any of those lies, it turns life into a competition. And when life's a competition, every relationship becomes about keeping score.

Who's winning and who's losing. But in covenant, you don't keep score and you don't compete. So you have the root of every relational dysfunction is this attitude of I need to win.

I need to be better than you. Or I know what you should be. I know what you need. It's this sense of superiority or judgmentalism. That is what is going on. But Jonathan here, Jonathan lives in freedom from that insecurity.

[23 : 45] But his dad, King Saul, did not. Look at what it looks like when we believe these false identities. When we build around these lies that create false identities.

Verse 6. As they were coming home and David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel singing and dancing to meet King Saul with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.

And the women sang to one another as they celebrated. Saul has struck down his thousands and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very angry. And this saying displeased him.

He said, They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands. And what more can he have but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day on.

Literally, it just means he was jealous of David from that day on. Saul was the richest, most powerful man in Israel. Yet his world was so small. He was stuck in the me circle.

[24 : 40] And in this, it shows us what kind of person you can become. When you don't even grow from me into we, you become petty and jealous and small.

You are unable to rejoice in another's success. You easily get irritable and displeased when things don't go your way. A few weeks ago, we visited a church on vacation.

Great service. Powerful worship. I mean, they were rocking on all fronts. Like, great discipleship was happening. You could see the fruit of it. And I didn't realize it, but I was there.

I started keeping score. I started thinking, oh, wow, they're a little bit better here than maybe us. And I'll confess to you that I got jealous. I got very jealous.

And so what I started to do in response to that is I started to look for the problems or the weaknesses in the church. Because that's what you do when you keep score. All you start noticing are the negatives because you need to find something worth complaining about.

[25 : 37] Well, what's worth pointing out in someone else that's not as good as you are? And what you're really doing and what I was really doing in that moment is protecting a fragile identity that's been built on a lie.

That's what we do. So afterwards, I asked my kids, hey, how did you enjoy it? Kind of like fishing. Like, maybe they'll point out some, like, negative things about it. But the Holy Spirit got in the way of my narcissism.

One of my sons replied, dad, that preacher was so good. You need to start preaching like him. It was good for me to hear that.

He was wrong, but it was still good for me to hear that. No, but, and I had to repent. And, like, God used that moment to expose what was going on in my heart. I had to repent.

The Holy Spirit reminded me that, Jesse, their success is kingdom's success. They're on the same team. You're on the same team. God's purposes and plans were moving forward in that place, in that city.

[26 : 40] People's lives were being changed and impacted. And so my heart went from small, petty jealousy to rejoicing in another church's success. I was able to appreciate, enjoy, and see all that God was doing.

The big shift for me started at the heart of the matter. Jesus. Jesus had to be back at the center of my life and in my heart.

It had to be all about him. And, guys, covenant is impossible unless Jesus is the center. Covenant is impossible for us. If we make anything, if we gather, if we build around anything else besides Jesus, it is going to fall apart.

It can't be our style of worship, the way we do church. It can't be the hobbies that we're interested in together. It can't be the same stage of life where we have the same number of kids or whatever it could be.

It is Jesus. Well, you know what that does? Man, it makes us a diverse people. Because Jesus brings people from every nation, tribe, and tongue, and background, and age, and whatever else.

[27 : 45] And he brings us together, and it is a beautiful thing. You don't get that anywhere else. And if we build it around anything, I mean, it could even be mission.

If we just build it around the mission of Jesus, God is happy to take the mission away to get us back to it being about him. Jesus has to be the center.

John, Jonathan let go of his identity as prince and got caught up in a bigger story. He believed God. He trusted God. He knew David was God's anointed successor to the throne.

He found his identity in living for God's will and purpose. That was his reward, and it was enough. While Saul was caught up in his own story, his reputation, his kingdom.

Let me wrap it by saying it this way. Faith in Jesus keeps him at the center. And it puts you and I into God's story. And that story is always going to be bigger than you.

[28 : 46] But it includes you. And it includes many others from many places. And it enlarges us. And it enlarges us together. And in that enlarging, it also enlarges our impact, guys.

To advance the kingdom of God. To make Jesus famous in our cities, in our towns, in our neighborhoods, in our nation, and into the nations. That's what living by faith looks like.

As the band comes up, if you're not a follower yet of Jesus, your first step into covenant community is just that. Crossing that line of faith. Believing in Jesus.

Jesus offers you fullness of life in him. But first, you have to surrender to the truth that he is Lord. He gets to call the shots.

And he is Savior. He came to save you from yourself. From your sins. He died on a cross to do that. You have to acknowledge that you needed him to rescue you.

[29 : 46] That you need his righteousness. And by faith in him, you are rejecting your small story and small life for a bigger one.

A larger one. In which you also have a part to play. Now, for the rest of us, if you are here and a follower of Jesus, I want to challenge us here.

What is your next step? What is your next step that God is calling into you? What is your next step into covenant community of being enlarged by covenant? Is it going from me to we?

Is it being covenanted, committed to a local church? Involved in serving and giving and being a meaningful part? Maybe it is opening your heart up to the nations.

Maybe that is it. Maybe that is your next step of enlargement. And then I want to ask you, what is holding you back from doing that? Is it shame?

[30 : 44] Is it guilt? Is it fear? Past hurts? Man, bring those. If something like that is holding you back, man, let the Holy Spirit speak to that.

And invite him into that and give it to him. Yield it to him. Let's pray. So, Heavenly Father, we come to you because community is a gift.

Covenant community is a beautiful gift. A powerful gift that you call us to be a part of. And so, I pray for wherever we are at, you would work in our hearts.

Let's pray for us. Empower us. Encourage us. Compel us to take whatever that next step you're calling us to take. I pray this in your name. Amen. Communion is something we do as believers, as followers of Jesus.

We are encouraged and told by Jesus himself as we get together. We do this. We do this together. This is a community meal of sorts. And it reminds us that Jesus paved the way.

[31 : 56] Paved the way. He is the way to covenant community. No other way. It's not your works. It's not how good you are. He's the way. And so, these things, his body broken, his blood shed.

These are the signs and the seal of his covenant with us. And his covenant over us. And on the night that he was betrayed, he took some bread and he broke it.

And he said, this is my body broken for you. Take and eat it in remembrance of me. Let's eat this together. And in the same way, he took the cup.

And he said, this cup is the blood of my covenant shed for you. For the forgiveness of your sins. Take and drink. Let's drink this together.