

EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



Despair

Despair a common emotion

One of the most common emotions that afflicts our society today is depression. There are thousands of people who struggle with depression every day. Many suffer depression because of chemical imbalances in the body which affects one's mind and one's mood. Therefore many can be helped with the use of medication. But the vast number suffer depression because of despair. Despair is the result of not seeing or feeling any hope in our life. When we are depressed we feel so lonely in this world. The troubles and problems of life overwhelm us so that we feel we are struggling against our difficulties all alone. When we feel this way, there does not seem to be any reason to continue the struggles of life.

In the book of Psalms several Psalmists speak about the despair and depression that they have to battle in their lives. One of those psalmists was a man by the name of Asaph who wrote Psalm 77. You hear his despair in the opening words of the Psalm. He writes: "I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, that He may hear me. In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted." In these words you hear the anguish that he is going through as he expresses his pain and torment in a loud voice to the Lord.

Despair controls one's life

Asaph speaks about how his despair controls his life. Every waking moment and thought is consumed with the despair that he feels. The whole day he cries to the Lord in his anguish and through the long night he stretches out his hand toward heaven, pleading to the Lord for His help. His despair will not allow him to get any rest, for he says, "The Lord holds my eyelids from closing." Perhaps you can relate to what the Asaph experiences. Perhaps you have or are experiencing dark days when life does not seem to have any purpose or meaning, when there does not seem to be any reason to continue with life. Sometimes the sense of despair will only last for a few moments or hours, sometimes it lasts for a few days or longer. During these times of despair it can be very difficult to carry on with the normal activities of life. It can control our every waking moment.

Cause of despair

The most telling words of Asaph are found at the end of verse 2 when he writes, "my soul refuses to be comforted." It is impossible to live without comfort in our lives. We are without comfort when there is no longer any hope in our lives. Asaph despaired because he felt as if he was all alone in this world; that even the Lord God had abandoned him. He asks in verse 7,8 "Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never show His favour again? Has His unfailing love vanished forever? Has His promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has He in anger withheld His compassion?"

Asaph feels he has been abandoned by the Lord and that he is all alone in this world. There is no

greater darkness in this life than to be lonely and abandoned, without any hope in this life. Asaph does not tell us why he feels that the Lord has abandoned him. No doubt he has been going through some personal traumatic struggles that has caused him great pain and suffering. It is also possible that the enemies of Israel have conquered the nation and are making life very difficult for Israel. Then it may indeed appear as if the Lord has abandoned His people. And if the Lord has abandoned His people to the tyranny of their enemies, then what hope and what comfort does Israel have? None.

And without any hope there is only despair and depression. What happens when we fall into despair and become depressed is that we become absorbed in our troubles and problems. Our troubles become so overwhelming that they take over our whole life. All our problems and difficulties become magnified, so that we can no longer see the forest for the trees.

We begin to look inward and focus on all our problems. Even the small problems of life become so large that we cannot see our way out of them. There is no longer any hope and without hope what is the sense of continuing on with the struggles of life. This sense of hopelessness can come about when we lose a loved one that is so precious and dear to our hearts. It can come about when we have difficulties with our husband or wife and our relationship deteriorates, or our children are causing us great concern, or our health is failing. There are so many things that can cause us to lose hope and question the purpose of this life. Without a purpose there is no comfort for our soul.

Common response to despair

The most common way to deal with our despair is to ignore our pain and anguish. We try to find comfort by forgetting about our difficulties. We can compare this method with the way we treat the minor scrapes and bruises of our children. When our little child comes crying because they have received a minor scrape, the way we deal with it is to distract the child, for when he is distracted, then he will also forget that it hurts. We often try to do the same with the pain and struggles of this life. We try to ignore and forget about them, we do not want to face our problems and deal with them for that will only cause us greater agony.

There are many ways in which people try to escape the hopelessness of this life. Many try to drown out their pain with alcohol, others will try to find comfort by going on a food binge, others seek it in sex, or in sports to take their minds from the problems of life. We all find different ways to ignore our pain and struggles and to seek our comfort in this life. But a life that seeks ways to ignore or avoid dealing with our problems is a life of non-existence. We walk through life like a robot, programming ourselves to do the things that need to be done, but we do not feel anything, and so we have no real and lasting comfort in this life.

Comfort in the midst of despair

Although Asaph struggles with despair, yet he does not give in to it. He does not try to ignore the despair that he feels, but he faces the pain and hurt in his life. He does that by crying out to the Lord. Even though he feels so lonely and abandoned in the middle of his struggles, yet he faces them by placing his pain and anguish before the Lord God. He



cries aloud to God. He says, "In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord." He stretches out his hands to God without wearying. He knows that all the other methods by which man tries to find comfort end in total failure. His only hope is to cry to the Lord, "Lord help me."

Even though he feels so lonely, as if the Lord has abandoned him, yet he cries to the Lord, "Lord, do not forget me, show me your mercy, and compassion." When he brings his pain and anguish before the Lord, the Lord does not forget about him. The Lord lifted him from the despair and depression that he felt. For the Lord opened the eyes of Asaph, so that he says in verse 11, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds."

Asaph thinks back to what the Lord has done for His people in the past. He remembers how the Lord took care of His people, how He saved them from Egypt with great

miracles, and let them escape the Egyptian army by opening a path through the Red Sea. If the Lord has done great things for His people in the past, surely he will look after His people today. Faith remembers the mighty deeds of God for his people in the past, and faith knows that the same God will take care of his people today. Today we may remember the great things God has done for us through Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ died for our sins and if he has been raised up from the dead and now sits in heaven with the Father, then we may also be sure that the Lord will not forget about His people today.

What happens in our life is that we so quickly lose the proper perspective. What do we remember? We remember all the trouble and suffering that we are going through. All our thoughts dwell on our pain and our difficulties, so that it overwhelms us. But we forget about our Lord. We so quickly forget the great things our Lord has done for us in Jesus Christ.

God's people can face the pain and struggles of life, because the Lord has given us real comfort in Jesus Christ. That does not mean that God's people never have pain. In fact they feel the suffering and pain of this life very keenly. God's people do not escape the difficulties and problems of life. But we can face them, for the Lord has given us a hope. We know that no matter how great our pain is today, with the Lord Jesus we have a purpose and meaning for life. We know that in everything the Lord works for our salvation and ultimately for the coming of His glorious kingdom. Our great comfort is that the struggle of this life will give way to the eternal bliss and joy of the life everlasting with our Lord. In Jesus Christ my Saviour, my soul is comforted.

Matthew VanLuik

Global Warming

Recently Environment Canada reported that greenhouse gas emissions in British Columbia had declined significantly in 2005 even though the economy remained one of the hottest in Canada. While the economy grew at 3.7 percent, greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 2.4 per cent. Some of the reasons cited for the reduction included a decreased use of personal vehicles and boating. Reduction of power consumption by industry was also cited. While the B.C. Environment Minister considers these numbers to be good news, he also considers them to be only a drop in the bucket. Much more needs to be done because the planet continues to get warmer and if nothing is done, the life we value so much will not survive. Thus, we must choose wisely today because the choices we make today decide our future.

While I may have some questions about the science of global warming, this increased care for the environment is a good thing. According to the Bible, God is the creator of this world (Genesis 1). He is also the creator of humankind. However, He created humankind with the task to take care of this

world for Him (Genesis 1:28). They are to look after it well for the sake of his glory and the wellbeing of humankind. One day they will have to give an account to Him of how they have used and developed his good creation.

Spiritual pollution

Natural pollution, however, is not the only pollution that threatens life on this planet. There's also spiritual pollution that does the same. Students and teachers are gunned down in our schools. Corporate executives are found guilty of corporate fraud. Children and women are abused in one form or another. And the list could easily go on. In fact, spiritual pollution is often one of the causes of natural pollution. Instead of using God's good creation well, humankind has often misused it in selfish greed for personal gain. However, I have yet to see politicians give this spiritual pollution the same priority as natural pollution. Likewise, I have yet to see editors of major newspapers systematically encouraging their readers to make wise choices in this area.

Yet, they should because both natural and spiritual pollution break God's heart (Genesis 6:6). I'm sure you are familiar with the story of Noah who built an ark. Well, there was a reason why he had to do this. The Bible tells us that in Noah's day, God saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil from morning till night. And so, God was sorry that He had made the human race in the first place. Consequently, He decided to cleanse of his ruined creation with the waters of the Flood. Except for Noah and his family, for God saw what He liked in Noah (Genesis 6:5-8).

This can happen again any time soon. To be sure, God is not going to flush his creation clean with water again (Genesis 9:11). Yet, He did warn us that He would purify this world with fire. The Bible tells us that at that time God will come unannounced, like a thief. Then things are really going to heat up as the galaxies will burn up and the elements melt down (2 Pet. 3:10-12). Thus, we all have some wise decisions to make.

Wise decisions

Recently, David Suzuki was the guest editor of *The Vancouver Sun* for a day. The front page of the paper contained an interesting article about the state of our world and how climate change affects people and economies around the planet. Take, for instance, the pine beetle. Because warmer temperatures allow pine beetles to survive the winter, the mountain pine beetle has already destroyed massive stands of pine. The forecast is that 1.2 billion cubic meters of pine are at risk in the interior of B.C., worth 240 billion. Or take the Fraser River Salmon run. At present, the Fraser River salmon runs are experiencing increased mortality. The forecast is that rising water temperatures in the river will exhaust and kill salmon before they spawn. Or take Brazil. The widespread deforestation in this country for soybean cultivation is driven by demand for biofuels. The forecast is that deforestation leads to drought and drought to increased deforestation.

The fact that climate change affects people and economies around the planet should not surprise us because God has put the world together with wisdom. For instance, the Bible says that "God made the

earth by his power, and he preserves it by his wisdom (Jeremiah 10:12). Or “He [i.e. God] made the winds blow and determined how much rain should fall. He made the laws of rain and prepared a path for the lightening” (Job 28:25-26). This means that if humankind are poor stewards of creation and do not look after it wisely the way they should, things are going to go from bad to worse. Sooner or later, God’s wise creation is going to unravel because of humankind’s foolishness.

Yet, God’s wisdom is not only expressed in natural life, but also in spiritual life. Also here there is a wise order for living. If we do not follow it wisely, sooner or later our lives will unravel in foolishness. The Bible is full of instruction about this kind of wisdom. For instance, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Or, “Ill-

gotten gain has no lasting value, but right living can save your life” (Proverbs 10:2). Or, “A gossip goes around revealing secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence” (Proverbs 11:13).

Jesus also had lots to say about this moral or spiritual wisdom. For instance, ‘If you are slapped on the right cheek, turn the other, too. If you are ordered to court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles’ (Matthew 5:39-41). Or, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Or, “Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse, because it is build on

rock. But anyone who hears my teaching and ignores it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will fall with a mighty crash” (Matthew 7:21-23).

Jesus spoke a lot about this kind of spiritual wisdom because the history of the world was entering into its last phase. Soon the world is going to heat up even more than it is at this present time. As the waters of the Flood once flushed the earth clean, so one day the earth will be purified with fire. So, while it is good and responsible to take care of this world, if we do not take care of our soul, having taken care of the earth will not benefit us at all.

Jesus once illustrated this with the story about a greedy farmer. Someone once paraphrased this story like this. “The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: ‘What can I do? My barn isn’t big enough for this harvest.’ Then he said, ‘Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll gather in all my grain and goods, and I’ll say to myself, Self, you’ve done well! You’ve got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!’ Just then God showed up and said, ‘Fool.’ Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods – who gets it?’ That’s what happens when you fill your barn with Self and not with God” (Luke 12:16-21).

So, be sure to make wise decisions not only with regard to the state of the environment. Also make wise decisions with regard to the state of your soul. Change your mind about Jesus and surrender your whole life to Him. He truly is the narrow gate that leads to eternal life!



Dick Moes

Joseph's Promise to be King

Bible Story Based on Genesis 37

Joseph was different. His ten older brothers were sometimes loud and aggressive. But Joseph was not like that. He was quiet and did not mind to be on his own. Often he was not even aware of what was going on around him. He was a bit of a daydreamer.

Apart from his ten older brothers, Joseph also had a sister and a younger brother.

The older brothers did not like Joseph very much. But father Jacob had a special place in his heart for him. Of course, that made the brothers dislike Joseph more.

Together with his older brothers Joseph looked after the sheep. One day the brothers were misbehaving. Joseph was appalled. He understood that it would not be right for him to scold his brothers. Father would have to talk to them. As soon as they came home Joseph told father Jacob. But the brothers were not sorry. Instead, they started to hate Joseph even more. The tattletale!

Father Jacob was so pleased with Joseph, that he had a beautiful coat made for him. This made the older brothers jealous and angry. That spoiled brat!

But God had set the young Joseph apart. It was the Lord's doing that Joseph was a God-fearing boy. The Lord was preparing this son of Jacob for a special task.

In a dream he showed Joseph what the special task would be. One night Joseph dreamed that he and his brothers were tying up stalks of corn. Suddenly Joseph's stalk stood up straight, while the stalks of the brothers gathered in a circle around his stalk and bowed down. When Joseph told his brothers about this dream, they mocked him. "Do you really think that you will rule over us?" They hated him more still.

Another night he dreamed that the sun, moon and eleven stars were

bowing down before him. This time even father Jacob was upset. "I hope you don't think that one day your mother and myself along with all your brothers will bow for you!"

But the dreams told the truth. One day Joseph would rule like a king. As king he would save his family. Even though the brothers mocked Joseph, they knew in their hearts that the dreams were from God. It made the brothers jealous, but father Jacob kept the dreams in his heart.

A while later the older brothers took the sheep far away to find grass. After they were gone for several days, father Jacob told Joseph to find them and see how they were doing. At first Joseph was not able to find the brothers, but a man who had overheard them told Joseph where they were.

When Joseph came closer to his brothers, they recognized him from a distance. "Look, here comes that dreamer! Let's kill him and throw him in one of the pits. We'll tell father that a wild animal killed him. Then we shall see what will come of his dreams."

But Reuben, the oldest brother, stopped them. "No, don't kill him. Just throw him in the pit." It was Reuben's plan to save Joseph's life and set him free.

When Joseph arrived the brothers grabbed him, tore off his beautiful coat, and threw him in the pit. While they were eating, a group of merchants came by on their camels. They decided to sell Joseph to them for twenty shekels of silver.

Reuben was not there when the brothers sold Joseph. When he came

back he rushed to the pit to get Joseph out quickly. To his horror the pit was empty. Terrified he ran to his brothers. "The boy is not there! How can I answer to father?"

The brothers found a solution. They killed a goat and sprinkled the blood over Joseph's beautiful coat. When they came home they showed the coat to father Jacob. "Look what we found, father," they said solemnly. They stood back as Jacob examined Joseph's coat.

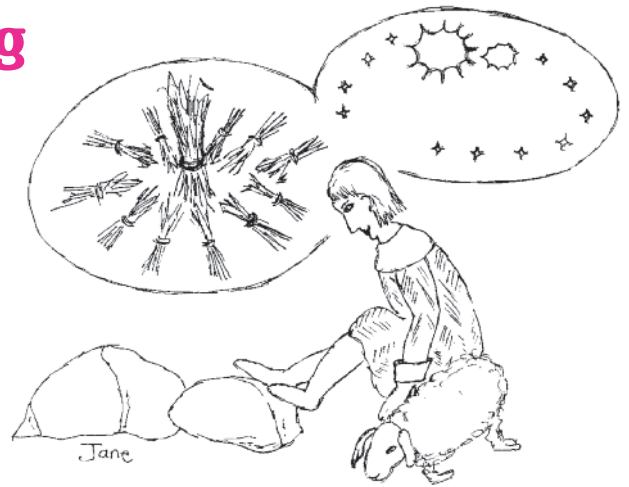
"My son!" Jacob cried with a loud voice. "He is dead! A wild animal has killed him. I shall mourn for ever!"

But Joseph was not dead. The merchants took him to Egypt where they sold him to a rich captain of the king's guard.

The Lord had started to make Joseph's dreams come true. It seemed that there was no hope for Joseph. But in Egypt Joseph continued to serve the Lord. At first Joseph was a slave. But as God's special servant he became a mighty ruler in Egypt and a saviour to his family.

Though Joseph lived many years before the Lord Jesus was born, his life foretold the life of Jesus. Joseph served God and was rejected for his good deeds. But the Lord made him a king and a saviour. So it is with Jesus. Jesus did God's will perfectly, but was killed on the cross. Yet, God accepted Jesus' death as payment for sin. The Saviour Jesus is now King of heaven and earth.

God keeps his promises. Look for the signs.



Activity Page

THE LORD CALLS

People cannot see the Lord. But we can see things the Lord has done. For example, we can see how beautiful the Lord has created the world and all that is in it. It is amazing how a bird can soar through the sky. An apple tree brings forth buckets of fruit, year after year.

We can hear the Lord, too. He has given us his Word. From of old he spoke to people. The special people who received the Word of God were called prophets. Many prophets wrote the Words of God down. Today we still have those Words. Together they form the Bible. That is why we call the Bible also God's Word, or Holy Writ.

Through the Word of God we are called to be God's children. We are able to hear God's word because the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. That is very amazing. All that the Lord does is amazing, from creating fruit-bearing trees to calling us with his Word. Through the work of the Spirit we also bear fruit: love, joy and peace.

OUR CALLING AND OUR WORK

The Lord does not only call us to be his children, he also calls us to do a job. He is like a father, who says to his child, "Robert, move the lawn," or, "Cathy, you clear the table."

But the Lord does more than an earthly father. The Lord does not only call you to do a job, he also gives you everything you need for your work. He prepares you as well. If he would want you to be carpenter, you will notice that you are attracted to things that are made of wood and you are eager to learn how to use a saw, a hammer and nails. Some children are fascinated with engines in cars. Others have a special love for animals.

Joseph was called to become ruler of Egypt. When he was still very young the Lord gave him special dreams which showed that he would be a ruler. It took many years, but in the end the special dreams came true. Joseph was a good ruler, because he knew how to obey the Lord.

YOUR CALLING

How do you know what the Lord wants you to do?

First, you have to learn how to serve the Lord. We learn that from reading in the Bible and from listening to people who understand God's Word.

We can also look at what we can do well and what we enjoy doing. We may be good at solving math problems, or at looking after others, or at sorting things out. The things that we are good at are gifts from God, which prepare us for our calling.

It is also very helpful to talk to people who know you well. Sometimes a parent, or a teacher, or a good friend can see our gifts better than we can ourselves. We are used to who we are, including our gifts. But someone else can see what is special about us.

Whatever our calling is, we must do our work to the honour of the Lord. He prepared us for our task. He deserves the praise.

WORD PICTURE

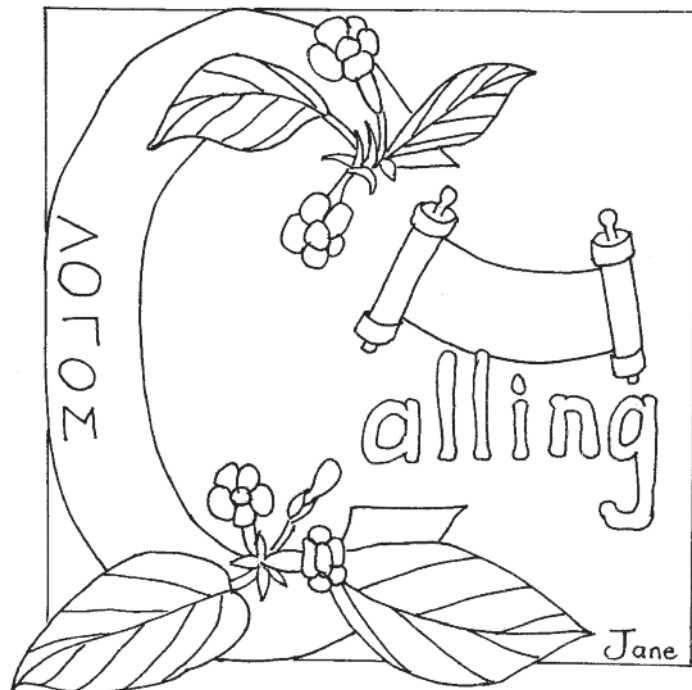
The Lord calls us by name. From the Bible we know how to walk in his ways, whatever our special calling is. Our Lord Jesus is sometimes called the Word. He showed us perfectly how the will of God is done.

THE HEAVENS SING YOUR GLORY

*The heavens sing your glory,
And do, O God, your will.
The stars with solemn voices,
Resound your praises still.
So let my whole behaviour,
All what I think and do,
O Lord, my Strength and Saviour,
Bring glory unto you.*

Psalm 19

DAWN



True Friendship

Good friendship is a precious pleasure in life. There are few human experiences that enrich a person's life as does having a good friend. It is precious, but it should not be rare. Alas, it often seems that it is an all too rare pleasure in the Christian community. That makes it all the more important that we think for a moment about true friendship.

In order for two people to become good friends, they need to have things in common. They need a common set of values, beliefs and convictions. People who do not share these will always remain distant from each other. They cannot develop meaningful relationships with each other. Friends are bound together by living for a common goal; they have dreams that complement each other, longings that dovetail together. Disagreements between them do not challenge their common goal. When two people experience that kind of friendship, then they challenge and encourage each other to do well, or they rebuke and admonish each other when one or the other does wrong. This is what the proverb means that goes, "As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17).

Jonathan, the son of King Saul, had clearly shown what his goal in life was. Before the book of Samuel even mentioned David, it tells us about the military feats of Jonathan. He wanted to deliver Israel from her enemies but he put all his trust in God's power so that he might give all the glory to God when he enjoyed success. This is especially clear from the time when he attacked a Philistine army numbering several thousand with only his armour bearer with him. Just as he launched the

attack, Jonathan said to his companion, "Climb up after me; Yahweh has given them into the hand of Israel." By the help of God, the two of them attacked and routed the Philistine army (this exciting story is told in 1 Samuel 14).

David, the son of Jesse, had exactly the same goal in life. He also was consumed by the desire to deliver Israel from her enemies, and he too put all his trust in God's power so that he might give the glory to God when he enjoyed success. This is especially clear from what he told Saul before he went out to Goliath, "Yahweh who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of his Philistine." And then he went down into the valley and killed Goliath.

David and Jonathan had exactly the same goal in life. They had the same intensity, and the same complete readiness to sacrifice themselves to accomplish that goal. It is not surprising to read, then, that after David talked with Saul and explained that he had killed Goliath for the deliverance of Israel and for the glory of Yahweh, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and loved him as himself. Thus began a magnificent but tragic friendship – magnificent because it was a friendship based on absolute devotion to God, and thus, it would induce spectacular works in each other's lives; tragic because Jonathan's father would become

David's fiercest enemy and bring a separation between the friends which would result in Jonathan's cruel death.

The greatest friendship is not the product of fondness between two people. It is a product of unreserved commitment to God that finds common expression in similar circumstances of people's life. When two such people meet each other, they cannot help but to be magnetically drawn to each other. We read that Jonathan loved David as his own soul. Because they were bound together in absolute commitment to God's glory and Israel's deliverance, whatever would advance that goal was good. Even if Jonathan, the heir to Israel's throne, should lose the throne to David, nevertheless, Jonathan loved David. If that were God's will and if that would advance Israel's power against the enemy, let it be. David's exaltation would be his exaltation, even if it meant he would not be king. For he loved David as himself.

In the church, people who find themselves in similar circumstances of life, facing the same challenges will become one in spirit. There should be no lonely people in the church. If two or more are committed to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, they will love each other as they love themselves. May our communities become places of true friendship.

Paul Aasman

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