HUDSON'S HOPE CHAPEL

Strengthened by a Friend

October 4, 2026 · Series: After God's Own Heart · Luke Hughes-Bunger

Main Passage: 1 Samuel 23:13-29 (ESV)

Big Idea: God keeps His people through friends who point us back to Him and through care we may not recognize while it is happening. Our lasting security is in Jesus, the King who holds His people.

Introduction - Someone Comes Alongside

At the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, British runner Derek Redmond tears his hamstring during the 400m semifinal. His father, Jim, comes from the stands to help him towards the finish. He cannot repair the injury or restore the chance of a medal. He can support his son through painful steps.

We recognize the value of that help. Yet receiving support ourselves can feel difficult. We may give a safe answer when someone asks how we are doing. We may worry about burdening them or believe that we should always be the one giving help.

Christians can also assume that strong faith means coping alone. Scripture gives us a different picture. God's people need care, encouragement, and reminders of what is true. Receiving help can be part of trusting Him.

David now lives as a fugitive from Saul. God has chosen him to be king, but he cannot settle safely. Jonathan comes to him in that uncertainty. He cannot end the danger, but he can strengthen David's confidence in God.

Still in the Wilderness

1 Samuel 23:13-15

David rescues Keilah from the Philistines, but the town does not become a safe home. Saul plans to pursue him there. God warns David that the townspeople would surrender him, so he leaves with about six hundred men.

The group moves wherever it can. David stays in wilderness strongholds while Saul seeks him every day. Leading these men means continuing to make decisions under pressure. God's choice of David has not removed danger from his life.

Verse 14 also tells us that God does not give David into Saul's hand. Saul's pursuit and God's preservation happen during the same days. The danger is real, and so is the Lord's care.

From David's position, another escape may mean another hurried departure. The narrator helps us see what those departures mean: Saul repeatedly fails to capture the man God is preserving. Days that require David to run are still days in which God keeps His purpose secure.

When a Struggle Continues

A long difficulty can make us question whether God has forgotten us. People ask about it at first. Later, when there is little new to report, we may become reluctant to mention it. Grief, family pressures, or uncertainty can continue long after the first conversations about them.

David's story helps us speak honestly about that experience. A struggle's length does not prove that we have moved beyond God's care. We can bring Him the same need again and ask others to keep praying with us.

David has a particular calling. God will bring His chosen king to the throne, and Saul cannot overturn that purpose. We should not turn this into a promise that every Christian will avoid danger or receive the outcome they want.

David's road also points towards Jesus, the greater Son of David, who experiences rejection before His vindication. Our hope rests in this faithful King. God sustains His people along their difficult roads, and He often uses other people to do it.

A Friend Who Points to God

1 Samuel 23:16-18; 2 Samuel 9:1, 7, 11

Jonathan takes the initiative and goes to David at Horesh. He enters the place where his friend is under threat. Encouragement begins with his willingness to be present.

This friendship carries a personal cost. Jonathan is Saul's son and the presumed heir to his throne. Saul has made clear that David threatens Jonathan's position too. Yet Jonathan welcomes God's purpose for David and affirms that David will be king.

Saul fears being replaced. Jonathan can love David despite the effect on his own future. God's purpose matters more to him than securing the highest place for himself.

That challenges the way we help others. Can we support someone who receives more recognition than we do? Can we rejoice when a person becomes stronger and needs us less? A faithful friend seeks the other person's good without needing to remain central.

The passage says Jonathan strengthens David's hand in God. He reminds David that Saul does not control the future God has promised. The threat remains, but David has a stronger reason to take courage than the strength of his enemy.

Jonathan commits himself to David, though he cannot see everything ahead. Returning to his father's household does not mean joining Saul's hostility towards David. Jonathan's loyalty remains firm. He will die fighting the Philistines alongside Saul before David takes the throne, but his incomplete picture of the future does not make his friendship less real.

David later honours their covenant through kindness to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, whom we met in our summer series. In 2 Samuel 9, David seeks someone from Saul's household to whom he can show kindness for Jonathan's sake. He welcomes Mephibosheth to eat at his table like one of the king's sons.

David is keeping his promise to show steadfast love to Jonathan's household. Mephibosheth has not earned his welcome. The friendship that strengthens David in the wilderness later brings Jonathan's son to the king's table. God's purpose does not depend on either friend knowing every turn in the story.

Encouragement We Can Trust

We often want to resolve another person's pain quickly. We may assure them that they will get the job, that a relationship will recover, or that everything will soon make sense. Those outcomes may be our sincere hopes, but they are not promises we can make on God's behalf.

Christian encouragement has firmer ground. Jesus has dealt with the condemnation of those who trust Him. They can bring their needs to the Father. Their future is held by a living Saviour, even when the next step remains unclear.

We can pray specifically for work, reconciliation, relief, and strength. If the answer takes longer than we hoped, we can keep praying together. Trusting God's wisdom helps us stay alongside someone without claiming to understand everything.

Listening matters too. We can use a Bible verse to avoid an uncomfortable conversation, or we can open Scripture while genuinely sharing a person's trouble. The difference includes our willingness to hear them and remain present.

This care can begin at a shared table, at work, or in a conversation on the street. Learn a name. Ask a question that allows an honest answer. Listen carefully, pray, and consider how you can continue to offer support.

Receiving help also belongs to Christian life. David has faced Goliath, but he still needs Jonathan. Earlier courage does not make present weakness shameful. We can tell someone trustworthy that we are finding life harder than we have admitted and ask them to pray with us.

The two friends renew their solemn commitment before the Lord. Jonathan returns home, and David remains at Horesh. The visit has not ended the wilderness. It has strengthened David in God for the life he still has to live.

The Interruption That Becomes Rescue

1 Samuel 23:19-29

People from Ziph offer to surrender David to Saul. Saul asks them to establish where David is hiding, and the pursuit begins again. David moves into the wilderness of Maon, but Saul follows.

The danger becomes immediate. David and his men hurry along one side of a mountain while Saul's forces close in. Then a messenger brings news of a Philistine raid. Saul turns away from David to deal with it.

The place becomes known as the Rock of Escape. David then moves to the strongholds of Engedi. He has received the rescue needed for that day, but he still needs somewhere to hide.

The journey towards the throne continues.

There is no spectacular display in this rescue. News, timing, and military demands turn the pursuit away. Yet verse 14 has already given us the governing explanation: God does not surrender David to Saul.

Providence means God's rule over real events, including His work through ordinary people and circumstances. An ordinary means of help can still be a genuine expression of His care.

Gratitude without Pretending to Know Everything

We can thank God when someone notices our need, offers practical support, or helps us seek assistance we have delayed. Gratitude to the person and gratitude to God belong together.

We do not have to explain every painful event before acknowledging the help we can recognize. We can thank God for care received while remaining honest about questions we cannot answer. Humility leaves room for both gratitude and grief.

Circumstances also need to be understood in the light of God's word. An opportunity does not automatically give us permission to do whatever seems useful. God's commands still guide our response.

David's escape serves God's particular purpose for His chosen king. It is not a guarantee that every crisis will end with a last-minute rescue. Jonathan's later death reminds us of that limit. Our lasting confidence comes through Jesus, whose coming God is preparing through David's story.

Held by the Greater King

John 10:27-28; John 15:13

David reaches the throne, but he cannot give God's people permanent security. He will need forgiveness himself. Jesus, the promised Son of David, is faithful throughout His life and reigns beyond death.

Jesus also faces rejection and danger. During His ministry, His enemies cannot take Him before His appointed hour. When that hour comes, He willingly goes to the cross. His suffering belongs to God's saving purpose.

At the cross, Jesus bears the judgment our sins deserve. Guilty people can receive forgiveness and peace with God because He gives Himself for them. His resurrection means that death cannot finally separate His people from Him.

When we cannot understand God's care in our circumstances, the cross gives us a firm place to look. God has made His love known in the gift of His Son. Uncertainty about tomorrow cannot erase what He has already done.

In John 10, Jesus promises eternal life to His sheep and declares that no one will take them from His hand. David's preservation leads to a throne. Christ's keeping brings His people into eternal life. His promise reaches beyond the dangers we face now.

Jesus also speaks of the greatest love: laying down one's life for one's friends. He gives that love its fullest expression. Jonathan's costly friendship helps us appreciate the greater Friend who gives Himself to bring sinners near to God.

We can come to Jesus honestly, confessing our sin and asking for mercy. We do not save ourselves by becoming strong enough. We trust the Saviour who died and rose for us.

For believers, His care continues through His word, His Spirit, His intercession, and His people. We can offer encouragement because we have first received His love. Christian friendship grows from grace already given.

A Step for This Week

Let someone trustworthy know where you need prayer or support. Then consider one person you can encourage. Make contact, listen, pray, and offer something you can follow through on.

We cannot repair everything for each other. We can walk beside one another and point towards the Lord who holds us. Even when tomorrow brings the same difficulty, today's conversation, prayer, visit, or meal can be a meaningful gift of God's care.

Discussion Guide Questions

1. What does Jim Redmond's help for his son show about the value of presence when we cannot change an outcome?
2. Read 1 Samuel 23:13-15. What two realities does verse 14 hold together?
3. Why might a continuing struggle make it difficult to ask for prayer again? How can a church respond well?
4. Read verses 16-18. What does Jonathan's visit show about taking initiative in friendship?
5. What does Jonathan stand to lose by supporting David? How does David later honour their covenant through Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:1, 7, 11)?
6. What does strengthening someone's hand in God look like? How does it differ from promising a particular outcome?
7. How can listening and specific prayer help someone whose situation has not changed?
8. Read verses 26-29. How does God preserve David, and what difficulty remains after the escape?
9. How can we thank God for ordinary help without claiming to explain every circumstance?
10. Read John 10:27-28 and John 15:13. What does Jesus promise His people, and how does His death and resurrection secure their hope?
11. What makes receiving help difficult for us? What does David's need for Jonathan teach us?
12. What is one specific way you can receive care or strengthen another person in God this week?