



David: “A Man After God’s Own Heart”

1 Samuel 16:1-13

What Might Have Been?

Recently I spent a few hours mixing sand and cement to repair the front steps of my home. They were not in great disrepair, but the cement between the stonework had worn away over the years, allowing water to seep into the gaps between the stones. I first noticed this about five weeks earlier when a piece of the stonework crumbled because water had eroded the stone. This was a surprising reminder that water can erode and damage stone if given enough time.

In the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, we can learn a great deal about the call of God on the lives of Hannah, Samuel, Eli, Saul, and David. The early chapters of 1 Samuel are exciting, engaging, challenging, and informative, with a remarkable ability to speak to those of us whose lives are dominated by smart phones, iPads and social media.

When Saul was 30 years old, he was a tall, impressive individual who, as king, provided purpose, focus, and direction for the nation of Israel. Despite his initial incredulity at being chosen as king, Saul discovered a radical transformation when God changed his heart, and a bright future then lay ahead of him. Between chapters 10 and 15, however, 42 years pass, and with great sadness the reader recognizes a long, slow drift in the life of Saul. Saul had begun his reign with so much promise, yet erosion—slow, silent, and subtle—crept into his life. Cracks began to appear. His spiritual life began to crumble.

“...the LORD looks at the heart” (vs. 7)

As chapter 16 opens, God instructs Samuel to journey to Bethlehem and select one of the sons of Jesse to be the next king. Samuel,

although grieving over Saul, reluctantly agrees. When he arrives and sees Eliab, Jesse’s oldest son, he is initially convinced that he has found the next king: “*Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.*” But God informs him otherwise. As each of Jesse’s sons appear before Samuel, God reminds him, “*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*”

So what is God looking for? He is looking for an individual whose heart is completely His. A person who has no locked doors or hidden compartments. Someone who believes that integrity, transparency, loyalty, and faithfulness are essential ingredients in a relationship with God. He is not concerned with whether the individual is tall or short, blond or brunette. He is not looking for charisma. God is looking for *character*.

After each of Jesse’s sons have appeared before Samuel and it was clear that none of them is God’s choice, Samuel asks if there is another son. Finally, at the end of this process, we learn of David—the youngest, unimportant, and seemingly insignificant. He was so instantly forgettable as an individual that his own father does not even think to mention him to Samuel.

We subsequently learn that God has already been preparing David for such a time as this. Throughout Scripture it is crystal clear that godly leadership comes from relationship, and God for some time has been developing His relationship with David.

David has spent years in the open countryside looking after his father’s livestock. God has trained David in solitude, teaching him life’s major lessons in obscurity before entrusting him with great responsibilities. The days David seemingly spent alone, he actually spent in the presence of God. There he learned contentment in the call of God and obedience to all that God was preparing him for.

He also learned the lesson of obscurity. Those who turn out to be servant leaders begin as unknowns, unseen, unappreciated, and unapplauded. Strange as it may seem, those who first accept the silence of obscurity are best

qualified to handle the applause of popularity. David learned that the menial, insignificant, routine, repetitive, unexciting tasks of daily life have meaning and value. It was in the everyday activities of life, where God was seeking faithfulness, that David learned the value of monotony.

During this time there was no one else around, no one to see what David was doing, and no one seemed interested. Yet David revealed responsibility and diligence in the little things, in the lonely places, and there he proved himself capable and trustworthy. During this period, David also learned that when God develops our inner qualities, He is never in a hurry. He simply keeps working away, refining and changing and encouraging us to be like David, “*a man after God’s own heart.*”

David’s family and friends could not see what God was doing. Even Samuel the prophet thought David’s brother was the one God had chosen. David’s father did not think to mention him until the last minute. With great irony, the name “David” does not appear until the last verse. The writer is telling us that those closest to the boy considered him a “nobody,” yet God had other plans. “*Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*”

In the year 1020 BC, the people of Israel had their eyes firmly fixed on Saul. He was the King, the focal point of the Jewish nation. No one noticed a boy looking after his father’s sheep. No one except God.

The lesson for us is this: When you are tempted to think of yourself as a “nobody,” please remember that God does not see you that way. Just as He looked at David, He looks at you and sees infinite value and worth. The Bible is clear that God has a purpose and plan for your life, and is looking for individuals who are obedient to His call and faithful in their relationship with Him. Individuals of character, faith, and integrity. Individuals who will resist the subtle, slow, silent effects of spiritual erosion. Individuals who long to have a heart *after God’s own heart*.