

MAN OF
VALOR,
MAN OF
GRACE

CHARLES R. SWINDOLL



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Man of Valor, Man of Grace

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INTRODUCTION

A Man Worth Measuring

About a century ago, as poet and historian Carl Sandburg was finishing his multivolume biography of Abraham Lincoln, he was searching for an appropriate title of the seventy-fifth chapter, which covered events immediately following Lincoln's assassination. Sandburg settled on a quaint old woodsman's proverb: "A tree is best measured when it's down." In Sandburg's opinion, not until a life is "down" can we adequately measure its significance, its breadth of impact, its depth of character.

That's equally true of a once great king named David. The only person in all of Scripture to be called "a man after God's own heart," David is mentioned in the New Testament more often than any other Old Testament character. Poet, musician, courageous warrior, and national statesman, David distinguished himself as one of God's greatest men. In battle, he modeled invincible confidence. In decisions, he judged with wisdom and equity. In loneliness, he wrote with transparent vulnerability and quiet trust. In friendship, he was loyal to the end. Whether as a humble shepherd boy or an obscure musician before King Saul, from his youth onward he showed himself faithful and trustworthy. Even after his promotion to the highest position in the land, David still modeled integrity and humility. What a man of God!

But, as we shall see, David—like us—was anything but perfect. Having earned the public's trust and respect, he forfeited it all in a brief season of sensual pleasure. Then, as the consequences kicked in, we discover other sides of his makeup—lustfulness as a man, weakness as a father, and partiality as a leader. The aftermath left him beaten down. But through it all, he endured.

It's all there, written for all of us to learn from, preserved for us to remember. This great man, though far from perfect, nevertheless lived a life with strengths worth emulating.

While taking this in-depth journey through the life of David, my hope is that you'll view David as a real person, and then see comparisons and opportunities in your own life so that you begin to emulate the qualities that made him a man after God's own heart.

For a world in desperate need of models worth following, here's someone who well deserves our time and attention: David, a man of valor and grace, of passion and destiny.

CHAPTER 1

GOD'S HEART, GOD'S MAN, GOD'S WAYS

On the surface, there seemed to be nothing about David that would have impressed God, causing Him to say, “That’s My man!” David looked much like any other Jewish boy his age. The prophet Samuel observed that he was “reddish, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance” (1 Samuel 16:12 NASB)—it’s the only physical description of young David we have. Attractive eyes, a healthy complexion, and perhaps he had red hair, or more likely he was reddened or bronzed from hours spent in the sun and wind. The outward appearance didn’t seem to set him apart in any special way.

He was just a shepherd—a young one at that—living in the village of Bethlehem. Yet God said, in effect, “You have what I’m looking for, young man. You are the future king of Israel.”

If we’d been living in the farmhouse next door to David’s family in the Judean hills, we might not even have known the name of this youngest son of Jesse. After all, his own father didn’t think of including him at an important interview for his offspring, until the interviewer Samuel (on God’s royal search errand) asked, “Are these all your sons?”

Jesse tapped his forehead and said, “Oh, almost forgot—there’s my youngest. He’s out in the field tending sheep.”

“Go and fetch him,” Samuel said, as we see in 1 Samuel 16.

Suddenly, this young nobody—a boy even his own father had forgotten about—became somebody.

But before we get to David as king of Israel, let's mine some background and history to better appreciate the world in which he lived. One historian described those ancient times perfectly in one sentence: "The people were on a long drift from God."¹ That was the world into which David was born.

The high priest Eli and his wicked sons were gone, and God's chosen successor—Samuel, last of the famous "judges"—was an old man. People had heard stories about the days when Israel was a great nation, and about Samuel at the zenith of his career, subduing Philistines and judging the land wisely and well. But most of them experienced none of that personally.

They knew only that Samuel was an aged man and that he'd appointed his sons to judge Israel. And what a mistake that was! Look at what the Bible says: "His sons, however, did not walk in his ways but turned aside after dishonest gain, and they took bribes and perverted justice" (1 Samuel 8:3 NASB).

People were disillusioned over this, and they wanted something done about it. What they really wanted was a king.

Samuel's advanced age and his wayward sons were not the only reasons behind this desire. The elders of Israel held a summit meeting with Samuel at Ramah—a place in the hill country about five miles north of Jerusalem—and they voiced another reason: "Give us a king to judge us *like all the other nations have*" (8:5 NLT).

People have always wanted to be like everybody else, to do the popular thing—and these folks were no exception. "We're tired of worshipping an invisible God. Everybody says, 'Where's your king?' And we have no answer except 'Oh, He's in the heavens.' We want a real leader here on earth, like other nations have!"

What they did *not* say to Samuel was this: "We want to wait on God to provide the leadership we need."

Their attitude broke Samuel's heart, and he went to God in prayer about it. And God answered: "They are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer. . . . Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them" (8:7–9 NLT).

God will let them have exactly what they want. Does He ever!

SAUL, THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

The man chosen—Saul—is tall, dark, and handsome. That's how people choose kings. They go for someone who looks good. "He'll be a good image for Israel. Saul's our guy." So Saul comes on the scene and sweeps them off their feet. He is forty years old when he starts to rule. He has a measure of humility to begin with, and seems able to rally people around a cause. He has enough moxie to get an army together, and before long the Israelites agree, "He's the man for the job."

But in time he becomes thin-skinned, hot-tempered, and given to seasons of depression, even thoughts of murder. So much for the people's choice!

David is born about ten years after Saul becomes king. He's born into volatile times. The people of Israel are on that long drift from God, and to make matters worse, they're now becoming disillusioned with the leader they've chosen.

What should you do when your king doesn't walk with God—when you've gotten your own way, but everything seems wrong? That's a disillusioning, insecure feeling.

DAVID, THE LORD'S CHOICE

Graciously, God does not abandon His people. Through Samuel, He intervenes.

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. *The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart*, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."
(1 Samuel 13:13–14 ESV)

The Lord . . . sought out a man . . . Look at that little three-letter word *man*. Only a man—but what a man!

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Would it surprise you to learn that more is written about David in the Bible than any other Old Testament character? Abraham has some fourteen chapters dedicated to his life, and so does Joseph. Jacob has eleven. Elijah has ten. The life story of Moses is contained in about forty chapters (plus mention of his name in several other chapters tightly focused on God giving His laws and instructions for worship). But if my count is correct, sixty-six chapters in the Old Testament are dedicated to David, and the New Testament goes on to make fifty-nine references to him.

When you realize how much is said about David in Scripture, coupled with the fact that he's specifically called a man after God's own heart, you can get the feeling that he's some sort of super-phenomenal person. Some superhero. But don't get the wrong idea about why God chose David—or why He chooses anyone, for that matter.

GOD'S WAY OF CHOOSING

To set the record straight, why *does* God choose anyone? Or perhaps the question should be: What kind of people does God choose and use?

To determine that, let's look first at a New Testament passage. In the opening chapters of the apostle Paul's first letter to the believers at Corinth, the context has to do with the way different people viewed the apostle Paul. Jewish readers of Paul's letter would be looking for a miracle, for a sign that proved Paul had authority from God. Meanwhile his non-Jewish Greek readers would be looking only at surface impressions; a person's inner life meant little to the Greeks of that day, who were more influenced by brains, brawn, and beauty.

In light of all this, here's the thrust of Paul's opening message to the Corinthians: "I'm not coming to you with brilliance or human wisdom, and certainly not with any kind of impressionable physique. Instead, I come only in the power of God. And there's a good reason for that."

Note carefully how Paul expressed the reason:

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential;

not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. (1 Corinthians 1:26–29)

I especially like this modern translation of the last part of that passage:

God . . . has chosen the world's insignificant and despised people and nobodies in order to bring to nothing those who amount to something, so that nobody may boast in the presence of God. (1:28–29 MLB)

Paul was telling them, “Look around, Corinthians. You won't find many impressive people in your church.” What was the divine reason for that? *So that no one can boast before God.*

That's a principle we tend to forget because many of us are still a lot like the Greeks. When we look for role models, heroes, we're often swayed or impressed by things that are cause for boasting. We want the beautiful people, the brilliant people, the successful people. But God says, “That's not the way I make my choices. I choose nobodies, and I turn them into somebodies.” That, in a nutshell, is the story of the life of David.

DAVID'S SERVANT-LEADER QUALITIES

When God scans the earth for potential leaders, He's not searching for angels in the flesh. He's certainly not looking for perfect people (since there are none). He's searching for men and women like you and me, mere people made up of flesh. But He's looking for certain qualities in those people—the same qualities He found in David.

The first quality God saw in David was *spirituality*. He sought out a man *after His own heart*. What does that mean? It means that you're a person whose life is in harmony with the Lord. What's important to Him is important to you. What burdens Him burdens you. When He says, “Go to the right,” you go right. When He says, “Stop that in your life,” you

stop. When He says, “This is wrong and I want you to change,” you come to terms with it. That’s bottom-line biblical Christianity. You have a heart that’s sensitive to the things of God.

This is further confirmed in this often-quoted verse: “For the eyes of the LORD roam throughout the earth, so that He may strongly support those whose heart is *completely* His” (2 Chronicles 16:9 NASB). God looks for men and women whose hearts are totally and absolutely *His*. No locked closets, nothing swept under the rug. When you do wrong, you admit it and immediately come to terms with it. You grieve over sin. You’re concerned about those things that displease Him. You long to please God in your actions. You care about the motivations behind your actions. That’s true spirituality—and it’s David’s foremost quality.

Another quality God saw in David was *humility*.

God had already made His choice for Israel’s next king when He sent Samuel to find and anoint him. God told his prophet, “I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, because *I have chosen a king for Myself* among his sons” (1 Samuel 16:1 NASB). The Lord had been on a secret surveillance mission in that home in Bethlehem—where He spotted Jesse’s youngest son and said in effect, “That’s My man!” Jesse didn’t know God was there. None of his sons knew. Nobody knew. But God was there and made His choice.

Why David? Because the Lord saw the humility of a servant’s heart in this boy David who was faithfully keeping his father’s sheep. To further confirm this, look at these statements in the Psalms: The Lord “chose His *servant* David and took him from the sheepfolds” (78:70 NASB); the Lord said, “I have found My *servant* David; with My holy oil I have anointed him” (89:20 NASB). God is saying, “I don’t care about slick public images. Show Me a person with the character and heart of a servant. I don’t require charisma, or an impressive track record. I care about character! Is this person deeply authentic in their spiritual walk—or only faking it? And are they a genuine servant?”

When you have a servant’s heart, you’re humble. You don’t rebel. You respect authority. You serve faithfully and quietly. A servant doesn’t care who gets the glory but wants to make sure the job get done. Servants try to make the person they serve more successful.

That’s David. God looked at him out in those fields in the hills

surrounding Bethlehem, keeping his father's sheep, faithfully doing his father's bidding—and God passed His approval. While David's brothers were off in the army making rank and trying to fight impressive battles, David—with his servant's heart—was all alone tending sheep.

A third quality David had was *integrity*. Look in Psalm 78 at how God's chosen man operated in leadership responsibilities:

He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheep pens;
from tending the sheep he brought him
to be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
of Israel his inheritance.
And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;
with skillful hands he led them. (78:71–72 NASB)

Circle that word *integrity*. The Hebrew word translated there as “integrity” is *tamam*; listen to some of its synonyms: “complete, whole, innocent, having simplicity of life, wholesome, sound, unimpaired.” It's what you are when nobody's looking. It means being bone-deep honest.

We live in a world that keeps insisting, in many ways, “If you just make a good impression, that's all that matters.” If that's your philosophy, you'll never be a man or woman of God. You cannot fake it with the Almighty. He's not impressed with externals. He always focuses on inward qualities that take time and discipline to cultivate.

A SERVANT'S TRAINING

Even before the choice of David as king gets revealed, God has been training him for his leadership role. The training ground has been lonely, obscure, monotonous, and real. And right there we see four enlightening disciplines.

First, God has trained David in *solitude* on those lonely hillsides. David needed to learn life's major lessons all alone before he could be trusted with responsibilities and rewards before the public. Solitude has nurturing qualities all its own. If you can't stand being alone, you have unresolved conflicts

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in your inner life. Solitude has a way of helping us address those. When was the last time you got alone with nature and soaked in it—so alone that the sound of silence seemed deafening? That’s where David lived, and where he first learned to “king it.” He learned to endure burning rays of summer’s sun, and he felt blustery winter winds of rain and cold. For many nights he sat alone under the stars, an aloneness that God used to train young David for the throne.

Second, David grew up in *obscurity*. That’s another way God trains His best personnel. Men and women of God, servant-leaders in the making, are first unknown and unseen, unappreciated, and unapplauded. In the relentless demands of obscurity, character is built. Strange as it may seem, those who first accept the silence of obscurity are best qualified to handle the applause of popularity.

Which leads us to another discipline of the training ground—*monotony*. We learn to be faithful in the menial, insignificant, routine, regular, unexciting, uneventful, daily tasks of life. Life without a break, without wine and roses. Just dull, plain l-i-f-e.

And that brings us to the fourth discipline: *reality*. You might have thought that despite the solitude, obscurity, and monotony, David was sitting out on those hilltops in a mystic haze, composing great music, or just relaxing in the pastures alongside the sheep. That’s not true.

Look ahead with me to 1 Samuel 17. Here’s David, standing by King Saul—as a lumbering giant approaches. Remember Saul, the tall-dark-and-handsome guy? Here he is inside his tent, scared to death, knees knocking, hiding from Goliath. And there’s little David nearby, saying, “Hey, let’s go whip that giant!”

Saul says, “Who are you?”

“I’m David.”

“Where have you been?”

“I’ve been with my father’s sheep.”

“You can’t fight this Philistine,” Saul says. “You’re just a kid.”

Without hesitation, David responds:

“Your servant was tending his father’s sheep [that’s *solitude*, *obscurity*, *monotony*]. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock

[that's *reality!*], I went out after it and attacked it, and rescued the sheep from his mouth; and when it rose up against me, I grabbed it by its mane and struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God." (1 Samuel 17:34–36 NASB)

Where did David get his courage? He learned it all alone before God. David is a man of reality, a man who remains responsible when nobody's looking. So David is thinking, *As for this guy Goliath—I'm not worried about him.* And we know what happened next!

Goliath is no big deal because David has been facing reality long before he squares off against that giant Philistine.

Somehow we have the idea that "getting alone with God" is idealistic, that it's not the real world. But getting alone with God doesn't mean you sit in a closet and think about infinity. No, it means you get alone and discover how to be more responsible and diligent in every area of your life—whether that means fighting lions or bears, or simply following orders.

LASTING LESSONS

David lived so many centuries ago, but the things we can learn from him are as current as this morning's sunrise. Two in particular stand out to me at this point in our discussion.

1. *It's in the little things and the lonely places that we prove ourselves capable of the big things.* If you want to be a person with a large vision, you must cultivate the habit of doing little things well. That's when God puts iron in your bones! The way you fill out those detailed reports, the way you take care of those daily assignments, the way you complete the simple tasks of home or work or school—all this is a reflection of whether you personally are learning to "king it."

The test of our calling is how carefully we cover the bases when nobody's looking.

2. *When God develops our inner qualities, He's never in a hurry.* A notable preacher once put it this way: "The conversion of a soul is the miracle of a

moment; the manufacture of a saint is the task of a lifetime.”² When God develops character, He works on it throughout a lifetime. He’s never in a hurry.

It’s in the schoolroom of solitude and obscurity that we learn to become men and women of God. From the schoolmasters of monotony and reality, we learn to “king it.” That’s how we become—like David—men and women after God’s own heart.

GOING AFTER GOD’S OWN HEART: From David’s Psalm 26, make his prayer your own:

Test me, LORD, and try me,
examine my heart and my mind;
for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love
and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness. (26:2–3)

CHAPTER 2

A NOBODY, NOTICED BY NO ONE

After Saul became king of Israel, his actions and decisions soon revealed that he was a selfish, angry, hateful, mean-spirited man—a real piece of work. Eventually something snapped in his mind, and during the later years of his rule, he lost touch with reality, thus proving himself unqualified for the job.

Not long after Saul began his reign, Samuel caught him in three serious infractions (they're laid out for us in 1 Samuel 13–15). These missteps involved a foolish decision, a rash vow against his own son, and finally open disobedience of God.

When Samuel points his finger at the king, Saul tries at first to rationalize what he's done, then finally admits his guilt. Even then, he qualifies his confession:

Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have violated the command of the LORD and your words, *because I feared the people and listened to their voice*. Now then, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the LORD." (1 Samuel 15:24–25 NASB)

Saul is obviously concerned most about his image. He doesn't want people to know he's sinned. He's telling Samuel, "Let's just go back and worship somewhere together, like we've always done."

Samuel doesn't buy it for a minute. His reply is a straight-from-the-shoulder jab:

Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!"

As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind." (15:26–29)

Saul, still the rationalizer, again pleads:

Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." (15:30)

Okay, so Samuel has caught him in the act—but Saul has confessed, so why not just move on as if nothing happened?

Samuel, being a man of integrity, sees through the whole thing. Clearly, Saul has failed God. But Samuel agrees not to humiliate the king before the people: "Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD" (15:31). They participate together that day in a sacrificial ritual of worship—but it's the very last time. "Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him" (15:35).

The tragic story of Saul is that he never fully repented of his sin. Saul's greatest concern was how he looked before the people. Even after Samuel gave him a break, Saul took advantage of it and continued in that same vein until the day he took his own life.

But that's jumping ahead a bit. After Saul's failures become so clear, the prophet Samuel panics. He has reached the end of his rope. Saul was made king, but he's no longer qualified. What's to be done? Israel is surrounded by enemies, and they need someone to rule and to guard. But who?

Samuel doesn't know. The people don't know either. But God does.

MAN PANICS, GOD PROVIDES

What Samuel doesn't realize—what we ourselves often don't realize—is that behind the scenes, before He ever flung the stars into space, God has had today in mind, and this very week in mind. In fact, He has *you* in mind. And He knows exactly what He's going to do. God is never at a loss about what to do in our daily situations. He knows perfectly well what's best for us. Our problem is, *we* don't know. And we say to Him, "Lord, if You just reveal Your plan to me, explain it all—then I'll count on You." But that's not faith. Faith is counting on Him when we *don't* know what tomorrow holds.

When a man or a woman of God fails, nothing of God fails. When a man or woman of God changes, nothing of God changes. When someone dies, nothing of God dies. When our lives are altered by the unexpected, nothing of God is altered or unexpected. As He said about His praying people through the prophet Isaiah, "Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will listen" (Isaiah 65:24 NASB). Before you even utter a word in prayer, God promises: "I'm already answering, bringing to pass the very thing I've planned from the beginning."

That's the beautiful part of this story. Look at how the Lord reveals Himself to Samuel (in a verse we noticed earlier):

"How long are you going to mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, because I have chosen a king for Myself among his sons." (1 Samuel 16:1 NASB)

This is the first Samuel has heard that God was already zeroed in on a particular person to replace Saul as king. God declares that it's someone He selected "for Myself." God is saying, "The people didn't choose this king; he's *My* man."

Then Samuel panics: "But Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me'" (16:2). Samuel is just plain scared. Where are his eyes? Well, they certainly aren't on the Lord. They're riveted on Saul. From a human viewpoint, of course, Samuel is right to be anxious. King Saul has become murderous. But God is completely aware of that. After all, God

will be using Saul to shape David's life in the in-between years, between the sheep and the throne. God knows Saul very well.

By the way, do you have a Saul in your life? Is there somebody who irritates and bothers you? God knows all about it. That person is all part of His plan for you, strange as that may seem.

The Lord doesn't answer Samuel's remark about Saul. Instead, He instructs him about how to proceed in Bethlehem:

The LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and *I will show you what to do*. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate." (16:2–3)

God is saying, "Follow My lead! I'll be showing you exactly what to do—so go do it."

We often think we have to outwit God (in a sense) in order to get His will accomplished in our lives. But to be obedient, we don't have to be smart or clever or perfectly informed; all we have to do is obey. God knows the full situation for each of us—just as He knew for Samuel, as He was telling him, "Take a heifer, go to Jesse, offer the sacrifice, then look around. I'll show you the man I've chosen for the job." It's that simple.

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, there's David—who knows nothing about what Samuel and God are talking about somewhere on the other side of the country. David is just keeping the sheep. That's his job.

With poetic eloquence, British pastor and evangelist F. B. Meyer expressed what David's typical day would be like:

With the first glimmer of light the boy was on his way to lead his flock to pasture-lands heavy with dew. As the morning hours sped onwards, many duties would engross his watchful soul—strengthening the weak, healing that which was sick, binding up that which was broken, and seeking that which was lost; or the music of his song may have filled the listening air.³

That's David. For him, this is just like any other morning. Little does he know his life will never be the same again—that from this day onward, he's destined for the throne of Israel.

God has some extremely exciting things in mind for His children. They may come our way tomorrow, or next month, or next year, or five years down the road; we don't know when they'll show up. But the beautiful thing about this adventure called *faith* is that we can count on Him never to lead us astray. He knows exactly where He's taking us. Our job is to obey, living in close fellowship with God as we walk our earthly path. In the process of that simple arrangement, God engages us in His eternal plan.

“So Samuel did what the LORD told him” (1 Samuel 16:4 NASB). That's it, Samuel! What a model—that's exactly what *we* have to do.

MAN CHOOSES, GOD CORRECTS

Full of expectation, Samuel goes to Bethlehem, Jesse's hometown.

The elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?” (1 Samuel 16:4)

As evident from the elders' immediate reaction here, there's real fear stretched across the land at this time. So when a prophet comes to town: What is he doing *here*? What's wrong? What's happening?

Samuel calms down the town elders:

Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. (16:5)

This ancient act of consecration included perhaps the sacrifice of a lamb or other animal, and some kind of liturgical washing for the human participants, and maybe a period of prayer. There was apparently preparation before the anointing, and Jesse and his sons go through this ritual to prepare themselves for what God will say.

So here they are, gathering together, with no clue of what's going to happen. Even Samuel doesn't know which of Jesse's sons God will choose. Seven of them—the seven oldest—are coming closer, looking at Samuel. And he's looking at them.

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When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.” (16:6)

Hey, this must be the one, Samuel is thinking. Eliab looks like the type you’d normally choose for a king. No doubt he’s tall and impressive. Certainly he’s a man of battle, because in 1 Samuel 17 we see him with Saul and the troops arrayed against Goliath and the Philistines.

What Samuel doesn’t see yet is the character of Eliab. He doesn’t recognize what we ourselves will discover in chapter 17—that Eliab can be critical and negative and shows contempt toward his youngest brother.

Samuel here is enamored by the externals, as most of us often are. Exhibit A is not God’s man—and neither is exhibit B:

Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” (16:8)

Abinadab, the second oldest, probably looks as impressive as Eliab. For some reason, Abinadab isn’t king material either. Neither is exhibit C:

Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.” (16:9)

And on it goes:

Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” (16:10)

In the midst of this parade of possibles, we find God’s principle of choice expressed in His words to Samuel:

“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (16:7)

God knows our human tendency is to “look at the outward appearance”

[the Hebrew says literally, “look at the face”]. God Himself looks always at the heart. If I could change one thing about my focus or vision, it’s this: I’d like to see people not by face but by heart. But only God can fully do that. So we, with our limited focus, have to look to Him to give us that kind of discernment. We just don’t have it in ourselves.

That’s why God repeatedly tells Samuel no in regard to these seven sons of Jesse. He sees these men as they really are. He sees their hearts. Remember, God has indicated that He’s already chosen His man. And back in 1 Samuel 13:14 (as we’ve seen), God “sought for Himself a man after His own heart” (NASB). He knew exactly who that person was.

It’s highly significant to me that Jesse doesn’t even have his youngest son—son number eight—in the room as Samuel begins this process. Jesse is making two common mistakes that parents make. First, he doesn’t have an equal appreciation for all of his children; Jesse seems to see his youngest as nothing more than the sheep-keeper. And second, he has failed to cultivate mutual respect among his sons.

So he [Samuel] asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”
(16:11)

With God’s help, Samuel gains the proper perspective. Nothing will hinder his pursuit of the one God has chosen! He’s telling Jesse, “Go get that boy! What does it matter what he’s doing or how old he is?”

MAN FORGETS, GOD REMEMBERS

Oh, for the ability to see beyond the obvious—beyond anyone’s age or size or level of intelligence, and even beyond their track record. To see worth and value down deep inside. That’s the kind of vision that Samuel, with God’s help, finally demonstrates in this beautiful moment. Remember, David’s not there; he doesn’t know what’s going on back home. He’s faithfully tending

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sheep when suddenly someone comes running across the fields with a shout: “Hey, David! They want you back home!”

Obedient to his father’s summons, David—just a teenager—walks into the house, still smelling like sheep.

He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. (1 Samuel 16:12–13)

David sees this old man, Samuel the prophet, suddenly hobble over and pour oil on David’s head. It drips down his hair and onto his neck. The ancient historian Josephus wrote that Samuel at this point whispered in the shepherd boy’s ear the symbolic meaning: “You will be the next king.”

God’s ways are so marvelous, aren’t they? At the most surprising moment, the most magnificent things happen.

What does David do next? I’m happy to report that he doesn’t go around telling everyone, “I’m God’s choice!” or hop onto a chariot and race through Bethlehem’s streets yelling, “You’re looking at Saul’s replacement!” Instead, he will soon have a most unusual assignment.

In 1 Samuel 16, the narrative moves next to a scene where King Saul is depressed. At the urging of his attendants, Saul commands that a musician be brought to make him feel better.

One of the servants answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.” Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, “Send me your son David, *who is with the sheep.*” (16:18–19)

Don’t miss that last phrase. David is back tending sheep, even after being anointed king.

We see it also in the next chapter, where there’s a battle going on in the Valley of Elah between Israel and the Philistines with their giant champion, Goliath. Jesse’s three oldest sons are with Saul’s army, “but David

went back and forth from Saul *to tend his father's flock* at Bethlehem” (17:15 NASB)

What's David doing still tending his father's flock? Well, when you have a heart like David's, you do the job that sets before you, and stay faithful to it. Samuel has anointed him with oil, but David doesn't expect special treatment from others. No, he just goes back to the sheep. And when the king says, “Come and play for me,” David obeys.

David is sensitive enough to hear the whisper of God's voice: “You will be the next king.” But when the big anointing moment is over, he's not searching for the limelight, but humbly back with his sheep. I think that's one of the reasons God sees him as a man after His own heart. He's approachable, believable, authentic—and consistently faithful in the little things.

GOD SPEAKS, WE RESPOND

Three timeless lessons ring through my head as I look at these significant scenes in David's life.

1. God's solutions are often strange and simple. *So be open to them.*

We try to make God complex and complicated. He isn't. Amid all the complications with Saul and the throne, God simply says to Samuel, “Go where I tell you to go. I've got the answer—a new man. You just follow Me, and I'll show you.”

Don't make carrying out God's will complicated. It isn't. Stay open to His strange yet simple solutions.

2. God's promotions are usually sudden and surprising. *So be ready.*

When you least expect it, the moment will come—just like the Son of God's return from heaven. Suddenly and surprisingly, He will split the clouds and be with us. Just when we expect Him least, He'll be there, like a thief in the night. And that's the way God's promotions are. He watches you as you faithfully carry out your tasks, and He says, “I know what I'm doing. I know where you are and how to find you. Just stay ready as you carry out your job.”

3. God's selections are always sovereign and sure. *So be sensitive.*

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God's sovereignty applies to our choosing a mate as well as losing a mate. It applies to our being moved from one place to another, even though we thought we'd remain there ten more years. It also applies to those whom God appoints to fill the shoes of another. How easy to second-guess God's selections! How necessary, when we're tempted to do that, to remind ourselves that His selections are sovereign and sure.

God is looking at your neighborhood and your city, and He's looking for people to whom He can say, "I want to use you there, because you already proved yourself faithful. You are Mine." Our calling is to be faithful in the demanding tasks set before us, whether that involves our education, our marriage, our occupation, our children, or just the daily grind of life. That's the kind of men and women God wants to use.

If you and I had been living in Israel three thousand years ago, our attention would have been greatly focused upon the man Saul, taking the country by storm. Meanwhile, a "nobody" was keeping the sheep for his father on the Judean hillsides near the hamlet of Bethlehem—a boy named David, noticed by no one except God.

GOING AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART: From David's Psalm 131, make his prayer your own:

My heart is not proud, LORD,
my eyes are not haughty;
I do not concern myself with great matters
or things too wonderful for me.
But I have calmed and quieted myself. (131:1–2)