

David: A Man After God's Own Heart, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: A Man After God's Own Heart: Anointed in Obscurity

1 Samuel 16:1–13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening lesson sets the foundation for the entire study, and a great deal rides on getting its central truth into the hearts of the class. The historical setting is the hinge between Israel's first king and its greatest. Saul has been rejected for his disobedience, and God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to anoint a successor from among the sons of Jesse. The decisive moment comes in verse 7, where God overturns every human standard of evaluation: "man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." God passes over seven impressive sons and chooses David, the youngest, a shepherd not even summoned to the gathering, and the Spirit of the LORD rushes upon him. The doctrinal stakes are God's character (He sees truly, chooses sovereignly, and works through the lowly) and the beginning of the messianic line that runs to Christ, the Son of David.

There is also a pastoral caution to keep in view from the very first lesson. God's choosing of David is a calling to a purpose and a role, and it must not be presented as the unconditional individual election to salvation taught by Calvinism, nor as a guarantee that David could never fall. David's own later sin, which this study will face honestly, proves the point. Present God's choice as real, gracious, and purposeful, while preserving the genuine moral responsibility David carried and that every person carries. Remember too that David lived under the Old Covenant; draw the timeless truths about God's character and ways, which were written for our instruction, without reading New Testament specifics back into the scene.

Aim at both head and heart. Send students home able to say clearly that God does not measure people as the world does, that He sees and works through the overlooked, and that He equips those He calls. But aim also at formation. Nearly everyone in the room has felt passed over, has measured themselves by an outward scale, or has held back from serving out of fear or a sense of inadequacy. Let this lesson lift their eyes to the God who looks on the heart and invite them to live differently because of it.

Question 1

Student Question:

When Samuel is impressed by Eliab's appearance, the LORD tells him, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (v. 7). What does this verse teach us about God, about how He evaluates people, and about how completely His way of seeing differs from ours?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Slow down on the contrast the LORD draws in verse 7. Samuel, the most spiritually perceptive man in Israel, looks at Eliab and is sure he has found the king. Eliab is tall, the firstborn, the obvious candidate. And God says no, in language that rebukes even the prophet: “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature.” The mention of “height of his stature” is pointed, because that is exactly what Israel had wanted in Saul, who stood head and shoulders above everyone else (1 Samuel 9:2; 10:23). Israel chose by the eye and got Saul. God chooses by the heart and gets David.

The heart, in Hebrew thought, is not mainly the seat of emotion but the center of the whole inner person: the will, the loyalties, the hidden motives, the true self that no one else can see. To say the LORD looks on the heart is to say He sees what is actually there, beneath the presentation we manage for others. Nothing is hidden from Him. This is at once searching and comforting. Searching, because He is not fooled by our outward religion. Comforting, because He is not put off by our outward poverty either; He sees the real person and works with what is truly there.

This verse also reveals the gulf between God’s evaluation and ours. “The LORD sees not as man sees.” Human beings are necessarily limited to surfaces. We judge by what can be observed, measured, and ranked, because that is all we can access. God labors under no such limit. He reads the heart directly. The teacher should help the class feel how radically this reorders everything, since so much of human life, including much religious life, is spent managing appearances before an audience that cannot see what matters most.

Press the application gently but clearly. If God looks on the heart, then the heart is what we must attend to. It is possible to have an impressive outward life and a hollow inner one, as Saul did. It is also possible to be overlooked by everyone and treasured by God, as David was. The question this verse puts to every student is not “how do I look?” but “what is actually in my heart, and does it belong to God?”

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The omniscience of God: He sees what no human eye can see
- God evaluates by the heart, not by outward appearance or status
- The biblical meaning of “heart” as the inner center of the person
- The contrast between Saul (chosen by sight) and David (chosen by the heart)
- The danger of a religion that manages appearances before people
- God’s seeing as both searching (no hiding) and comforting (no overlooking)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean, practically, that God looks on the heart and not the outward appearance?

- Why is this truth both unsettling and deeply reassuring at the same time?
- How does the contrast between Saul and David help us understand what God is looking for?

Question 2

Student Question:

We all carry a scale in our heads for measuring people, and usually for measuring ourselves. In what specific way have you been judging by the “outward appearance” lately, sizing up yourself or someone else by looks, success, or status rather than by the heart? What would change this week if you let God’s way of seeing reshape that judgment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and the goal is honesty rather than information. Everyone in the room affirms in principle that God looks on the heart. The harder work is admitting how relentlessly we ourselves judge by the outward appearance, and how much of our own peace rises and falls with how we measure up on that outward scale.

Help students name the specific scales they actually use. For some it is appearance, for others accomplishment, income, the behavior of their children, the size of their platform, or simply being needed. These scales are usually invisible to us precisely because we take them for granted. Naming one out loud is the beginning of repentance from it.

Then turn the question toward change. If God genuinely does not rank by the outward scale, then a student who is exhausted from measuring up can lay the burden down, and a student who quietly looks down on others can repent of it. Ask for one concrete shift this week: a way of speaking about themselves, a comparison they will stop making, a person they will start seeing differently. Resist letting the answer stay general; the value is in the specific.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between affirming a truth and living by it
- The hidden scales by which we measure our own worth
- Repentance from judging others by the outward appearance
- Finding rest in being seen and valued by God rather than by people
- The link between how we believe God sees us and how we treat others

Discussion Prompts

- What is the outward scale you most often use to measure your own worth?
- Where have you recently sized up another person by appearance, success, or status?
- What is one concrete way God’s seeing could change how you view yourself this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

The LORD tells Samuel He has “provided for myself a king among his sons” (v. 1), and He passes over seven impressive older brothers to choose the youngest, who was not even invited to the sacrifice. What does God’s choosing of David teach us about how God works out His purposes in the world, and why is it significant that He so often chooses the overlooked and the unlikely?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 1 frames the whole episode: “I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” The choice is God’s, made before Samuel ever reaches Bethlehem. The drama of the seven brothers passing by is, in a sense, for Samuel’s benefit and ours; God already knows whom He has provided. This is the LORD working out His purpose in history, and He will not be redirected by the obvious human candidate.

Notice the pattern, because it runs all through Scripture. God repeatedly chooses the younger over the older, the weaker over the stronger, the overlooked over the obvious: Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph the despised younger son, and now David the eighth son left with the sheep. Paul gathers up this whole pattern in 1 Corinthians 1:26–31: God chooses the lowly and despised things of the world so that no human being may boast in His presence. The point of choosing the unlikely is that the glory and the power are clearly seen to be God’s.

The teacher should be careful here to describe God’s choosing accurately. This is God selecting a man for a purpose and a role, the kingship of Israel and a place in the line that leads to Christ. It is not a statement that David was unconditionally elected to personal salvation apart from his own faith and obedience, nor that the brothers were eternally rejected as persons. Scripture presents God’s call as real and purposeful, and it also holds people genuinely responsible to respond in faith. Keep both together, and avoid framing this as Calvinistic election.

Finally, let the truth land as encouragement and as humility. Encouragement, because the God who delights to use the unlikely can use the ordinary people in the room. Humility, because if God chooses the lowly so that no one may boast, then anyone He uses has nothing to boast about. The shepherd boy became king, but the kingdom was always the LORD’s gift, never David’s achievement.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s sovereign working out of His purposes in history
- God’s pattern of choosing the younger, weaker, and overlooked
- Choosing for a purpose and role, not Calvinistic election to salvation
- God choosing the lowly so that no one may boast (1 Corinthians 1:26–31)
- The line of promise running from Jesse’s son toward Christ
- Calling as gift and stewardship, never personal merit

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think God so often chooses the overlooked and the unlikely?
- How does the way God chose David guard us against pride in our own gifts?
- What is the difference between God choosing someone for a role and a guarantee they can never fall?

Question 4

Student Question:

David was faithfully keeping the sheep, out of sight and out of mind, when God set His choice on him. He was not performing for an audience. Where in your life are you serving, working, or waiting in a place no one seems to notice? How does it change things to know that God sees what is done in obscurity and is not absent from the back pasture?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David's anointing did not interrupt a great public career; it interrupted a day of keeping sheep. He was doing humble, unglamorous, largely invisible work when God set His choice on him. The class should feel the dignity God places on faithful service that no one sees.

Many in the room are living in some version of the back pasture: caring for aging parents, raising small children, working a job that feels unseen, serving in the congregation in ways that draw no notice. The temptation is to believe that the real action is happening somewhere else, to someone more visible. David's story says otherwise. God's eye was on the pasture all along.

Encourage students to reframe their hidden faithfulness as the very soil in which God forms a person. David's years with the sheep were not wasted time before his real life began; they were where he learned the courage and care that would later shepherd a nation (Psalm 78:70–72). Invite each student to name their own back pasture and to do that work this week as unto the Lord who sees.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The dignity of faithful, unseen service
- God's presence and attention in places the world overlooks
- Hidden seasons as God's training ground, not wasted time
- Working "as unto the Lord" rather than for human recognition
- Contentment in obscurity versus craving visibility

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life are you serving or waiting in a place no one notices?
- How does it change that work to know God sees what is done in secret?

- How might God be using a hidden season to form you for what is ahead?

Question 5

Student Question:

Samuel was afraid to obey, certain that Saul would kill him if he heard, yet God gave him a way forward and Samuel went (vv. 1–5). What does this account teach about the relationship between fear and obedience, and about trusting God’s word even when obeying it looks costly or dangerous?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 1 through 5 are easy to rush past, but they hold a real lesson. Samuel’s fear is not faithless cowardice; it is a sober reading of the situation. Anointing a rival king while Saul still reigns is genuinely dangerous, and Samuel says so plainly: “if Saul hears it, he will kill me.” God does not rebuke the fear. He gives Samuel a true and honest way to proceed, the sacrifice at Bethlehem, and Samuel obeys.

The lesson is not that obedience is always safe or that fear is always sin. The lesson is that God’s word is to be trusted and obeyed even when obedience carries real risk. Samuel went because God said go. Faith here is not the absence of fear but the decision to obey the God who speaks despite the fear.

The teacher can connect this to the larger biblical witness that God’s servants are repeatedly called to obey in the face of danger, and that God goes with them. Moses, Esther, the apostles, and the Lord Himself all moved forward in obedience when staying put would have been safer. The walk of faith regularly asks us to take the next step before the whole road is safe.

Be careful not to turn this into a promise that obedience always removes the danger. Sometimes it does not. The promise is not that we will be spared every cost, but that the God who commands is trustworthy and present, and that obedience to Him is always the right and ultimately the safe path, even when it does not feel like it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s word as the ground of obedience even under risk
- Faith as obeying despite fear, not the absence of fear
- The trustworthiness and presence of God with those He sends
- The biblical pattern of servants obeying in the face of danger
- Avoiding the false promise that obedience always removes cost

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between sinful fear and the honest fear Samuel felt?

- Why is it significant that God gave Samuel a way forward rather than rebuking him?
- When has obeying God required you to move before the way looked safe?

Question 6

Student Question:

Samuel obeyed despite real fear. Most of us know what it is to sense clearly what God would have us do and then hesitate because of what it might cost. What is one thing you believe God is calling you to do that you have been putting off out of fear? What would it look like to take the next step of obedience this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Samuel's example directly on the student. Almost everyone can identify a moment of clear conviction followed by hesitation: a conversation God wants us to have, a sin to confess, a relationship to mend, a step of service or generosity, a word of witness. We sense the rightness of it and then let fear talk us out of it.

The teacher's aim is to help each student name one such thing specifically and honestly, without piling on guilt. Naming it is most of the battle, because fear thrives on vagueness. Once the delayed obedience has a name, the next step usually becomes clear.

Then call for that next step, small and concrete, this week. Samuel did not have to conquer Saul; he only had to take the road to Bethlehem. Most acts of courageous obedience are like that, a single doable step taken in trust, with the outcome left to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between conviction and action
- Fear as the common reason obedience gets delayed
- Naming a specific act of obedience rather than staying general
- Taking the next concrete step and leaving the outcome to God
- Trusting God's presence in the act of obedience

Discussion Prompts

- What is one thing you believe God is calling you to do that fear has delayed?
- What is the single next step you could take this week?
- What would it look like to trust God with the outcome of that obedience?

Question 7

Student Question:

When Samuel anointed David, “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward” (v. 13). David was not chosen because he was already qualified to be king; he was equipped after he was chosen. What does this teach us about how God prepares and empowers the people He calls to do His work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 13 is the turning point of the scene: “the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.” The order matters. David is chosen and anointed first; the Spirit’s empowering comes after. He is not selected because he is already a finished king. He is set apart, and then equipped to become what God has called him to be.

This is God’s consistent way of working. He called Moses and then promised, “I will be with your mouth.” He called Gideon while he was hiding and named him a mighty man of valor before he had done anything valorous. The pattern teaches that the calling of God carries with it the equipping of God. The work is His, and so is the power to do it.

For Israel under the Old Covenant, the Spirit came upon particular leaders for particular tasks. The teacher can note, without reading later realities anachronistically into the text, that this anticipates the fuller giving of God’s Spirit under the New Covenant. The timeless principle stands: God does not call the equipped so much as He equips the called, and the resulting strength points back to Him as its source.

Let this dismantle the excuse of inadequacy. David at his anointing had no royal training, no army, no experience of court. What he had was God’s choice and God’s Spirit, and that was enough. The same God who equipped a shepherd to become a king is the God who supplies what His people need for the work He gives them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Calling precedes and carries equipping (“chosen, then empowered”)
- The Spirit of the LORD coming upon David for his appointed task
- God equipping the called rather than calling only the equipped
- The Old Covenant pattern anticipating the fuller gift of the Spirit
- Strength for service as God’s gift, directing glory back to Him

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that the Spirit came upon David after he was chosen, not before?
- How does this challenge the idea that we must feel fully qualified before we serve?
- Where do you need to trust God to equip you rather than relying on your own readiness?

Question 8

Student Question:

It is easy to disqualify ourselves from serving God because we feel unready, untrained, or not gifted enough. Where have you held back from a good work because you felt inadequate? How might David's story free you to step forward in dependence on the God who equips those He calls rather than waiting until you feel sufficient on your own?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the truth of God's equipping into the student's reluctance to serve. Few things keep believers on the sidelines as effectively as the feeling of not being enough: not knowledgeable enough to teach, not mature enough to lead, not gifted enough to help, not recovered enough to be useful.

The teacher should treat this feeling with compassion, because it is often rooted in genuine humility, but also confront it with the truth of the passage. David's qualification was God's choice and God's Spirit, not David's resume. To wait until we feel sufficient in ourselves is to misunderstand how God works and, in effect, to make the work depend on us rather than on Him.

Invite students to identify one good work they have declined or delayed because they felt inadequate, and to consider stepping into it in dependence on God. The goal is not reckless presumption but humble availability: offering what they have and trusting God to supply the rest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Inadequacy as a common barrier to serving God
- The difference between humble dependence and self-disqualification
- Availability to God rather than waiting to feel sufficient
- Serving in dependence on God's equipping, not personal adequacy
- Stewarding the calling and gifts God gives

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you held back from serving because you felt unready or inadequate?
- How does David's story reframe what actually qualifies a person to serve God?
- What good work could you step into this week in dependence on God?

Question 9

Student Question:

David is anointed here as God's chosen king, yet Scripture is careful to show that God set His favor on David for a purpose and a role, not as a guarantee that David could never fall away (as his later life will painfully show). The New Testament also points us beyond David to the greater Anointed One, Jesus Christ, the Son of David. How does this anointing of the shepherd-king begin

to point forward to Christ, and how does it warn us against turning God's choosing into a license to presume on Him rather than a call to faithful obedience?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it does two things at once: it points forward to Christ, and it guards against a serious misuse of God's choosing. Take both carefully.

First, the forward look. David is here anointed as God's chosen king, and the word "anointed" (messiah, christ) is loaded with significance. David becomes the great Old Testament type of the King to come. The New Testament repeatedly calls Jesus "the Son of David" and presents Him as the true and final Anointed One who sits on David's throne (we will explore this fully in Lesson 7). What begins as oil poured over a shepherd boy in Bethlehem is the opening of a line that runs straight to Bethlehem again, and to the cross, and to the throne at God's right hand. The teacher can let the class feel that they are watching the start of a story far bigger than David.

Second, the guardrail. It would be easy to read David's anointing as a guarantee, as though once God chose him, his standing was secured no matter how he lived. David's own later fall, which this study will not soften, decisively refutes that reading. God's choice set David in a role and gave him real privilege, but it never canceled his responsibility to walk faithfully, and when he sinned grievously he had to repent and return. This is the consistent biblical witness: those whom God favors are still called to ongoing faith and obedience, and presuming on God's favor is itself a grave danger (compare 1 Corinthians 10:1–12, where Israel's privileged status did not exempt them from falling).

So resist two errors. Do not present David's election as an unconditional, irrevocable guarantee of salvation in the Calvinistic sense, and do not let the class draw the "once saved, always saved" conclusion from it. Present instead a God who graciously chooses and equips for His purposes, and who calls the chosen to faithful obedience, holding out both the wonder of being chosen and the seriousness of remaining faithful. Done well, this prepares the class for the whole arc of David's life, triumph and tragedy alike, and lifts their eyes to the one Anointed King who never failed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David as the anointed king and Old Testament type of Christ
- "Anointed" (messiah/christ) and the line running from David to Jesus
- Jesus as the Son of David, the true and final Anointed One (developed in Lesson 7)
- God's choice as purposeful favor, not an unconditional guarantee of salvation
- Against "once saved, always saved": the chosen are called to remain faithful
- Against Calvinistic election: real calling held together with real responsibility
- The danger of presuming on God's favor (1 Corinthians 10:1–12)

Discussion Prompts

- In what ways does the anointing of David begin to point us toward Jesus, the Son of David?
- Why is it dangerous to treat God's choosing as a guarantee that we can live however we please?
- How do we hold together the wonder of being chosen by God and the call to remain faithful?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. You have watched God send a fearful prophet, pass over the impressive, search out the heart, call a forgotten shepherd boy, and pour out His Spirit on him. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this opening chapter of David's story. What is the single truth about how God sees and chooses that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the whole lesson and turns it toward formation. By now the class has seen God send a fearful prophet, refuse to judge by appearances, search out the heart, choose a forgotten shepherd, and pour out His Spirit. The aim now is not to add information but to invite a response.

Encourage students to name something specific rather than a vague good intention. One person may need to stop measuring by the outward scale; another to embrace a hidden season as God's training; another to take a fearful step of obedience; another to step into a work they have felt too inadequate to attempt. The point is to let one truth from David's story actually take hold this week.

Close by lifting their eyes to Christ, who is doing the forming. The God who looked on David's heart looks on theirs, not to condemn but to shape them into the image of His Son. This sets the tone for the whole study: not merely learning about David, but being changed by the God who was at work in David's life and is at work in ours.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from knowledge to personal response
- Naming one specific way God is at work through the passage
- Christ as the one actively forming the believer
- God's searching gaze as the means of transformation, not condemnation
- Carrying a single truth into the week ahead

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this lesson is God pressing on you most directly?

- What is one specific way you will live differently because of it this week?
- How does it encourage you that God looks on your heart in order to form you, not to condemn you?