

David: A Man After God's Own Heart

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

Samuel 16:1–13

The road from Ramah to Bethlehem is not long, but on this particular day every step of it felt dangerous to the old prophet walking it. Samuel had a heifer with him and a horn of oil hidden in his pack, and a story ready in case anyone asked why he had come. God had told him to stop grieving over Saul, the tall and handsome king who had looked so promising and turned out so hollow, and to go anoint another. "How can I go?" Samuel had protested. "If Saul hears it, he will kill me." Kings do not take kindly to prophets who go around anointing their replacements. Yet here he was, on the road, because when God says go, the only safe place is forward.

He arrives at a sleepy shepherding town, and the elders come out trembling, wondering what they have done to deserve a visit from the man of God. Samuel calls Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice, and the parade begins. Eliab steps forward first, the oldest, tall and strong and every inch a king. Samuel takes one look and thinks, surely this is the one. And God says no. Not this one, and not because of anything you can see. "Man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." One by one the brothers pass by, seven of them, and seven times the answer is the same. No. No. Not him either. Samuel must have wondered if he had misheard God entirely.

"Are all your sons here?" the prophet finally asks. There is an awkward pause. Well, there is the youngest, Jesse admits, but he is out with the sheep. Nobody had thought to call him. He was not even invited to his own anointing. So they send for him, and the whole gathering waits, and in comes a boy with sun on his face and the smell of the pasture still on him, and God says the words Samuel has been waiting all day to hear: "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." The oil runs down over the boy's head, and the Spirit of the LORD rushes upon him, and nothing about the afternoon looks any different except that everything has changed.

This is where David's story begins, and it begins with a truth that turns our world upside down. We are people who count what can be counted and measure what can be measured. We rank by height and looks and talent and resume, and we quietly assume God grades on the same scale we do. He does not. While the world was looking at the handsome brothers in the front row, God was looking at a forgotten boy in the back pasture, and He saw a heart He could work with. If you have ever felt overlooked, passed over, left in the field while others were called to the feast, this is your story too. The God who sees is still looking, and He is not looking where everyone else is looking.

Group Discussion: We live in a world that ranks people constantly, by appearance, achievement, popularity, and position, and most of us learned to play that game before we were ten years old. Why do you think it is so hard for us to believe that God genuinely does not measure people

the way the world does? Where do you see this worldly way of measuring at work in the people and places around you?

Personal Reflection: Think about the standard you most often use to judge your own worth, the scale you secretly believe really counts. Is it your appearance, your accomplishments, your usefulness, your reputation? When you imagine God looking at you, do you picture Him scanning that same outward scale, or do you believe He is truly looking at your heart?

Read 1 Samuel 16:1–13

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?

8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Samuel 13:13–14, the LORD seeking out “a man after his own heart” to replace Saul; Psalm 78:70–72, God taking David from the sheepfolds to shepherd His people; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31, God choosing the lowly and despised things of the world to shame the strong; 2 Corinthians 4:7, the treasure of the gospel carried in jars of clay so the power belongs to God; 1 Samuel 16:14–23, the very next scene, in which the anointed shepherd is quietly brought into Saul's court