

BaptistWay Press® Premium Commentary

By Dr. Ron Lyles
Pastor, South Main Baptist Church
Pasadena, Texas

Studies in Character and the Crown (1 Samuel)

Lesson Seven

The Lord Looks at the Heart

Focal Text

1 Samuel 16

Background

1 Samuel 16

Main Idea

David was God's startling choice as the next king of Israel.

Question to Explore

Why do we tend to judge others on external appearances?

Quick Read

If judged by human standards, David would never had been considered worthy of Israel's throne.

Introduction

Our Christian faith includes our Trinitarian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the first stanza of "Holy, Holy, Holy" concludes, "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." It has nothing to do with the fact of our being created in the image of God, but frequently adults can seemingly be "three persons." How others see us, how we see ourselves, and how God sees us can be so different that we seem to be three different individuals or persons.

The importance that we attach to how others see us is reflected in the amount of money we spend on our physical appearance. The money we spend on skin/personal care products, gym memberships and exercise equipment, weight control programs, and anti-

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aging products including elective surgery is enormous. American women spend an average of \$8.00 a day on their face and skin, totaling \$300,000 for an average life span.

People make evaluative judgments about us every day simply by looking at us, how we dress, how we sit, stand, walk, and how we talk. Despite spending a lot of money to look good, some things about our physical appearance have little to do with how others see us. An article from *Forbes* magazine, summarizing several recent studies, documents the impact of appearance on workplace compensation.¹ Companies pay taller people more money. Someone six inches taller than an equally skilled worker will earn almost \$5,000 more per year (\$789 per inch). Generally, obese workers are paid less. Blonde haired women, people who work out, women who wear makeup, and attractive people all earn more than their equally skilled colleagues.

How we view ourselves can be quite different from how others see us. Several years ago, I took one of those personality/relational inventories that catalogued individuals in eight groupings. In this system, five other people who knew you well were asked to fill out the same questionnaire as you did. You provided answers about yourself, and others provided answers about how they saw you. The other five were unanimous in putting me as a “7,” while I saw myself as a “3,” the complete opposite of how they saw me. Go figure.

Some people see themselves in negative ways. They have poor or low “self-esteem” issues. They function well among work associates and friends, but deep inside they do not feel they are worth much. They see themselves as unable to accomplish much in life because they are not gifted in any way.

Then that third “person” is how God sees us. The interesting thing is that God sees us as valuable and believes we have more potential than we may see in ourselves. God knows your every thought and his designed plan for your life. He knows what is in our hearts.

Commentary

God rejected Saul to be the founder of a dynasty of kings (1 Samuel 13) and then rejected Saul himself to continue as king (1 Sam. 15), but God did not reject Israel. He declared he would choose another king leader (13:14). This chapter identifies that new king to be David of Judah.²

David will become the central figure for the remainder of the Books of Samuel. Old Testament interpreters have designated 1 Samuel 16—2 Samuel 5 as “The Rise of David” or “The Court History of David.” In this material, David moves from being an unvalued, unknown shepherd to one of whom the Lord said, “You will shepherd my people Israel” (2 Sam. 5:2). God is certainly the “Director” of this dramatic action, while David is the leading “Actor” or human character.

Surprised by God (16:1-5)

Harold is (“one of the few and the proud”) a former Marine. He wows us when he wears his “dress blues” on Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Veteran’s Day. I met him almost twenty years ago. In 2000, I performed the wedding for him and Ellie Lewis, both surviving spouses of previous marriages. They enjoyed one another. Harold cared for her during her illness until she went to be with Jesus four years ago.

Harold is so energetic and vibrant. He is involved in our transportation ministry as he helps pick up non-driving Senior Adults on Sunday mornings. I stopped writing this lesson on Saturday morning to attend Harold’s 90th birthday party. The family pulled it off. He was genuinely surprised and sported that broad grin in gratitude.

We like surprises when they are pleasant ones. God surprised Samuel, but I am not sure Samuel initially considered it to be a pleasant surprise. Both God and Samuel had grieved over Saul’s actions (15:35), but now God told Samuel that it was time to look to the future. God had a new assignment for the prophet. God was ready for Samuel to anoint a new king.

Samuel was to anoint someone whom God had “chosen” (16:1). This is the key verb of this chapter (16:1, 6, 7, 17, 18). The Hebrew verb underlying “chosen” is *ra’ah*. It appears more than 1,300 times in the Old Testament. It means “to see,” “give attention to,” “to perceive,” or “have a vision.” The writer used it in verse 1 in a specialized sense of seeing or providing or choosing. God “saw” the one he wanted to be Israel’s next king.

Divine initiative is clearly undergirded by the Hebrew text. The last sentence of verse 1 reads literally, “I have seen from among his sons **for me** a king” [emphasis mine]. Something is different. The selection of Saul was expressed by God to Samuel in this way, “Listen to them and give **them** a king” (8:22) [emphasis mine].

To carry out this new directive, Samuel must go to Bethlehem, a village of Judah, some five miles south/southeast of Jerusalem. It is curious that this village is not among some sixty-three towns of Judah named when Joshua allotted the tribal territory (Joshua 15). It was connected to the two stories of conflict that concluded the Book of Judges (Judges 21-25). Going to Bethlehem would take him beyond his normal circuit of travel (1 Samuel 7:15-17).

God specified not only the place where Samuel would go, but he also identified the family from which the next king would come. Jesse was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth (Ruth 4:17-22), a family through whom God had already been at work.

Samuel was apprehensive about obeying these instructions (1 Sam. 16:2). Although God had rejected Saul, he was still the king. God’s suggestion about a sacrifice was not a contrived deception to provide protection for Samuel (16:2). Sacrifice would have

accompanied a significant religious act like the anointing of a new king. It was the truth but not the whole truth.

Samuel obeyed God's instructions. When Samuel arrived in Bethlehem, the "elders" (16:4), like Samuel, were apprehensive or afraid. Elders were originally the oldest and wisest men of the village, but then they became the recognized leaders regardless of age. Their strong concern regarded the motivation of Samuel for coming to their village. Did Samuel come as Saul's representative to recruit for Saul's army or to collect money for Saul's treasury? Was Samuel no longer in favor with Saul? Did his presence here put them in danger?

Samuel put their minds at rest. They should not be alarmed because Samuel had come to offer a sacrifice to God, and they were invited. Since offering sacrifice was a way of being in communion with God, persons did particular things to be declared "holy" or clean enough to be in touch with God. "Consecrate yourselves" (16:5) refers to that ritual preparation.

The elders probably attended the sacrifice, but they no longer interest the biblical narrator and thus drop out of the story. The family of Jesse is the center of attention. Samuel himself consecrated or "set them apart" in preparation for the sacrifice (16:5).

Seeing Like God (16:6-13)

Samuel was convinced that he "saw" what God had "seen" in one of the sons of Jesse. Eliab, the firstborn son (1 Chronicles 2:13), was a fine physical specimen to see. In addition to being in the advantaged position of the firstborn son, he was impressively handsome and imposing in his height. (Recall that height was one of Saul's striking features as well.)

God "rejected" (16:7) Eliab, the same word used to describe Yahweh's rejection of Saul for his disobedient actions (15:23, 26). It is interesting that God directly said "No" to Eliab, while Samuel spoke for God in turning down the other six brothers. God did not participate directly again in the process until he declared the "Yes" for David (16:12).

The key verb of the chapter, "ra'ah," appears three times in verse 7, translated by the English verb "look." The basis of Yahweh's rejection of Eliab is explained by the difference between the way that we evaluate or make decisions about people, based upon our observations of their physical appearance, and the way that God "sees" people and evaluates them.

"The LORD looks at the heart" (16:7) describes a distinct advantage that God has over his human creation. The Hebrew people believed, as the scholars would say it, that the heart was the center of cognition, emotion, and volition. The heart was where a person formed thoughts, reflected on and refined those thoughts, expressed their thoughts about

feelings, and determined to turn those thoughts into action or made decisions (Proverbs 23:7). God knows our every thought, feeling, and decision process.

The two sons of Jesse following Eliab in the birth order are presented to Samuel, and Jesse hears Samuel declare them as not chosen by God. The narrator provides us the names of these two brothers but not the names of the next four. “Chosen” (1 Samuel 16:8, 9, 10) is the common word for designating someone or choosing. This term *bachar* is the one used theologically for God’s choosing a people called Israel and committing himself to them as his “chosen people.”

What was Jesse thinking during this parade of his sons before Samuel? He must have wondered what they were **not** chosen for. “Seven of his sons” (16:10) were not chosen. Samuel had to be puzzled. Seven was the number for completion, wholeness, or fullness (as seven days completed a week). What son of Jesse could God have “seen” if these seven boys represented the totality of Jesse’s family? The question begged to be asked, and Samuel posed it (16:11).

Jesse admitted that he had another son who was not present at the sacrifice. His youngest boy was at work tending sheep (16:11). Jesse’s eighth son was outside the boundaries of completeness, too insignificant to be invited to the sacrifice, and possessing no credentials for service, but Samuel wanted to see him anyway. Note the irony of the village elders and Jesse’s family standing and waiting until the youngest son arrives (16:11).

Despite Eliab (though impressive in physical appearance) being rejected, we should not automatically assume that a handsome or beautiful appearance is an obstacle to being chosen by God for service. A strikingly good physical appearance is not something that disqualifies one from offering service to God. At the same time, it does not rank high in value when God chooses persons for service.

Three phrases denote the physical attractiveness of David. “Ruddy” (16:12) comes from the same root as the words for Edom and Adam. It denotes the color red or the reddish dust of the earth. We use “ruddy” to describe the pink complexion of a person appearing to be flushed. The Israelites, who were darker or more olive-skinned color in complexion, considered this lighter or fairer skin tone to be appealing or attractive. Some interpreters understand David’s ruddiness to mean that he was redheaded.

God announced that this youngest son was the one he had seen. He asserted that Samuel should anoint him, and Samuel did exactly that (16:13). This anointing was a private event, and more than likely, not even anyone present except Samuel understood the significance of the event. For David it was a defining moment, and for Israel it changed everything.

When Saul was anointed, the Spirit of God did not empower him immediately; rather, he came upon Saul later (10:6; 11:6). It was different with David. God could not wait to empower his chosen king. The Spirit's presence with David accompanied the anointing. "From that day on" (16:13) denotes the constant presence of the Spirit of God with this new king. (Although I have been using his name in this lesson, this is the first appearance of the personal name "David" in this book.)

Samuel had anointed Saul to be king and then continued to be available to him for advice and counsel. Samuel would not have that same role with David. He anointed David and then went to his home town (16:13). The transition from the period of the judges (represented by Samuel) to the period of the kings (represented by David) was complete.

The Spirit of God (16:14-23)

Even as the verb *ra'ah* was the key to the previous paragraph, the noun *ruach* is the key word in these verses. This is the word for wind, breath, or spirit and here designates both the Spirit of God and an evil spirit. The two statements of verse 14 deserve special attention as they present difficulties to modern readers.

Seemingly Israel could only have one officially "anointed" and Spirit-empowered king at a time.³ The Spirit of God rushed upon David when he was anointed (16:13). That had implications for Saul as that same Spirit of God "departed from Saul" (16:14).

The ministry of the Spirit of God was different with persons in the period of the Old Testament from his ministry today with Jesus followers. In that time, the Spirit of God indwelt or empowered certain leaders of Israel including priests, judges, prophets, and kings. The Spirit's ministry or presence was mostly granted to these individuals for temporary periods of time to perform specific tasks. Since the event of Pentecost (Acts 2), the Spirit of God has a different ministry with New Testament believers. We believe the Holy Spirit **permanently indwells** (not temporary) **all Jesus followers** (not just selected leaders) to perform his ministry through us.

The last part of the sentence is more troubling to us. "An evil spirit from the LORD tormented him" (16:14). This concept is repeatedly expressed in this paragraph. Two areas of information provide help in the interpretation of this statement.

The Israelites believed in the complete sovereignty or control of God over all his creation. They had no understanding of "secondary causes" or the cause and effect that God built into his creation. For example, we understand atmospheric conditions including wind movements and the amount of moisture in the air (relative humidity). As a result, we can predict when it will rain because we know the conditions that are favorable to it. The ancient Israelites lacked that causation knowledge. When it rained, God sent the rain directly. When it did not rain, he stopped it from raining.

This perception of God's control was also applied to when bad things happened. Even a spirit that had such a harmful effect on Saul came directly from God.

Secondly, it seems the Bible sometimes described psychological illness or mental health conditions in theological terms. From the description here and from the behavior in subsequent chapters, Saul appears to have the symptoms of bi-polar disorder, having manic/depressive episodes, or a form of paranoia. We cannot "diagnose" Saul from a distance, but we can say with certainty that Saul was deeply troubled, possibly both emotionally or psychologically, and spiritually.

Those who served in Saul's royal court easily saw the mood swings and periodic sadness of Saul, and they recommended a solution to him (16:15-16). Mental health professionals acknowledge that music is often associated with healing or soothing power.

Saul listened to them and agreed to implement their solution. "Find" (16:17) is that verb *ra'ah*. Although Saul did not know it, he wanted to "see" the same one God had already "seen" as the next king. The servant had already "seen" (16:18) (yes, it is *ra'ah*) the one Saul wanted to see.

The resumé of David that was presented to Saul is indeed impressive (16:18). It contains the first mention of David's musical prowess. David's excellence as a poet and composer of music became a standard feature in Israel's treasured memory of David. He was the patron saint of Israelite psalms.

He also had military prowess. "Warrior" is literally "a man of war," while "brave man" is that phrase used to describe David's father, meaning a person of recognized status (16:18). In addition to having those characteristics, he was a handsome man and was articulate in his speech. The most important thing about David, however, was that he experienced the presence of the Lord in his life.

Saul had heard enough about David. "Send" (16:19) was a command for Jesse rather than a request. Honored by this command, Jesse sent gifts to the king. David impressed Saul who immediately was attracted to him personally. An armor-bearer was one of the king's personal servants and guardians in battle (16:21). The "trial" or temporary service became a permanent appointment. "Allow" (16:22) is much more diplomatic than the previous command.

The solution suggested by Saul's officials proved to be successful. Whenever the evil spirit caused Saul to fall into one of his depressing moods, David played music which brought needed relief to the king.

Conclusion

We form judgments or decisions about people by what we see. We look at the physical features of people, especially their face. We look at the clothes they are wearing. We look at the way they stand or sit. We use our eyes to evaluate people.

I propose that if we really do want to see other people as God sees them, we should use our ears rather than our eyes. We should hear what others say. We should listen to them express their thoughts and feelings. We should hear them tell us what they think they should do with their lives. With our ears, we “look at their hearts.” That is being like God.

Meet the Writer: Dr. Ron Lyles

Ron Lyles has been the pastor of the South Main Baptist Church in Pasadena, Texas for more than thirty years. He has also been writing Bible study material for most of that time. Dr. Lyles is a graduate of Dallas Baptist University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div., Ph.D.). He has served Texas Baptists in a variety of roles and also enjoys teaching adjunctively for Logsdon Seminary at their Corpus Christi location.

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¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tykiisel/2013/03/20/you-are-judged-by-your-appearance/#46b1f1ab6d50>
(Accessed 2/17/18).

² The narrator introduces David through three stories: David, youngest son of Jesse anointed by Samuel (16:1-13); David the musician who soothed Saul (16:14-23); and David the warrior who killed Goliath (17:1-58). In each of these accounts, David is identified as a shepherd. Also, in each of them, God is the one who is maneuvering David into a favored position.

³ One of the beautiful realities of the democratic system in our form of government as a republic is the peaceful transition of leadership through political elections. We elect a President in November, and that newly elected leader does not take the oath of office until January. During this time of transition, the current President is still the recognized leader both here in our country and around the world. The

President-designate, duly elected, is not yet the President and should not speak as the President. We describe that by saying, “We only have one President at a time.”