

Chapter One

Conflict Within the Family

(Read 1 Samuel 16)

Did you know that it's impossible to predict who will be mightily used by God? Impossible, because God has His own reasons for putting unlikely people in even more unlikely places! His evaluation of each of us is quite different from the grade we give ourselves or the assessment of our friends. *It just may be that God has a place mapped out for you that is much greater than what you would ever dream for yourself.* Just ask David, the shepherd boy turned King of Israel!

We've all been measured by someone else's yardstick, evaluated by the personal preferences of our parents, siblings, and friends. In fact, we instinctively compare every person we meet with our standard of "most wanted qualities." Appearance, personality, wit, sincerity—all of these affect the judgments we make of one another. Though we might theoretically agree that all people are created equal, we grade one another on a scale that is according to our liking. We treat people not according to an absolute, but with relative value.

Parents make a mistake when they judge their children by society's yardsticks. Perhaps the most prevalent of those yardsticks is *beauty*, which James Dobson says our culture regards as the "gold coin of human worth." Parents often fall into the

trap of paying more attention to the attractive child, the one who makes them feel best. The other children feel the pain of rejection, the depression that comes from knowing that they just do not measure up. Because our opinion of who we are is determined by those around us, the child who feels rejection by his parents will have emotional baggage to deal with as he or she struggles toward emotional wholeness.

If appearance is the *gold* coin of human worth, *intelligence* is surely the silver coin. If you have the good fortune of being a “whiz kid,” you will be accepted because of your brilliance. There is prestige connected with high scores in algebra, political science, or computer programming.

Children may have natural abilities in music, art, or public speaking, and still feel the sting of rejection within the family network. Given the large number of dysfunctional families, even gifted children may grow up with feelings of depression and self-hatred. Children who are ignored or abused verbally or physically know the inner pain of feeling that no one really loves them, and that they have no apparent value.

There is evidence that David suffered because of rejection from his father and older brothers. They resented his quick ascendance to fame and would have preferred that he stay at home with the sheep where he belonged, but we’re ahead of the story.

The Search for a King

As our story begins, King Saul had been rejected by God, and now the Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over

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, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons” (1 Sm 16:1). So the aged Samuel made plans to go to Bethlehem to find a new king.

Already Saul was paranoid, filled with suspicion and hostility. Even the godly Prophet Samuel feared going to Bethlehem, lest the king discover the real reason for his mission. So the Lord graciously allowed Samuel, as a “pretext” for his trip, to offer a sacrifice when he arrived at Bethlehem (vv. 1-5). But after the crowd dispersed he privately fulfilled the real purpose for his journey. Jesse was proud when he was told that one of his sons would be the next king. In fact, he probably thought he knew in advance which of his sons it would be.

In the past, Samuel had often judged a person’s character by his appearance—his posture, size, or personality. Thinking that this would be the natural way to determine which of the sons had been chosen by God, the seven young men strutted past Samuel one by one.

Quite naturally the eldest, Eliab, walked past first. Those who study the birth order charts tell us that firstborns are generally competitive, self-confident, and strong-willed. They usually make good leaders. Eliab probably carried a thick spear to demonstrate his bravery, and with his most kingly gait he walked past, confident that he would be chosen.

Even Samuel was fooled. “Surely the Lord’s anointed is before Him,” he thought to himself (v. 6). But as the old man became silent and listened to the voice of the Lord, he heard these astounding words: “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God

sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (v. 7). The Almighty was talking. “I have rejected him!” What a blow to this proud, naturally gifted leader.

Then it was Abinadab who walked slowly past the prophet. By now Samuel had learned not to jump to conclusions, so he waited patiently for the divine voice. “Neither has the Lord chosen this one” (v. 8). Likewise all seven sons, fully dressed and armed, marched before Samuel, yet their kingly countenances did not impress the prophet. Each had to be told he had been rejected for kingship.

David, the Last Born

Samuel was puzzled. He assumed that all of Jesse’s sons had been invited to this special party, but the line of sons came to an end and there was no divine confirmation. He couldn’t help but wonder whether he had heard the voice of the Lord correctly. So he asked, “Are these all the children?” Jesse reluctantly answered, “There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep.” Then Samuel said, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here” (v. 11).

This is our first hint that David was not a favorite son. Jesse had been specifically invited to the sacrifice and told to bring his sons because one of them would be anointed king (vv. 1, 3). We get the impression that he had almost forgotten he had another son. His excuse for not having David present was weak, for there were others who could have been put in charge of the sheep (see 1 Sm 17:20). Perhaps he did not have high hopes for this boy.

This was probably not the first time David had been excluded from a family gathering; he had become accustomed to being relegated to tending sheep while his older brothers embarked on adventure.

Improbable as the request seemed, David was brought before the aging prophet. We can believe that David was pleasantly surprised that he was actually missed at the family gathering. When he was told that Samuel was there seeking to anoint a new king, he could scarcely believe it.

David was attractive, but not kingly. "Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the Lord said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he'" (1 Sm 16:12). Samuel was just as certain that he was the right one as he was that the other sons were not! Samuel opened his flask and oil ran from David's head to his shoulders. And he was only fifteen years old!

Who was present at this anointing? We read, "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (v. 13). David, the runt of the family, was anointed "in the midst of his brothers," as they were reeling from wounded pride, angry over what appeared to be God's arbitrary decision. The brother who was not even in the race had won the prize!

In most families, older brothers resent the younger ones, especially when they receive special honor. We do not even have to read between the lines to see that David was not loved by his brothers. The family simply could not bring itself to rejoice over the honor bestowed upon its youngest member.

We have glimpses of the derision the older brothers felt about their younger sibling. Though David had been anointed, he returned to herd the sheep and was treated as if nothing

had happened. He soon learned that he was not enrolled in the school of royalty, but in the school of pain and disappointment. He continued his home responsibilities. Even when he was chosen to play the harp in the court of King Saul (vv. 18-23) he did not stop his work on the family farm, but went back and forth between the palace and his father's flock (1 Sm 17:15). Then the day arrived when his brothers' true feelings fully surfaced.

Let's skip ahead four years and catch a glimpse of how David's brothers felt about him. One day his father, Jesse, told David to take some food to his brothers. When he arrived he found that Goliath was challenging the armies of Israel. David began to ask questions about what was happening: "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" (1 Sm 17:26).

David's oldest brother overheard the conversation, and we read, "Eliab's anger burned against David and he said, 'Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your insolence and the wickedness of your heart; for you have come down in order to see the battle'" (1 Sm 17:28).

Only last borns can fully appreciate the pain of such a tongue-lashing given by an older brother! If David was to be treated as a king-in-waiting, it would not be by his family! His anointing evidently meant little to them. His brothers treated him as if he didn't even deserve to know what was happening on the front lines. Parents and siblings are often the last to acknowledge greatness in their midst.

After Eliab scolded him, David replied, “What have I done now? Was it not just a question?” (1 Sm 17:29). Perhaps it was only a question, but younger brothers should know that they have no right to ask impertinent questions in the presence of older brothers.

With this exchange, Eliab passes from the pages of the Bible and is never heard from again. I have often thought about this confident firstborn who assumed that the selection process would be a beauty contest, dependent on who had the most impressive physique and most kingly presence. Yet he was passed over in silence, ignored, unrecognized for who he thought he was.

Though we are not told, I believe that Eliab’s life was forever changed when he saw his kid brother anointed that afternoon in Bethlehem. Either he turned his heart to seek the Lord, content to play whatever part God gave him in Israel’s history, or he died a resentful old man. Like Cain, who was angry with the favor shown to his younger brother, Abel, Eliab had the choice to turn to God for acceptance or to live with hatred and animosity.

David felt all of this rejection deeply, perhaps too deeply. Even in his later years he struggled with the indifference of his family toward him. As a grown man he would write, “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up” (Ps 27:10). The conflict within his family was never far from his mind.

Perhaps on his way back to Ramah, Samuel speculated about why the other, more likely brothers were bypassed. If any one of them had become king, *he just might have been a clone of the vacillating Saul, who was impressive in appearance but*

had a self-serving, disobedient heart. The text explicitly says that when Saul stood among the people, “he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward” (1 Sm 10:23). Yes, though Saul was tall and handsome, inwardly he was filled with rot. Looks are deceiving!

Long before Samuel actually anointed David in Bethlehem, God had said, “The Lord has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people” (13:14). In God’s plan David had already been appointed king; it was just a matter of time before it would be fulfilled. A shepherd boy “after God’s own heart” was chosen above those who appeared more qualified for the position.

Why did God reject seven rugged sons and call for the tagalong of the family? The answer is in 1 Samuel 16:7, a verse that deserves to be quoted a second time: “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”

God was making it clear that a man can be towering in stature and have a shriveled soul. A man can have all the qualifications for leadership, but if he lacks the qualities God values, he will be rejected by the One whose opinion counts the most.

An ancient prophet wrote, “For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His” (2 Chr 16:9). The Almighty is constantly taking inventory of us as individuals, and needless to say, He has access to information the rest of us lack. *When God measures a man He puts the tape around the heart and not the head.*

David, as we shall see, was far from perfect. In fact, he is often remembered for his glaring weaknesses. Yet he was used by God in spite of these faults, for God needed a broken-hearted man to teach future generations how to be comforted in the midst of pain. David was used by God, not in spite of these weaknesses, but *because of them!* How better could God display His grace than to show His power in the lives of those with the deepest inner needs? If we saw only David's strengths, we would not see God's grace.

What kind of heart did David have that he should attract the attention of the Almighty? Why David and not Eliab?

A Shepherd's Heart

Carefully read this divine commentary on why David was chosen: "He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands" (Ps 78:70-72). David was simply promoted from one kind of shepherding to another! He took what he learned in the fields and applied it to leadership.

Out in the wild, David was willing to risk his life for one of the lambs. When explaining why he should be given the privilege of fighting Goliath, he said to Saul, "Your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued *it* from his mouth; and when he rose up

against me, I seized *him* by his beard and struck him and killed him” (1 Sm 17:34-35).

I certainly would not have taken on a lion or a bear simply to save some sheep. But given David’s last-place status in the family, it was important that he accumulate a string of successes; he needed to carve out some territory that would give him recognition in the eyes of his family. So he became good at the responsibilities that came his way, even before he knew he would be given the high honor of kingship. Because of David’s faithfulness with lambs, God would eventually make him the shepherd of the many lambs (His people) in Israel.

David served with selflessness and “the integrity of his heart.” That means he could be trusted to be honest, dependable, and content with what he was given to do. He guided his flock skillfully; at night he returned with the same number of sheep as he had gone out with in the morning.

A thousand years later another shepherd would appear, born near where David had been anointed. Indeed, Bethlehem would then be known as the “City of David,” the town where a virgin would spend the night and give birth to a son. He was the “Good Shepherd,” who would eventually volunteer to “lay down His life for the sheep.” God seems to be partial to shepherds!

Just look around and ask how many people are willing to take a risk for someone else, or to sacrifice for the good of others. How many of us are dependable, content to be faithful even when no one is looking? How many of us are willing to do the best we can with what we have?

If David could be trusted with sheep, God knew He could trust him with men. Faithfulness in the pasture was transferred to faithfulness in the palace.

A Humble Heart

When David was expected to return to tend sheep after being anointed, he did not insist that this was beneath his kingly dignity. Though he didn't have the New Testament, he understood its precept: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pt 5:6). If we are faithful to where we are on the ladder, God will let us know when it is time for us to move up to the next rung.

David was willing to wait. Fortunately, he did not yet know that years of conflict with King Saul lay ahead of him. He would be hunted like a bird in the wilderness; he would have to duck to avoid spears and arrows. He would become so discouraged in his years of running that eventually he would defect to the enemy, joining the army of the Philistines!

For now all David needed to know was that if God had chosen him to be king, it would be up to God to fulfill His Word. God could be near him in the shadows just as much as in the light.

In all there would be fourteen years of waiting before David was crowned. Those years of emotional pressure were necessary for David to be drawn to God. He would learn that *what we do while we are waiting is just as important to God as that for which we wait!*

A Serving Heart

Two years after David was anointed, "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord terrorized him" (1 Sm 16:14). David came into the king's court and

used his skill as a musician to calm Saul's frenzy. This relieved Saul's depression; apparently the evil spirit receded in the presence of the hymns of praise played in honor of the Lord Jehovah. Even today, demonic spirits retreat in the presence of hymns of praise sung to the glory of God.

David also became Saul's armor bearer, showing that he was willing to play second fiddle. He was a king in waiting, but he knew that leadership involved being a servant. In fact, those who cannot serve cannot lead.

David didn't seek kingship. His brothers thought of many reasons they should have been chosen. They thought that kingship was a matter of self-confidence and ability. David knew that leadership in the kingdom was a choice that had to be left to God. *He never forgot whose kingdom it was.*

The best leaders, said Tozer, are those who do not aspire to leadership, but are conscripted by God. Those who wish to lead must learn to serve; they must wait for God to thrust them into the spotlight that leadership necessitates. Men choose leaders with one checklist, God uses another.

A Worshiping Heart

David, for all his faults, found satisfaction in his relationship with God. Little did he realize on that exciting afternoon in Bethlehem that he would experience years of pain—pain that would push him into the arms of God. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Ps 42:1-2). Read the Psalms and you will

be convinced that David reached his greatest heights on the days when he had his greatest lows. He discovered, in the words of C.S. Lewis, that “God is the one all-satisfying object.” Few people have learned to draw on God’s resources as often and as desperately as David; few have found God to be so sufficient in the hour of need.

A Forgiven Heart

Many of us remember David for committing adultery with Bathsheba, and murdering Uriah in an attempt to cover up the sin. Although the consequences of those actions plagued David until the day he died, the other side of the coin is that he experienced the bliss of forgiveness (this story will be covered in detail in chapter 10). David came clean in his confession before the Lord. He was cleansed, forgiven, and restored. He offered God his broken heart, and the Lord put the pieces of his wounded soul back together.

The temptation is to judge a person by outward appearance. Those who don’t meet our criteria are lost in the shuffle. God wants us to look beyond such superficial characteristics; He expects us to understand that the real person is what is within the heart. “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Prv 23:7).

Yes, sometimes it appears as if God puts His hand on the wrong man! He chooses those who would be considered least likely to succeed and elevates them to a position of responsibility.

Queen Victoria, it is said, told her friends that she thanked

God for the letter *m*. To explain, she would quote the words of Paul: “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God” (1 Cor 1:26-29). Queen Victoria was thankful that Paul did not say, “Not *any* noble are chosen” but rather, “Not *many* noble are chosen.” Little wonder she gave thanks for the letter *m*!

No, we cannot predict whom God will choose for positions of responsibility. He takes those who are in the shadows and brings them into the light. He takes someone whose family has “written him off,” and inscribes his name in the Book of Life. The lowly are exalted and the mighty are brought low. “He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make *them* sit with princes, with the princes of His people” (Ps 113:7-8).

If you have felt neglected in your family; if you feel that God has forgotten about you while others are chosen for special privileges, take heart. Let God love you; let Him be the object of your concentration; do His will, whether great or small.

Take as much time as you need in His presence to point your heart like an arrow in His direction. Your friends have one opinion of you, God has another.

Guess whose matters most?