

The Gospel According to David: Spiritual Timeshare Salesmen

1 Samuel 16:1-13

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Dan Hoffman

I was about 13 when my family ended up at Harrison Hot springs for a vacation. It was the first time I had ever been to a hot spring. And I was disappointed to find out that there were no slides or diving boards. It was all about sitting in hot tubs with old people. Of course, as a prepubescent boy there was some novelty in all the smell of sulphur.

But by far the excitement of the trip came on the last day. It turned out that the reason we were at Harrison was because it was a timeshare and we had earned a cheap stay by promising to take in a promotional talk from a friendly neighbourhood salesman.

There wasn't any childcare available so I sat with my 10-year-old sister and 2-year-old brother on the floor of the sales office for hours while this guy talked about what a good deal my parents were getting. But particularly I remember how he emphasized the merits of the free double tape deck stereo system with detachable speakers for a surround sound experience. Our family was on the verge of taking it home.

And I was hooked. Mom and dad already had a stereo system so I figured this would probably be mine. And it was at this point I began helping the stressful situation by adding my encouragement to the pot – let's do it mom and dad!

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Welcome to Fort George. We are glad that you've joined us today. I'm Dan. I'm one of the pastors here. And this semester we are taking a deep dive into the biggest biography in all of ancient literature – the life of king David. Did you know that? David's story is the longest and most in-depth story about any person on earth 3000 years ago. And it's a story about a search for the true king.

And it starts with Hannah who gets a vision of who this true king will be and sings a song. And her song is all about how this king is not going to accumulate power but give it away. He will lift the needy from the ash heap and seat them with princes.

And then Hannah's son Samuel anoints Saul. And Saul does fine for a bit, but he turns out not to be the true king at all. Instead, his lower image of himself than God has of him leads him to grasp at value in all sorts of places, and he ends up abusing his position and being just as bad as the kings of the neighbouring countries.

And Samuel is devastated. And that's where we find ourselves today. So if you've got a Bible open it up to 1st Samuel 16. And would you stand with me as we come before God's word? Hear now the word of the Lord.

[Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13]

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

So we are in this ancient biography about David and the search for the true king. And it turns out, while we aren't looking for a king today, the details of this story transcend time. All the things they were looking for in a king are things we are looking for now – justice, peace. A world full of people with the same character traits Hannah sings about – where people would serve each other and distribute their power.

But Samuel's devastated. He tried with Saul and it failed. And there is this growing despair. It's like the season leading up to the next federal election when all the bumper stickers start to come out deriding the current Prime Minister. But people who have been around for a bit can still remember all the bumpers and stop signs that were deriding the last guy. And it's easy to despair. It's impossible to find justice.

But into that context the word of the Lord comes to Samuel. And God says "Samuel, there is another. There is a rightful king who will infuse his kingly character into the human race." And that's what this text is about – it's about the kingly character God sees and esteems, and how to get it.¹ First, kingly character.

So in verse 1 God sends Samuel to Jesse saying, "I have chosen one of his sons to be king." And the word "chosen is literally the word "seen." "I've seen Me a king."

And so Jesse and his sons show up at the sacrifice and Jesse begins parading his boys in front of Samuel. And Samuel looks on the first son, Eliab and thinks, "Wow! Surely this is the Lord's anointed." And that's when we come to the central verse in this passage. God responds in verse 7:

"Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

So what's going on here? Well, it's like what the salesman was taking advantage of when he highlighted the merits of the stereo. Or it's like a pickpocket who bumps you on one side while removing your wallet on the other. It's misdirection.

And Samuel is duped by it. God sees Eliab and Samuel sees Eliab. And Samuel's impressed. Behavioral scientists call this the halo effect. It's like if your boss asks you whether you think Dave would make a good team leader. And you've met Dave, but you don't know him, other than that he's tall and good looking and so you immediately reply "Yeah, I think Dave would make a great team lead!"

It's a first impression based on totally irrelevant information. The logic is "Dave is tall and good looking therefore he would be a good team leader." It's bad logic. It's seeing one thing, but not seeing reality.

¹ Outline adapted from Tim Keller <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/the-lord-s-anointed-5343/> (Accessed January 13, 2023)

But God's critique isn't just against Samuel, it's against the human condition. We are obsessed with the way things look on the outside. So what is it about Eliab's height that was so attractive to Samuel?

I mean being short is awesome. Just think of all those third-class airline seats you can enjoy; or how all the clothing lines all have your size. Why would anyone want to be big? I'm not jaded. Honest. But being big in a culture of physical combat was a significant advantage.

If you ever watch the world's strongest man competitions, you will never find an average sized person among them. The current champion – Hathi Bjornson – the Mountain from The Game of Thrones – is a monster. He's 6 foot 9 and was 452 pounds at his heaviest. If you see him in the WestJet lineup change your flight – he's going to sit beside you. And no kidding he's strong. He has to carry himself around!

So people weren't just smitten by the looks of big men, they were smitten by the swords of big men. Being big was a kingly attribute in Samuel's day. It was a talent. But God says "Samuel, you are buying time shares. You don't need a stereo. You're being duped and misdirected by inconsequential attributes. Size doesn't make you kingly, it's what's in the heart that matters.

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Now we live in a society that has taken the superficial to ultimate places. We are constantly bombarded with images that define beauty. And with all the filters available, our culture is built on beauty that's skin deep and airbrushed.

And think of what this does to us. Think of how the dating apps work. They train us to look at people completely opposite to the way God sees them. It's all about the shape and quality of the skin and nothing about the character.

Did you know that on Tinder men take between 5.7 and 6.3 seconds to determine whether they are interested. Think of all the character traits you can successfully identify in 6 seconds. There are two of them.

Now women have more range in their selection speed. They take only 3.2 seconds to identify someone attractive while agonizing for 6.9 seconds before writing someone off. Of course, I've heard women don't actually swipe right, but that's another problem.

What's the point? The point is as we walk down the street we have fine tuned our skills to see the very opposite things God sees. God says, "People see the outward appearance, but the Lord sees the heart."

So be careful. Or maybe be aware. Especially I would say if you are in the "dating game." It's easy to look at 10 people and eliminate 6 as not up to par and then hope that the last 4 have some character. But this text is saying there's a good chance you will have written off your true prince or princess and been suckered by misdirection.

We live in a culture that excels at missing the characteristics that God sees as important. Character is important.

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Now if we stopped there it would be easy to think, “well, the difference between David and his brothers was simply that David had a golden heart while his brothers were a bunch of sinners. And that’s why God chose him. God’s just looking for people with outstanding character.”

But if you came to that conclusion then the rest of David’s story would be confusing. I mean how does a guy with outstanding character manage to lie, cheat, lust and murder with the skill David demonstrates? Really David’s not any better than Saul. So there is something else here. And we see it when David is anointed.

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So Samuel gets through Jesse’s seven sons, and every time God indicates that He doesn’t see them. And so Samuel is a bit confused and responds:

“The LORD has not chosen any of these.... Are these all the sons you have?” (1 Samuel 16:10)

And that’s when Jesse remembers, “Oh yeah! There is one more. But he’s out with the sheep. And Samuel says “Send for him. We aren’t sitting down until he gets here.” And when David arrives God tells Samuel “This is the one.” And then we read:

So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David from that day on. (1 Samuel 16:13)

The Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on. Now this is what makes David who he is. We talked about this last week: the closer we image God, the more like ourselves we become. God is what makes David who he is. Don’t miss this. The Spirit flooded David and this is the source of his kingly character.

This means kingly character isn’t a natural quality. People don’t get born this way. I mean have you ever met a two year old who just sees things from other people’s perspectives and loves to share toys? No! We all get born sea gulls from Finding Nemo – it’s all “Mine. Mine.” Saul is the default.

The kingly character Hannah sings of – the person who gives up their power to raise the poor and vulnerable from the ash heap – is not something people get born with. It’s something God births in us when He floods us with His Spirit.

But here’s the interesting thing about the Spirit of the Lord. You have to work in concert with Him to reap His reward. You see Saul got flooded with the Spirit too. In chapter 10 we read:

When Saul and his servant arrived at Gibeah, they saw a group of prophets coming toward them. Then the Spirit of God came powerfully upon Saul, and he, too, began to prophesy. When those who knew Saul heard about it, they exclaimed, “What? Is even Saul a prophet?” (1 Samuel 10:10-11)

So Saul has a profound encounter with God that happens at his anointing, but he doesn't dwell there. He doesn't maintain his connection with God. And the result is that he ends up using the power of God to his own advantage. He tears people down instead of raising them up from the ash heap.

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Without working with the infilling of God's Spirit to grow in kingly character, the power and position God gives us is a liability. Without character, power corrupts. But godly, kingly character comes from abiding with the King.

And this is what makes David different. We don't see it in this text, but we will in the weeks to come. While David is constantly failing and falling short, he is quick to repent and return to God. And it is this constant return that God sees and values.

Later David gets called "The man after God's own heart." But it's not that he started with any particular good character, it's that he followed the Spirit's leading and continued to invite God's Spirit to fill him. And this is the encouragement of the text.

If you are a Jesus-follower, then you've got Jesus' Spirit. But the games not over now, now it begins. So let God's Spirit keep coming powerfully upon you. This is where real life resides. The closer you image God – the more you grow in godly character, kingly character – the more like your true self you will be. The more like Jesus we become the more human we are. And it is in this journey to Christlikeness where life resides.

Friends, the happiest people aren't the richest or the most powerful or attractive. The happiest people aren't the ones who buy into the misdirection of society and chase more money or more affirmation or more power than they've got. There is no satisfaction to the hunger for more. It's a misdirection. It's a free gift attached to a time share. The happiness it promises isn't real.

Rather, the happiest people are those who find their identity in who God says they are and allow His Spirit to fill them and change them to look like Him. And they are the happiest people because they are living in reality, they haven't been misdirected.

Friends, Christlikeness is reality. Kingly character is what you were created to bear. And so the more you look like the king the more fulfilled your life will be.

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Now, full disclosure. If you want to grow in kingly character – and you should – then you need to know there is cost to it. When David gets filled with the Spirit his story changes from playing harp and shepherding sheep in the mountains to being taunted by giants and hunted by Saul. In weeks he is hiding in caves and running for his life. That's what happens when David gives himself to the filling of the Spirit.

But guess what. David doesn't regret his decision to allow the Spirit to fill him. As he runs for his life he says:

I will praise You, LORD, with all my heart;
 I will tell of all the marvelous things You have done.
 I will be filled with joy because of You....
 The LORD is a shelter for the oppressed,
 a refuge in times of trouble.
 Those who know Your name trust in You,
 for You, O LORD, do not abandon those who search for You. (Psalm 9:1-10)

David doesn't want to go back to the sheep. He loves what God is doing in him.

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When I was a kid people used to say "Never pray for patience, because God will give you an opportunity to built it." Have you heard that? I don't know where this saying came from, it circulated at our church. But what a terrible and misguided saying for Jesus-followers to repeat. Of course pray for patience. And rejoice in opportunities to built it, because patience is a kingly character trait.

And guess what. Guess who is happier in life: patient people or the guy sitting behind you at the traffic light one second after it has turned green? He's having an aneurism!

Friends, godly character is where joy resides. It's worth everything. So submit to the Spirit's filling and work with Him to pursue it. Chase Christlikeness in every aspect of your life because this is the good life God wants for you.

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Did you know that God is committed to your happiness. And God knows that the happiest any son or daughter of the King can be is when they look like their Father – when they develop His character.

And this is why the happiest life isn't one free from giants and caves. Character gets built fighting giants and living in caves! And God is committed to the growth of kingly character in you. So work with His Spirit to pursue this. Pray for it. And rejoice when you get the opportunity to built it. Kingly character is the path to joy, now how to get it.

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Kingly character is what matters, and we get it from the forgotten son. So Jesse has eight sons and he parades the first 7 in front of Samuel. And in Hebrew tradition 7 was a perfect number. It means complete. It means all of it. And so Samuel is surprised: "is this it?" And it's at this point that Jesse remembers. Ah!:

"There is still the youngest... (1 Samuel 16:11)

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The word "youngest" here does refer to age, but it also refers to a lack of importance. It's the least consequential. So it's like Jesse says "Well, there's still the runt of the family, but why worry about him? He smells like sheep and there is so little impressive about him that I didn't even see that I'd forgotten to call him. He's the 8th son.

Humanity defaults to not seeing what God sees. And actually all of scripture is full of this story. So God is constantly choosing the younger, the weaker and the uglier.

So it's Able not Cain. It's Jacob, not Esau. It's Isaac not Ishmael. And with women it's always the undesirable or the barren. So it's Sarah, not Hagar. It's Leah, not Rachel. It's Hannah. It's Tamar. It's Ruth. It's Rahab. Virtually every person God works through is unimpressive in some way. But God sees them. God loves to choose the ones the world forgets.

And that's because all their stories are actually part of the one story in the Bible. There's only one story. And here's the point: you can't develop godly, kingly character – and so live in God's joy – without knowing the Forgotten Son.

So when Samuel looks at Eliab and thinks "Surly this is the king." Surly this is God's anointed; God's messiah." That's what Samuel says. But it wasn't Eliab. And ultimately it wasn't David either.

And that's because there was another Son yet to come. And He too was forgotten and excluded. He too was kept out with the sheep. He too was anointed and then driven into the wilderness to be hunted, not by Saul but by Satan. And ultimately there was another who was not just forgotten by His father but forsaken. He cried out "My God, My God. Why have You forsaken Me?"

And Jesus was beautiful and worthy, but as the true King of Righteousness He lay all this down for us. He was excluded; He endured the wilderness; He faced temptation He was forsaken. And He gave up all His power and position in order to raise up the poor and powerless from the ash heap.

And if you know this King; and if let His Spirit fill you, and keep filling you, that is what will grow kingly character in you.

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My parents bought that time share and I got that stereo, and it was the cheapest stereo every made. And we never went back to Harrison.

So watch out for what the world is peddling. Everything in our society is built up around seeing value in the exact opposite places that God sees it. But we listen to the high pressure sales pitch at the risk of spiritual misdirection. So don't buy the lie. What sits on the surface is not what matters.

Instead let God's Spirit lead you to see what He sees. See the True King. Build your life on His kingliness. And if you will do this then His kingliness will flow into you. His Spirit will fill you. And He will transform you into His image. You will be like Jesus. Your character will be conformed to His character. And this will bring you the ultimate joy and meaning that you were created to long for. This is where real life resides.