

God Looks at the Heart (1 Samuel 16:7)

People tend to judge the character and worth of others by looking at outward appearances. First impressions are important but not necessarily correct.

If a person is tall, good-looking, well-built, and tastefully dressed, then he or she possesses physical qualities that humans generally admire and respect. Often these are the physical qualities we seek in a leader.

But God has the unique ability to see inside a person. God knows our true character because the Bible tells us that he “looks at the heart.”

We have been looking at some of the great characters in our Bible who are forerunners for Jesus, and now we come to one of the greatest, David.

In 1 Samuel 16, the time had come for Samuel to go to the house of Jesse in Bethlehem to anoint Israel’s next king. As Samuel looked at Jesse’s oldest son, Eliab, Samuel was impressed with what he saw. *“Surely, this is the man the Lord wants me to anoint,”* said the prophet (verse 6).

But God told Samuel, *“Don’t look at his appearance or how tall he is, because I have rejected him. God does not see as humans see. Humans look at outward appearances, but the LORD looks into the heart”* (1 Samuel 16:7, GWT).

Saul, Israel’s first king, was tall and handsome. Samuel may have been looking for someone like Saul, and Eliab’s appearance was quite striking. But God had a different man in mind to anoint as Israel’s king. The Lord had earlier revealed to Samuel that He sought a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

Samuel looked at all seven of Jesse’s older sons, but the Lord rejected them all as His choice for king. God was looking for one who had a faithful heart. David, Jesse’s youngest son, whom they had not even bothered to call, was out tending the sheep. After Samuel passed over the other sons, they sent for David, and the Lord said, *“This is the one”* (1 Samuel 16:12).

David was God’s choice—imperfect but faithful, a man after God’s heart. David had developed a heart after God. In his time alone in the fields,

shepherding the flocks, David had come to know God as his Shepherd (see Psalm 23).

Appearances can be deceiving. The outward appearance doesn't reveal what people are really like. Physical looks don't show us a person's value or character or integrity or faithfulness to God. Outward qualities are, by definition, superficial. However, moral and spiritual considerations are far more important to God.

God looks at the heart. He sees into your heart and my heart. We cannot hide anything from God.

The heart in Scripture is a person's inner moral and spiritual life. Proverbs 4:23 explains that everything we do flows from our hearts. The heart is the core, the inner essence of who we are: Jesus said, *"A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of"* (Luke 6:45).

To everyone who saw him, Judas Iscariot looked like a faithful disciple, but his appearance was deceiving. The other disciples had no idea of what was going on inside Judas's heart. Jesus was the only one who knew Judas's heart: *"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!"* (John 6:70). God's perspective is higher, deeper, and wiser than ours.

Second Chronicles 16:9 says the eyes of God are continually roaming throughout the earth to strengthen people whose hearts are fully committed to Him. God can peer into our hearts, examine our motivations, and know everything there is to know about us (Psalm 139:1). God knows if a person will be faithful. God sees what people can't see.

King David was far from perfect. He committed adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11). But God saw in David a man of deep, abiding faith who was wholly committed to the Lord. God saw a man who would depend on the Lord for strength and guidance (1 Samuel 17:45, 47; 23:2). God saw a man who would recognise his sin and failure and who would repent and ask the Lord for forgiveness (2 Samuel 12). God saw in David a man who loved his Lord; a man who worshiped his Lord with all his being (2 Samuel 6:14); a

man who had experienced God's cleansing and forgiveness (Psalm 51) and had come to understand the depths of God's love for him (Psalm 13:5–6; 106:1). God saw a man with a sincere and personal relationship with his Creator. When God looked at the heart of David, He saw a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

Like Samuel, we can't see what the Lord sees, and we must rely on Him for wisdom. And we can trust that, when God looks at our hearts, He sees our faithfulness, our true character, and our value as individuals.

This is the second Sunday of Lent and one of the great Lent stories is the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness; Jesus alone and at the mercy of the devil. Everything is stripped away and God looks into his heart.

We often think poor Jesus, 40 days without food, vulnerable and weak, and now the onslaught of temptation. But what we often miss with this story, is that Jesus went into the desert filled with the Spirit. He had been baptised by John and the Holy Spirit came upon him like a dove, and at that moment the spirit led him into the desert. So, Jesus went into the wilderness with the Spirit of God in his heart and that makes all the difference.

But after 40 days, without food, the Devil comes to him and begins a series of temptations. But what was Jesus doing for the 40 days? He was in fellowship with God.

The first temptation is to turn stones into bread. In the Palestinian desert, the limestones were small and round and looked like bread from Palestine, so the temptation was very real, *turn these stones into bread, if you are the Son of God.*

Jesus didn't give in to this temptation, for he saw that the most important thing in life was his relationship to his heavenly father and he knew that the Devil came to wreck this relationship, to undermine God's Fatherly care for him. The Devil wanted to do it, at the start of his ministry.

Jesus knew that God would supply all his needs and he knew that turning the stones into bread was to deny God and give in to the Devil and so he says, *"Man shall not live on bread alone."* He knew that it was what was in the heart that was of ultimate importance. Here is Jesus' first litmus test and he had two others, to undergo, which he passed.

God said to Samuel that the Lord doesn't look at outward appearances but he looks at the heart.

Lent is about looking deeper than the skin, looking deeper than the material, it's about looking at the heart and that's what Jesus' temptations were about, a stripping away of all the worldly props, a wilderness, a time of extreme deprivation and a testing time, out of his comfort zones and in these moments of testing we find who we truly are, and what we depend upon, the material or the spiritual.

God saw right into Jesus' heart and he saw the heart of a faithful Son.

This was the real test for Jesus, knowing that God looks deeper than we look and that God looks into the heart.

In conclusion, Samuel was sent by God to the house of Jesse to anoint a new ruler over Israel. He went there imagining that he was a shrewd judge of character, well able to discern God's will. He came away recognising that he had still much to learn about the ways of God, who sees far deeper than any of us ever begin to see. Samuel's experience counsels us never to judge by appearances and never to imagine that we have understood all there is to understand.

What does God see when he looks into Your heart, when all is stripped away and we are alone with God?

Today, let us remember that God doesn't judge by external appearance because he looks right into our hearts. Let us, this Lent, be honest, be open to the scrutiny of God and, where we need to repent, let us come before Him and fall on our knees and acknowledge our sin.

He will be there to meet us and to affirm us as his child.