A HEART AFTER GOD’S HEART

1 Samuel 16 & 17

By

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Lessons from David (1)

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We all like compliments. I think it was Mark Twain who said that he could live for a whole month on a good compliment. As a Christian I can think of no higher compliment than to be described as a man or woman with a heart after God’s heart. When that compliment comes from God Himself, we had better sit up and take notice! Here is a person whose life we can all profit by studying. Such was God’s description of David: “This is a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam. 13:14). Why would God put such a high affirmation on this man? How can I have a heart after God’s heart, like David had?

I trust that the study of David’s life in the next few weeks will be profitable to us all, but I hope it will be especially profitable to those who are teenagers and young adults. David was anointed as king by the prophet Samuel while he was still a teenager (although he did not assume the throne until he was 30). He was probably in his late teens when he slew the giant Goliath. Probably he wrote Psalm 23 and perhaps other psalms while he was still a teenager, watching his father’s sheep. The trials David went through at the hand of Saul occurred while David was in his twenties. So his life contains much instruction for those on the young side of life.

That’s especially important in our day when there is a common belief that teenagers are supposed to rebel. We expect it and it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. But it’s not a biblical norm. In Scripture, there are many examples, David being foremost, of young people with a heart for God. Sure, David lacked the wisdom of experience. He needed trials to refine and mature him. There were “sins of his youth” that he later would regret (Ps. 25:7). But God began to use David in a significant way while he was still in his teens. He can still do that. It is my prayer that God would use this series of messages to lay hold of many of our young people as well as adults, to help us all to develop a heart after God’s heart.
Today I’d like to focus on four qualities that marked David as a young man with a heart after God’s heart, which we must develop if we want to be men and women after God’s heart:

**To have a heart after God’s heart, we must be converted, be Spirit-filled, spend time alone with God, and be obedient in small things.**

1. **To have a heart after God’s heart, we must be converted.**

   It is most crucial at the outset to establish the fact that David was not by nature a man after God’s heart. He did not possess some inherent goodness which made God choose him. In Psalm 51:5 David declares, “I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me.” Every person who is converted recognizes that there is nothing in himself which commended him to God. By nature we all are sinners, in rebellion against God. We all are self-willed and self-seeking rather than seeking after God (Rom. 3:9-12, 23). No one deserves anything but judgment from God.

   And David was not made right before God by his own good deeds. In Psalm 32:1-2, David wrote, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.” The Apostle Paul quotes these verses in Romans 4:7-8 in the context of arguing that no one is made right with God by their own good works. Rather, it is by faith in God’s provision. So we would be off on the wrong track from the start if we assumed that David, by his own will power and effort was a man after God’s heart and that God chose him on that basis.

   Rather, conversion is God’s work, and He had performed that work in David’s heart. David didn’t choose God; God chose David and took him from the sheepfolds to shepherd His people (Ps. 78:70-71). While 1 Samuel 16 has reference to David’s anointing as king, not to his conversion, the clear point of the incident applies to God’s ways in salvation, namely, that God chooses those whom the world often overlooks or rejects. Samuel would have picked David’s older brothers, not David. David’s father didn’t consider his youngest son enough of a candidate even to bring him in from the fields. But David was God’s choice. Even
so, God chooses for salvation those whom the world would reject, so that none can boast before God (1 Cor. 1:27-31).

It’s enlightening to compare David and Saul on the matter of conversion. Whether Saul was genuinely converted or not is subject to debate, and perhaps we can never know for sure. He strikes me as an example of the seed sown on the thorny ground, which got choked out and did not bear fruit unto eternal life. But even so, Saul had some sort of dramatic spiritual experience in which “God changed his heart,” the Spirit of God came on him mightily, and he prophesied (1 Sam. 10:9-10). If David had a similar dramatic experience, it is not recorded in Scripture. Perhaps, like many who are converted in childhood, David could not put his finger on a date or describe a dramatic change.

But the subsequent lives of the two men lead in opposite directions. David followed the Lord; Saul’s course was marked by self-seeking and partial obedience under a veneer of spirituality (1 Sam. 13:8-14; 15:10-35). Although David had his share of sins, he always confessed and turned from them, whereas Saul compromised and made excuses. David was honored by God, but Saul ended his life in disgrace.

Genuine conversion may or may not be accompanied by some dramatic or emotional experience. Sometimes a person comes to Christ in a dramatic encounter, such as Paul on the Damascus Road. But at other times, a person cannot put his finger on the moment at which he was converted. Rather, he comes to a gradual awareness that God has done a work in his heart. But in every case, genuine conversion is a work of God in the human heart in which He imparts new life and a right standing before Him based on the work of Christ on the cross. It is not based upon human will power, but on the sovereign, unmerited favor and choice of God (John 1:13; Rom. 9:10-18; Eph. 1:4-5; 2:8-9; James 1:18).

I ask each of you to examine yourself in light of Scripture on this most crucial point. Hear me carefully: Growing up in a Christian home, being baptized, or joining a church does not mean that you’re converted. Praying to “invite Jesus into your heart,” making a decision for Christ, or having an emotional spiritual experience does not necessarily mean that you’re converted. Satan would want
nothing more than for some of you who attend this church regularly to think that you’re converted when you’re really not!

So how do you know if you’re truly converted? Paul exhorts, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!” (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter tells us, “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble” (2 Pet. 1:10).

Scripture gives a number of tests of whether faith is genuine or spurious (e.g., the whole book of 1 John): A truly converted person will have a growing sensitivity to and turning from sin (1 John 1:5-10). He will be growing in obedience to Christ and in love for His people (1 John 2:1-11). He will have a growing knowledge of and love for God’s truth as revealed in His Word (1 John 2:21-27). In short, he will be learning to turn from self-seeking and instead to seek the things of God (Luke 9:23-24).

One further thing: A converted person will not be apathetic about the things of God. Those who are complacent do not see their great need for God. But God says that such people do not know their true condition, that they are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, and that He will spew them out of His mouth unless they repent (Rev. 3:15-19).

My former church history professor likes to ask people, “What evidence do you have that God has been merciful to your soul?” It’s a probing question! Don’t give rest to your soul until you can answer it. David was a young man after God’s heart because he had been truly converted by God. Everything else is built on this.

2. **To have a heart after God’s heart, we must be Spirit-filled.**

Note 1 Samuel 16:13. Before Pentecost, the Spirit of God did not permanently indwell all believers as He does in the present age of grace. Rather, He came upon certain ones to enable them to perform certain roles or tasks. He also could and did leave those who did not walk uprightly (1 Sam. 16:14; Ps. 51:11). When Samuel anointed David for the throne, the Holy Spirit came upon him
mightily from that day forward. David was a markedly different young man because of the Holy Spirit.

If you are truly converted, you have the Holy Spirit indwelling you (Rom. 8:9). But if you’re tolerating sin in your life or are living to please yourself rather than God, you are quenching or grieving the Spirit. You must confess all known sin and yield consciously and continually to the Holy Spirit so that He will produce His fruit in your life (Gal. 5:16-23).

A good question to ask is, “If the Holy Spirit were to withdraw from my life, how long would it take me to miss Him?” Am I so routine, so self-dependent, that I could go on for weeks and never realize that the Spirit had departed? Also, we need to be careful to realize that the prime mark of a Spirit-filled life is not miraculous signs and wonders, but rather the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and joyful endurance in times of trial (Col. 1:11-12). To be a man or woman after God’s heart, we must be truly converted and we must walk daily in dependence on the Holy Spirit.

3. **To have a heart after God’s heart, we must spend time alone with God.**

David was out in the field with his father’s sheep when a messenger, out of breath, came running up and said, “The prophet Samuel is with your family and he wants you to come!” So David went and to everyone’s bewilderment, Samuel anointed David (1 Sam. 16:1-13). I doubt if anyone except Samuel understood at that time the full significance of that act. But they knew it meant something. Then Samuel went back to Ramah (16:13). And where did David, the newly anointed king, go? Back to his sheep (16:19)! And what did he do out in the fields with those sheep? Fortunately, he didn’t have a Walkman or Watchman, or we wouldn’t have the Psalms! David used that time alone to develop his relationship with God.

Psalm 23 probably flowed out of those quiet times with God. Psalm 19 may also have been written while sitting out in the fields, meditating on God’s revelation through creation and through His written Word. David probably had a scroll of Moses’s writings which he read and thought about as he was in the fields. He also
used that time to develop his skill as a musician (16:18), expressing his feelings of adoration toward God through psalms.

If you’re married with children at home, you probably will have to fight to make time to spend alone with the Lord. If you’re single, you’ll have to fight to use the time you have alone for spiritual growth rather than to yield to temptation. For most of my twenties, I was alone. I spent three months living and working in Chicago and another three months with the Coast Guard in the Oakland area. I had a lot of alone time in wicked cities where I knew almost no one else. I easily could have fallen into sin and nobody would have known.

I had to commit myself to use that time to seek the Lord. During my Coast Guard days, on my evenings off I used to take a Christian book and my Bible, drive over to a Denny’s near the base, drink coffee and read until about 10 p.m. On the way back to the base, there was a deserted section of road along the waterfront where I’d pull off and pray for a while. It was a lonely time, but I look back on it favorably because it was a time of growth in the Lord.

If we want to be men and women after God’s heart, we must spend consistent time alone with Him. Some people can’t stand to be alone. They fill every moment with noise from the radio or TV. They feel a need to be around people constantly. But you won’t grow in the things of God unless you spend time alone with Him. Let me make four practical suggestions in this regard:

Learn to read. I haven’t always been a reader. God used a friend to challenge me to start reading books to strengthen my spiritual life, and now I can’t find enough time to read. Remember, reading is a learned skill. Even if you aren’t good at it now, you can learn. Perhaps you should begin by taking a reading course at the library or by reading a book on how to read better. But once you learn to read, it opens up treasures from the greatest Christians of all time. Nothing has helped my spiritual life more than reading.

What should you read? First and foremost, read your Bible! Read it over and over again, cover to cover. The godly George Muller read his Bible over 200 times. He read through his Hebrew Old Testament seven times! As you read, don’t do it to check it off
your list of things to do. Read prayerfully, asking God to reveal Himself and to show you your own heart, with a view to obedience. If you’ve never done it, 1993 would be a good time to read the entire Bible in a year.

Also, read Christian classics. Don’t waste your time on a lot of the modern junk being written. Go to authors who are solid theologically, who have a heart of devotion for God. Read Pilgrim’s Progress, by John Bunyan. Read some of Spurgeon’s sermons or the writings of J. C. Ryle. Read J. I. Packer’s A Quest for Godliness, which will open you up to the writings of the Puritans. Become a reader and your heart after God will grow! (I have a reading list available if you’re interested.)

Learn to pray. Use alone time to commune with God. Read and pray the Psalms, which reflect David’s communion with God. Study the Lord’s prayer and Paul’s prayers as models. I keep a prayer list, but I figure that God can read my list. I try to learn to commune with Him in prayer.

Learn to worship. Our public worship on Sundays should be an overflow of our private worship. Learn to adore God and marvel at His love in your time alone with Him. Express yourself by singing (you might have to be really alone to do this!). We forget sometimes that the Psalms were not just poems, they were put to music. God seeks those who worship Him.

Learn to think. You can’t think if you’re never alone with God. Learn to evaluate life in light of His Word. Think through current events, things you read, things others say, your current circumstances, your goals, and your family needs in light of God’s truth.

To have a heart after God’s heart, we must be converted; be Spirit-filled; spend time alone with God. Finally,

4. **To have a heart after God’s heart, we must be obedient in small things.**

When we first encounter David, he is tending his father’s sheep, a job his older brothers looked down on (1 Sam. 17:28). David’s father didn’t even consider David important enough to be included at the big event with Samuel (16:11). But God saw David’s faithfulness in this seemingly unimportant task. It was part
of his apprenticeship for leading the nation (Ps. 78:70-72). He took
his job seriously. When a predator attacked one of the sheep,
David didn’t shrug his shoulders and say, “Oh, well, I’m not going
to risk my neck for that dumb sheep!” He went after it and rescu-
ced it (17:34-35).

Later, Saul heard of David’s skill as a musician and summoned
him to the palace. I’m sure that as David played his harp out in the
fields, he never dreamed that it would someday open the door for
him to play before King Saul. But, when it did, David served well
in this more important task (1 Sam. 16:14-23).

Then came war with the Philistines. David’s older brothers
joined Saul on the battlefield. But where was David? Back tending
his father’s sheep again, and serving as errand boy for his father
(17:14-15). When Jesse wanted David to go find out about his
brothers’ welfare, he carefully made provision for his shepherding
responsibilities and obeyed his father without complaint (17:20).

When David got to the battlefront and heard of Goliath’s
blasphemous challenge, he began asking some questions (17:26).
This threatened David’s oldest brother, who put David down with
a sarcastic question (17:28). David easily could have returned insult
for insult: “Some battle, you coward! Why don’t you go out after
Goliath?” But instead, David held his tongue (17:29-30). He was
learning obedience in his speech (16:18).

None of these things represent any big deal. But they all
combine to show that as a teenager David was learning to be obe-
dient to God in the insignificant situations where God placed him.
He was already anointed by the great prophet Samuel. He could
have said, “I’m not going back to those silly sheep. Get a servant
to do it!” Or, “I’m not your errand boy! I’m the future king!”

Obedience in small things may not seem like much, but it’s
like the small strands that are woven together to make a rope. We
all tend to sit around wishing that God would use us for some im-
portant task, like slaying Goliath, not realizing that it’s obedience in
the small, everyday tasks God sets before us that weave together to
make the rope that enables us to bring down Goliath. The moral
fiber which enables us to attack and defeat the huge problems in
life is made up of the strands of obedience in the little moral
choices that confront us daily: integrity, controlling wrong thoughts, guarding our speech, controlling anger, submitting to authority.

Conclusion

I once heard a pastor tell of an opportunity he had to speak to the national directors of a large mission organization. He was scheduled to speak at 1 p.m. A friend from the mission picked him up and as they drove to the conference center, the pastor asked how the morning had gone. It turned out that the directors had been divided and had some heated debates over some policy matters—not an ideal setting to minister!

The pastor began by asking the men to bow their heads and to raise their hands if they had spent time alone with God that morning. Remember, these were top mission officials! But only a few hands out of many went up. So the pastor took some time for them to spend quietly before God before he spoke. Then he insisted that they spend three hours the next morning in the Word and prayer before he came to speak at 1 p.m. At first they balked, protesting that they had too much work to do. But he stuck to his guns. He said that they were a different group of men the next day when he got up to speak!

Do you want God’s supreme compliment applied to you—that you are a person after God’s heart? Make sure you’re truly converted. Depend consciously each day on the Holy Spirit. Spend time alone with God often. And, practice obedience in the small things He gives you to do. That’s how God developed David from a shepherd boy to a great king. Every person who has a heart after God’s heart must walk the same way.

Discussion Questions

1. How can a person have assurance that he/she is genuinely converted? Use Scripture in your answer.
2. How can we be filled with the Holy Spirit? Again, use Scripture to answer.
3. How can a Christian have quality times alone with God?
4. Should we obey God even if we don’t feel like it? Isn’t this legalism or hypocrisy?

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