



## WHEN GOD MAKES A CHOICE

*Jeff Peabody  
New Day Church  
Federal Way, WA  
April 23, 2006*

Did you hear the news report this week about the woman they're calling AJ? She's 40 years old and she can remember almost every single day of her life since 1974. You can give her a date and she can tell you what day of the week it was, what she did that day and any major world events that might have been happening at that time. She says it's like a movie that's always playing in her brain and never stops. Doctors have been able to verify that she's telling the truth, because she kept extensive journals since the time she was about 10.

Scientists are calling it the first case like this that they've ever learned about. I'm glad to hear that, because it's a little disturbing to think how far I am from that. Most of the time, I can't even remember what happened yesterday. People will ask me on Monday, "How was your weekend?" I'll say "Great!" Then they'll ask, "What did you do?" And then I'll give them a blank stare as I try to rack my brain for details.

All my memories about when my kids were little tend to blur together, too. I get confused about which of them did what when they were 9 months old. Fortunately, Karin has kept notebooks on each of them, jotting down a few great moments every now and then so we don't forget.

I was thinking about that as I was preparing this week's message, and I'm so glad that somebody thought to take really good notes on the life of King David. We have a ton of information spanning most of his life. He has more pages devoted to him than almost anybody else in the Bible. Plus, he wrote many of the Psalms himself, so we not only have his biography -- we have his own words as well.

Every December, Barbara Walters comes out with her list of the most fascinating people for the year, but I think David would make the list of the most fascinating people of all time. His approach to everything he did was always full throttle. You get the sense that if he were alive today, he'd be into extreme sports, because he operated at this high intensity level. All these events that took place in his life were full of action and drama.

That makes for good reading. But what's so great about David is that even though he is a larger than life hero, he's not portrayed as perfect. In fact, all his flaws are talked about openly. Nobody tries to cover up for him. He shares his own raw, honest feelings

throughout the Psalms. That's what makes him so relatable – we can identify with his doubts and his fears, his failures and his loneliness.

The other thing that's really remarkable about him is that he's the one in the Bible who is said to be a man after God's own heart. If his life were a movie, it would be rated R (for more than just language), but he is held up as an example of what God is looking for.

Think about that for a minute. If you had to pick somebody you thought God would really, really, REALLY like, how would you describe them? Would they live in a monastery, reading their Bible all day? Would they be people who never messed up? God defies our expectations and singles out someone who was totally human and says, "here's a man after my own heart." Hopefully as we get to know David we'll discover what it was about him that God appreciated.

Author Eugene Peterson says this about David. "As an instance of humanity in himself, he isn't much. He has little wisdom to pass on to us on how to live successfully. He was an unfortunate parent and an unfaithful husband. From a purely historical point of view he was a barbaric chieftain with a talent for poetry. But David's importance isn't in his morality or his military prowess but in his experience of and witness to God. Every even in his life was a confrontation with God."

I'm excited about this series, because there is so much of David's experience that applies to our own. You don't have to work very hard to find connections between your own life and his. We can identify with what he did wrong and find encouragement in what he did right.

I'm not sure if you knew this or not, but it's BYOB month at New Day: Bring Your Own Bible. Since so much of this story is contained in just a few books of the Bible, I would highly encourage you to take this opportunity to bring your Bible to church on Sundays and follow along with the text. If you're like most people and you struggle with finding your way around the Bible, this will be great practice, because we won't be jumping around very much, and once you find it for one week, you'll be able to find it for the next.

If you don't have a Bible that's easy to read, help yourself to one from the back table. That's what they're there for. If you'll use it, you can have it for your very own. They're great Bibles that are the same version we put up on the screen most of the time, and they have a lot of additional reference tools to help you understand what you're reading.

Most of the stories we'll focus on are found in the books of 1 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel. Samuel is another major figure in the Bible, and a little history review of his life will help set the backdrop for our time with David.

Samuel was the little boy whose mother had dedicated him to God, so he was raised by the priest Eli in the Jewish Temple. From the time he was young, he was incredibly

perceptive to God's voice. God started giving him messages for the people of Israel, and they all would come true. So Samuel rose to be a prophet and then a judge in Israel.

By "judge" I really mean he was the key leader of Israel. They didn't have a king or a president, and that was on purpose. God wanted his people to remember that he was the one in charge, that he was their king. So for many years, they had a series of judges who handled the government administration.

But the people felt weird about that. They wanted royalty. They wanted to be like the countries around them and have a king to go out and lead them into battles.

So when Samuel reached about 65 years of age, the people said, "You're getting to retirement age. You can't keep going forever. Your sons don't want to follow in your footsteps, and quite honestly, we don't want you to appoint another judge. We want you to give us a king to rule us."

Samuel resisted and resisted, reminding the people WHY they didn't have a king. But they didn't give up, and finally, God said, "This isn't about you Samuel. They've rejected me – not you. Go ahead and give them what they want."

So Samuel names a young man named Saul to be king. Here's how the Bible describes him.

### **1 Samuel 9:1-2**

*There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish...He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites -- a head taller than any of the others.*

Saul just looked kingly. He was big and strong – the perfect picture for putting on your money and for building statues. He fit the bill for what the people wanted.

But he had an ego as tall as he was, and about 15 years into his reign, he made a choice to not carry out what God asked him to do. So God rejected him as king, and Samuel found himself once again in a spot of needing to name a king. So it is when Samuel is roughly 80 years old that David enters the story. God hand picked him to be king.

This morning what I'd like to look at is just that fact. How did God choose David? How does God choose us? Everybody in the story found themselves surprised by God's decision. What was so surprising about it and how does that impact us?

### **1 Samuel 16:1-13**

*The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."*

*But Samuel said, "How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me."*

*The LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate."*

*Samuel did what the LORD said.*

Let's stop right there for a minute. It says here that Samuel was feeling badly about Saul. There had been a big blow-up between the two of them when Saul chose to disobey God, and we're told that Samuel never saw Saul again after that.

Here was a man that Samuel had put in power – the very first king Israel had ever had, and now Samuel was going to be the one to say that power was going to transfer to somebody else.

I'm not sure what Samuel felt, but I know what I'd be feeling. I'd wonder if I had made a colossal mistake anointing Saul in the first place. I would wonder if I could have handled things differently when Saul made that bad choice. Maybe I could have reached a solution if I hadn't been so angry. Maybe I could have found a way to get him to change his attitude. I would replay the scenario over and over in my head and wish that things could have been different.

Samuel is living with regret. But God pulls him up short and says, "Fill your horn with oil, and be on your way." Samuel learns the first lesson about God's choice, and that is to

### **Look forward, not back**

How many times have you found yourself in a spot like Samuel? We love to live in the past. We can't get over our bad choices, our missed opportunities and the things that could have been different. We obsess over things we can't change and let them consume us with guilt and grief. God says, "Let go of the past. It's behind you now. Keep looking forward. Pick yourself up and be on your way."

Most of us have a very different concept of God in our heads. He's the stern, old man, pointing a finger and yelling at us for what we've done wrong. He's old fashioned and wants things to always stay the same. I've got news for you: God isn't the one who's stuck in the past. He's forward thinking. He's progressive. He has a new plan for a new day, and we need to keep up.

If Jesus' death on the cross accomplished anything for us, it was to provide forgiveness for our sins. That forgiveness is complete. If we're willing to accept that generous offer, God says he will forget our sin. And if he can get beyond our past, that gives us the freedom to move beyond it as well.

*When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, "Do you come in peace?"*

That's pretty transparent, isn't it? As soon as they see God's messenger, they assume it's bad news. Here there's about to be the biggest and best thing that's ever happened in this town and they're thinking, "Oh no. It's God. I wonder what's wrong this time."

In medicine, there is a tendency for some doctors to come up with a strange and obscure diagnosis for ordinary symptoms. Dr. Theodore Woodward, who was a professor at the University of Maryland, called those diagnoses "zebras", because he said, "When you hear hoofbeats, think horses, not zebras." Don't jump to the strange conclusion when there's a much more obvious answer.

When I was in Jr. High and would go to church camp, the speakers would get up there and talk about living for God, and I would always be very convicted and was always worried that if I responded positively, God was going to want to send me to the most remote village in whatever climate was the harshest with the worst food to eat and the biggest bugs. It was all about the sacrifices I would have to make.

But God's involvement in our lives is usually a horse – not a zebra. There are the occasions when he has tough news and discipline. He may very well be calling some of us to go to far away places for him. But we don't need to think that every time he wants to speak to us it will be painful. He loves us and wants to give us good gifts. We don't need to be waiting for the other shoe to drop. We should be looking for horses, not zebras.

*Samuel replied, "Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.*

*When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD."*

*But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

*Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, "The LORD has not chosen this one either." Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, "Nor has the LORD chosen this one." Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, "The LORD has not chosen these."*

I think the lesson of this section is to **look for the steak, not the sizzle**. This point gets hammered home to Jesse's sons as one after another of them stands before Samuel and hears the same message. "Not this one." Even their names give a little commentary on what's going on. Eliab means "God is my father" – a bold, statement, as confident as his belief that he would be the chosen one. Then he's rejected. A little crack in the confidence appears with Abinidab, whose name means "my father is willing." There's

more of a question in his mind. If God's willing, I could be the one. Things are a little shaky after his big brother got rejected.

Then comes Shammah, which means "astonishment." Nobody could believe how things were progressing. How could God not be choosing any of them?

Things started out so promisingly. Samuel took one look at Eliab and went, "Wow! God knew what he was doing here. This guy's king material."

Then God makes his famous statement: Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

I've always thought of that statement in relationship to David and what God saw in him, but the first context was when Eliab was in front of him. It's the OPPOSITE case here. He was all a good show on the outside, but inside his heart was not right.

Eliab was relying on a bunch of external factors – his looks, his height, the fact that he was the oldest. He assumed that all those qualities would be enough. They had served him well so far in life, and they were what most people cared about. But God looked right past all his best stuff to what was underneath. And he wasn't very impressed.

When I was 17, I discovered hair gel and started wearing my hair like Duran Duran. I went through a phase my senior year in high school where I honestly believed girls would not like me if I didn't have cool hair. Sadly, I had no idea girls didn't like me anyway. But I was so insecure in my own person that I pinned my identity on something very shallow.

I'm not so sure things are all that different as an adult. We work really hard at the external stuff, making sure we let other people know the things we think they'll be impressed with. Whether that's a job, a car, a house, what we're good at, who we're friends with...It's all sizzle. God says "Concentrate on the steak. Focus on what's in your heart, because honestly – it's in need of work."

God has given us everything we have – he's not impressed by any of it. He cares about who we're becoming, how our soul is shaping up.

Seven times over, the brothers get the message. When they've finally gone through the family, Samuel is a little bewildered.

*So he asked Jesse, "Are these all the sons you have?"*

*"There is still the youngest," Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep."*

*Samuel said, "Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives."*

It's Jesse's turn to learn a lesson here. I think God is saying to him,

**Look for what you've missed.**

David hadn't even been invited to the party. It's one thing to be the youngest in the family and to be the last in line for consideration. But he wasn't even on the radar. He wasn't even an afterthought.

That speaks volumes about how David was treated in the family. He was the kid brother who should just be kept out of sight. He was a pain. One more mouth to feed. Best to just put him somewhere he could do the least amount of damage.

Even when Samuel raises the question of there being any more sons, Jesse resists. "Well, yeah, there is one. But he's tending the sheep. He's busy. You mean we have to send somebody all the way out to the back field to call him in? Come on, Samuel. Trust me. He's my least likely son to be what you want."

Now there's a message in there about how we dismiss people and discount what God can do through them. I'm really guilty of that. I pride myself on having good intuition about people, but I've learned over and over again the hard way that I cannot limit what God can do.

When I was first starting seminary, they had an orientation class. People there were from a lot of different kinds of churches – Presbyterians, Methodists, Assembly of God. I don't care much about church brand names, but we're affiliated with the Columbia Baptist Conference and there was one other guy in the class from the same denomination. We kind of got lumped together because of that, and I can remember not wanting much to do with him. He looked so...Baptist. He was wearing a suit jacket for crying out loud and had this goofy grin on his face. I immediately labeled him and decided I didn't want much to do with him.

Did God ever show me how wrong I was. All my presuppositions about what he would be like were totally off. He turned out to be even less Baptist than me, and I now consider him one of my dearest lifelong friends. I had written him off and God has used him over and over again in my life.

We do that all the time with people. But I think there's a second message here as well. Just like Jesse had to look deeper into his own family to see what he may have overlooked, God asks each of us to look deeper into our own lives to see what we've dismissed. What have we assumed God isn't interested in? What about our lives do we think he could NEVER choose to work with?

When I used to lead music at our old church, I had a friend who was a talented guitar player, but who never wanted to play in church. For him, his guitar represented a chapter in his life he was not proud of, and he couldn't see God redeeming it for something new. Maybe you've got something in your past – a loss, a sin, an addiction – something that

feels unusable to you. That may be the very thing God has chosen. He can use your experience to help someone else, to impact other lives. When we say to him, “Oh you don’t really want THAT,” we miss out on so much. What have we overlooked that we can bring to him?

*So he sent and had him brought in. He was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.*

*Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one."*

*So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.*

The final lesson of this event was for David himself. What he took away from this experience was encouragement to

**Look at what God thinks of you.**

For years, he had been the baby of the family. Seven big brothers could really give a guy an inferiority complex. He was the smallest, the youngest, the last to know about anything. If he was an afterthought at this party, he was probably an afterthought at most parties. He spent long hours off by himself with the sheep, facing some pretty dangerous conditions on his own.

All those factors send messages. You’re nobody special. You’re worthless. You’re a pain. You’re in the way. You’re a hassle.

Then God comes along and says, “You’re the one I want.” And all the other voices start to fade away. God knew who David was and he liked him. He believed in him. He singled him out and valued him and honored him.

That’s life changing. The Bible says that from that point on, there was a new power in David’s life. His situation didn’t change immediately – he went right back to changing sheep. This wasn’t a coronation ceremony. But he now knew that God was with him on a different level, and he was never the same.

Whose voice do you hear in your head this morning? What defines how you see yourself? Are you looking at yourself through the eyes of a mom or dad who was never satisfied with what you did? Maybe you hear your boss or your spouse or someone else.

God is looking at you and saying, “You’re the one I want. I love who you are. I loved you enough to send my son to die for you. You have worth and value to me – no matter what anyone else thinks.”

When we grasp that truth, that kind of message has the power to change us. It raises our own expectations for ourselves. We aren’t limited by the opinions other people have of us. It was so empowering for David that he would go on to write,

**Ps 18:29**

*With your help I can advance against a troop;  
with my God I can scale a wall.*

Running and leaping with incredible, superhuman strength. That's what David felt like he could do, now that God was on his side.

It's different than Eliab – it's not self confidence based on our own abilities and strengths. It's confidence in just how secure God's love is for us. He proved it once and for all with Jesus. When we invite Christ into our hearts, then there's no wondering or guessing what God will see when he looks there. He'll see Jesus.

God chooses us, just like he chose David. To help that reality sink in, ask yourself:

1. Am I looking forward? Is there some regret or grief that is keeping me focused on the past? God calls us to forget what is behind and press on toward the goal, to accept his forgiveness and move ahead. What do I need to release to him?
2. Am I focused on sizzle or steak? What matters most to me in my life? Am I spending all my energy maintaining a good image but falling apart inside? That's where God looks. What's going on for me below the surface?
3. What have I overlooked? Who or what in my life have I assumed God can't use? Ask God to open your heart and mind, to show you what you've been blind to.
4. What voice am I listening to? Is it the sound of someone telling me I'm not important, or is it God saying I'm the one he's chosen? What will shape how I see myself?