

Do you remember Dana Carvey's impersonation of George Bush senior? "He seemed to have all the inflections down, the hand gestures," and the phrases he made famous, which I don't believe Bush ever said, like: "not gonna do it." And this one:

"What this country needs is character, and I am a character!"

That double meaning of the word "character" is the reason I've entitled this series "Characters". In the next four weeks, as we study some awesome lives from God's Word, we're going to see character: virtue, courage, strength, passion for God. But we're going to see this character housed in "characters": that is, people who are fallible, sinful, fearful, complaining, unsuspecting.

1. PASSION FOR GOD

And the first such Character with Great Character is David. We first meet David while SAUL the first king of Israel is still in power. Samuel is visiting the house of Jesse, David's father, because God told him to go there to anoint a new king,

a king of God's own choosing.

You see, in one sense, Saul was the people's choice for king. You know we have the People's Choice awards, and then we have the Academy Awards... and everyone knows that the people's choice is much less prestigious than being chosen by the select Academy?

Well, the people chose Saul but God chose David, and this is very telling. Let's look at these two choices. Saul was a man of impressive

bearing. He was clearly a foot taller than his peers, so probably close to 7 feet tall. He looked the part of a king. He came from a prominent family, the Bible says his father was a man of standing.

1 Sam 9:2 Saul, an impressive young man ***without equal*** among the Israelites

That's a good choice, don't you think? That's the people's choice right there. But after a few years, the people's choice wasn't working out so hot. So God makes his choice and he picks David. Now, what's the difference between the people's choice and God's choice?

We find the difference revealed when God rips the dynasty from Saul. Through the prophet Samuel he tells him:

1 Sam 13:14 [Saul,] your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man ***after his own heart...***

Despite his obvious outer gifts, Saul had "played the fool!" He admits it near the end of this life. How has he played the fool?

I had God on my side, and I was the pick of the litter in Israel, but I acted like God didn't exist. I neglected godly advice from godly friends, I didn't consult God for my life decisions, I thought God wasn't serious about his commands. I was the people's choice. But the people didn't know the inside of me.

And that right there is the difference between the people's choice and God's choice: the inside. The heart. God is looking for men and woman like David – not who are perfect, but about whom it might be said,

"They are a man, or a woman AFTER God's own heart."

Samuel learns just how important the difference between people's choice and God's choice is when he goes to anoint the next king. It just so happens that Jesse has many strapping sons. When Samuel comes, Jesse shows them off. First, Eliab. Samuel looks and thinks:

This is the one! I mean I'm looking at the future king right here!

No, he feels the check of the Holy Spirit inside. Not him. Why not him? He's the oldest son, he's a warrior. He **looks** like a king. But we're going to find out he's critical and negative and he has no faith. So next. Abinidab, the second oldest, as impressive as the first.

Another nudge in the spirit, 'no, not him.'" Next: Shammah. Nope! There's 8 brothers to go through, and suddenly in the middle of this God, teaches Samuel a lesson that we ought to memorize:

Samuel, do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, for 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. 1 Sam. 16:7

This is the difference between the people's choice and God's choice: The heart. We like, Samuel get enamored with the outside, when God looks at the internals. Not only do we and Samuel have a hard time looking past externals, so did Jesse. When Samuel asked to see his sons, Jesse forget to get his 8th and youngest son.

It's like a Cinderella moment right there. Jesse's saying, what do you want with him, he's too young and all he does is tend sheep. But now Samuel gets it and he says,

What does it matter how young he is or what he does... go get him!
And the Bible says David came in from the field and the Lord whis-

pered to Samuel's spirit these words,

“Arise and anoint him; for this is the one.” This teenager, a boy among men, this unsuspecting, nobody whom even his own father forgot about, is a man after my own heart.

Now before we move on in the story, let's take a time out for reflection. Do you want to be useable to God? In the NT, Paul tells Timothy that we ought seek to be

2 Tim 2:21 an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

So that when God has a job and he goes looking for a man or a woman after his own heart, he knows that among the useful instruments he can pick up at a moments notice, you are on that list. I get a call this week, from a friend of mine who can't contain himself. He calls me and this is what he says:

I've got the Holy Spirit jitters!

What are Holy Spirit jitters? It's that feeling, a trembling in your soul when you know God is using to do something special. In this case, the man was at work where he cares for geriatrics. One old lady this day was especially despondent. So how much should he you say? How much do you bring faith into it?

He decided to take a risk and talked to her about God's love, and how he has a plan, and how he cares and with other words he encouraged her. And then God nudges his soul and says, “do more.” And so he offers to this woman in his place of work, to pray for her. But not only that, he gathers 10 other people he works with and my friend leads a prayer meeting to encourage an old saint who thinks God's forgotten her...

(invite etc).

Now, that's someone just ready, to be God's agent... but what you don't know is that like many of us here, my friend, is kind of a David... you look on the outside, you look at his recent history, and you think,

I don't know if he's the right man for an important job like that. And God would say, "you look on the outside, but I look on the inside."

And I'm searching for Christ followers whose hearts are **fully committed** to me, whose hearts are pointed in my direction.

Not people who are perfect, or have spotless pedigrees, who have never sinned. No I'm looking for people who are "just say the word, followers of Jesus Christ..." That's the kind of person God uses. Friend are you available to God? I mean really, if he wanted you right now to pack up and move across the country, across the world, would you go?

Are you mobile? Are you usable? Is your heart after God's own? Let me tell you, it starts in the little things... For it's in the little things that prove the direction of our hearts.

I take you back to Saul... he was impatiently jumping ahead of God, doing it on his own, ignoring godly counsel, little things that proved his heart was not after God. So friend what about the little stuff? Is there

- justified little sins?
- The nagging lack of follow spiritual through?
- A complaining spirit?
- A greater fear of people or circumstances than fear of God?

Friend, then you might be a great people's choice, but God will say, where is your heart? But know this... if you are not the people's

choice... you don't have the appearance of a great warrior or saint... who cares? God looks on the heart... that's all that matters. As God crafts a heart in you that will be AFTER his own.

2. WAITING ON GOD

Now back to the story... After David is anointed, he doesn't go and get new business cards printed that say, "David, Future King" What does he do? He goes back to the field! There already is a king. He must figure, if God wants me to be king, then I guess he'll have to get busy. And God does in fact get busy:

- first he arranges for David to observe the Philistine champion, the 9 foot tall Goliath on the battle field calling curses onto God's people. David wasn't looking for a fight, but when he saw that scene, he knew he had to do something. So he did, with a sling shot and 5 smooth stones and a gut full of faith.
- Second from the moment the giant fell, David became a national hero and drew the attention of then King Saul.
- Third Saul drew him as a special musician and attendant, and without him realizing it, made David a sort of king in training.

You see, God getting it done? David doesn't have to manipulate God's hand... he just has to be faithful and obedient. Saul on the other hand... is the exact opposite. When he realizes that David is being blessed more and more, he flies into a rage. He tries to kill David more than once. Then, he pursues him into the wilderness and caves for 12 years.

Through all of this, David is amazingly patient. Don't get me wrong, he agonizes (Ps 54), but he lets God have his way. That's not to say that when Saul started chucking spears that David didn't duck! He did duck and he did run. Jesus says to his followers, be shrewd. He commends

the use of our brains, to be discerning and wise.

But we know there's a difference between that, and trying to take control away from God. God says trust me! Saul would not and it drives him to want to murder David, and then in two final acts of rebellion against God: sorcery and suicide. At the end of his life, we see that Saul who tried to control things more and more, never really had control. He had surrendered it to the enemy.

David had surrendered to God. Humbly, trusting and waiting on God. During the twelve years of Saul hunting him down, David had two chances to kill him. His men urged him to do it. Come on, they said,

“you're supposed to BE king, God anointed you! Take control, take charge!”

But he would not! This is what he says to them: 1 Sam 26:10

As surely as the LORD lives,” he said, “the LORD himself will strike [Saul]; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.

Do you see why he's called a man after God's own heart? Because a man who trusts God knows that he can't break God's commands to accomplish God's will. Do Christians not do that at times, practice an ends do not justify the means, Christianity?

- If we're getting the gospel out, we can be manipulative and disrespectful.
- If we save babies, then we can kill the Abortion Dr's
- If we provide for our family, we can go along with the shady business deal
- If we want to get married, we can marry the non-Christian

- If we have a great ministry idea, we can bypass accountability.
- If we want to comfort that person we can listen to gossip.

No. Not if we're children after God's own heart. Romans 3:8 says that it's not ever right to do evil that good may result. No, David trusted God and waited on him. So when Saul died, he was crowned king. **But wait, only the tribe of Judah endorsed him.** The rest of Israel crowned one of Saul's sons king.

For 7 years he waited on God's timing to make him king over all Israel. **7 years.** David waited, but his friends didn't. His military commander, Joab, thought David would be real happy if he killed Abner the commander of Israel's army. Other friends thought David would be happy if they killed Ishbosheth, Saul's son.

David had them both punished. Why? Because he was content to wait on God's timing. No wonder he would later write Ps 37:3-7:

3 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him

3. BROKEN BEFORE GOD

Now, back to the story. David was not perfect. How many of you know that king David has had a major moral fall? Most of us. But if I asked you, was that fall some kind of sudden, totally unpredictable thing or was it a long time in coming? I bet most of us would think it was a total surprise given that David was a man after God's own heart.

But it wasn't. Emily Dickinson wrote a poem about moral falls:

- crumbling is not an instant's act
- a fundamental pause;
- Dilapidation's processes
- Are organized decays

"Organized decays", a decay that starts way back during his time of running from Saul. You see, David, is a man of passion, and hence, an amazing warrior, a prolific poet and a ***polygamist***. Yes, David violated God's direct command by collecting a whole mess of wives by the time he's 30.

You see, way back before Israel had a king, (Deut 17:14) Moses gave instructions that any king in Israel should not:

- multiply horses by going back to Egypt
- multiply silver by hoarding wealth away from the people
- multiply wives so his heart is not lead astray.

Well, David was good on #1 and 2. Sad on #3. Why do I mention this? Because it confirms that every major fall, is an organized decay. It happens when something small goes unchecked. David has organized his sexuality in a backwards way:

He thinks if he has all these women, his passion will be abated. That's not the way the flesh works. You indulge it and it only craves for more. Think about anger, greed, control... they're all self reinforcing aren't they. The more you vent anger, the angrier you get, not less.

And I'm sure, David says, to himself,

well, it's not as though I'm just having **any woman** I want. I'm committed to them, I'm providing for them, I'm a good husband.

But how can he be? This one crack in his armor friends, I want you to see what it does: He has women he cannot love properly, and at least 20 children who must basically raise themselves. Without discipline, they grow up spoiled and unmanageable and defiant. We all have a crack in our armor, but has David strategically allowed anyone into his life to confront him about it? No one.

So by the time he's 51, with small (legal) sexual compromise, no accountability he is all set up for the fateful event:

2 Sam 11:1-2 In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

This is telling. Why isn't David with his troops? He's withdrawn from his obligations and responsibilities. An idle mind is vulnerable. Had David been where he belonged, there would be no fall.

He leaves his bed and strolls onto the patio roof. In the distance just next to the palace he hears some splashing. He sees a woman bathing and she's fabulously beautiful. It's a stolen look, that lingers, and then lust, and then he calls for her and then in one night Mighty David is brought low.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Temptation* says:

It makes no difference whether it is a sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge or love of fame or power or greed or

money... At the moment of temptation, God is quite unreal to us. Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with **forgetfulness** of God... we get fuzzy, “is this really sin?”

This sort of trance is what happens as clear thinking leaves us. Which is why God never says stand and fight temptation. He says, Flee! Run from youthful lusts, run from sex with someone who is not your spouse, run from idolatry. There’s no battle strategy except retreat.

David did not run... and he lost. His heart... that heart that was after God’s own heart had turned hard. He get Bathsheba pregnant. Then he tries to cover it up... tries to get Bathsheba’s husband to come from Battle to sleep with her but he won’t do it. So David sign his death warrant. Then he takes Bathsheba as his wife.

Now a man after God’s own heart, cannot do such a terrible thing, and sleep well at night. That’s why David wrote Ps 32:3-4:

3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

Finally, Nathan confronts David. The fact that he has to use a parable probably tells us that David was closed and unapproachable. So Nathan says: “Once a rich man stole a poor man’s only sheep, a precious family pet.” David flies into a rage:

This man deserves to die, because he had no compassion!

And Nathan said

You ARE this man!

Now this is a bitter sweet moment. Finally the pretending is over! “I have sinned!” And Nathan assures David that he will be forgiven... But he lets David know that God’s grace takes away the shame of sin, it does not take away all the consequences. Meaning? Turmoil and tragedy. One son rapes a daughter. Another son is uncontrollable, two more will betray him and try to steal the throne.

David’s consequences would reach a crescendo when his son Absalom, was killed in a coup attempt. And David, can’t stop mourning with heavy sobs:

Oh, Absalom my son, how I wish I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!

Friend, I think we Christians who have been weaned on grace must understand this... we can be forgiven and there is much mercy for us sinners... BUT in fact,. Some of us carry scars from choices we made a long time ago.

We are not exempt from the law of sowing and reaping. So three things...

- One is, God is not mocked, he settles accounts, a man reaps what he sows ***the grace that heals our shame and guilt, does not take away every scar of sin.***
- Two, no failure is a small failure. A small crack today splits wide open
- Three, get open in community NOW... don’t let success go to your head, get accountable, get humble, get known...

You want to finish your race well, right? David stumbled hard. But as a

man after God's own heart... he shows us how to be broken when confronted by sin. So three things:

- he was not evasive, but contrite
- he invited the truth
- he was chased by the pain to grace, not to defensiveness

And so we can say with David:

Ps 32:1-5 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit... Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" – and you forgave the guilt of my sin.