

For some people it happens that their dad, their father, the person who raised them, the person who contributed their genetic material and the person their kids call grandpa are all the same person. For many of us, myself included, that one person is a number of different people. With today being Father's Day, it can be a little complicated, and many years I avoid Father's Day in worship altogether. But this year we have this fantastic story about the boy who would be king, little David. It's also a story of brothers and sons and expectations.

Before we dive into this story from 1 Samuel, a disclaimer may be in order.

This story has a frustrating aspect to it:

I'm envious of Samuel and God's talks.

Samuel hears clear and undeniable messages from God. God speaks to Samuel in long speeches. I'm not sure we all have the same kind of direct and clear, one-one communication Samuel and God share.

To this, I'll point out Samuel wasn't always this directly connected to God. The first couple of times God spoke to Samuel, he thought it was an old priest Eli calling his name. "Samuel, Samuel."

In today's story, Samuel gets some pretty awesome messages from God—it wasn't always like that.

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Take a look at the front of your bulletin. All those busy boys. That's what it might have been like in Jesse and Nitzevet's home. Busy boys. Eight sons all told, the youngest being David. Our story takes place when the king in power, Saul, was bad news and the prophet Samuel is on the hunt for a new king. Samuel has been called by God to do this.

I love how the Message paraphrase starts this section of David's story. God asks Samuel the prophet "How long are you going to keep moping over Saul?" Samuel wants to give up on kings altogether and is doing some serious moaning and groaning- or as the Message puts it, moping. In 1 Samuel, it's like God knows we get stuck in pity loops, woe is me, what shall I do, Saul is so bad, over and over and over. So God says to Samuel? "How long are you going to be moping?" Is this familiar? Stop sitting around moping Samuel, I have a job for you.

It's not time to give up; your story is not over.

Samuel's response, "I can't God. I'm scared of Saul" is so real. Saul is crazy, and he's the king, and has all kinds of power. Even though God has already told Saul he's not going to be king forever, Saul is not going to take well to a new king. Samuel is asked by God to do something legitimately dangerous and Samuel is scared.

Fear can paralyze us: fear of the unknown, fear of expectations, fear of failure, and Samuel names that fear: he's scared of Saul.

God knows what to do with fear.

God's response is to help Samuel work through his fear, by giving Samuel the next small step. "Do this part, make this plan" after that small step, God will show Samuel what to do next. God understands our fear. God is so much bigger than our fear. In this story, God is helping Samuel

face his fear by breaking the big fear that Saul will discover Samuel's role in finding a new king, into small steps, each step one part of overcoming the big fear. God is bigger than our fear. God points Samuel in the direction of the town where David lives, pulls Samuel out of mopeville and on the road to Bethlehem.

What happens next is some sly maneuvering to get the sons of Jesse ready for one of them to be chosen king (without them knowing what was going on.) It's a reminder that sometimes God is at work in the background that sometimes different pieces need to move into place before a whole plan is ready.

Everyone is there, in Bethlehem, prepared for the special worship service Samuel has arranged. Samuel scans the crowd and spots the eldest son, this one, for sure.

Oh how much we love to find the one, don't we? It's a dream of most teenagers that they will look into the eyes of someone and know instantly that this is their one, for ever and ever.

Romance novels thrive on this. So do leaders. Last week I heard a leader talk about how sometimes you just know, right away. "You know, the way — they say that you know if you're going to like somebody in the first five seconds. You ever hear that one? Well, I think that very quickly I'll know whether or not something good is going to happen."

Samuel scans the crowd and his gut tells him, Eliab, that's the one.

Nope.

Our preschool class spent a month last fall working on this story and their scripture verse was 1 Samuel 16:7 "God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart."

First impressions matter. Eliab was tall, and science tells us we trust and elect taller leaders.

Eliab was oldest and that carried a lot of weight too. But Eliab was not going to be the next King. Nor was Abinidab.

Not Shammah either.

Son after son, paraded in front of Samuel, each not the one.

Jesse's probably having a lot of feelings right now. What do you mean my oldest son isn't the one? How could this be? Ok, I got another son, how about this one. No? This one? Again and again.

Jesse wants the best for his kids and I imagine with each son not chosen, Jesse's hope fades. He may have even given up hope.

How could it possibly be David?

In his head, Jesse and dreams and a plan for his sons. Samuel showing up added a whole new amazing potential future "my son, the next king of Israel." And then, 7 times, Jesse is told no.

Have you had your hope crushed 7 times in a row?

"The runt. Out with the sheep. Fetch the runt."

I'm pretty sure Jesse has absolutely no faith in this what so ever.

Who's the next king? David. This one. Samuel pour oil on David's head and the Spirit fills David. This is God's chosen king for the people of Israel.

There's a lot we connect to in this story,

Samuel being stuck, moping around about this bad king.

Samuel being scared of what he's asked to do.

Jesse being so proud of his boys.

The oldest one, then the next one, then the next and the next not meeting Jesse's hopes.

Being surprised by how an unlikely person becomes a hero.

The reminder that God sees into the heart.

What do you connect to? Turn to a neighbor and chat about it. Write a couple of words on your bulletin if you're not feeling chatty.

I'm serious.

It's an old story with many truths today.

Which brings us back to the complaint that Samuel gets such clear messages from God. Guess what? We did too.

When we make connections to the old stories that speak deep truths, God speaks to us.

When we say out loud what connections we make with the old stories, God speaks to us.

When we listen to each other speak of the connections, God speaks to us.

It may not be a whole paragraph, but with practice, God speaks to us.

Samuel once thought God's voice was Eli. It took years of listening and sometimes, Samuel still got it wrong. God's chosen king wasn't Eliab or Abinidab. God surprised everyone in choosing the runt, David.

That's how God works: surprising us when we think we are done, drawing us forward in times of fear and helping us see beyond appearances into the heart.