

CHAPTER 1

Anointed

He had virtually no voice left, yet he managed to somehow whisper, word by word, the entire Psalm 23. His brilliant mind was still intact even though his strength had left him. This was the last section of Scripture I heard from my dad's lips as he lay on his deathbed, waiting for the inevitable, in full surrender and without fear. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me . . ." Valley of death—with *no* fear—how is that possible? The answer follows in the same verse: "for *You* are with me." I will never forget the experience of watching my dad face the surety of death in full assurance of faith, completely certain of the ending: "And I will dwell in the house of the LORD *forever*" (verses 4, 6; emphasis added).

My father was a man who taught me, by words and actions, about the heart of God and what it meant to trust in Him. In fact, both of my parents fully trusted and rested in the arms of their heavenly Shepherd—in life and in death, in sickness and in health, in difficulties and in abundance. My father trusted his Shepherd even

during his struggle with three different types of cancer that afflicted him over a period of fifteen years in spite of his healthy lifestyle. That is why my homily at his memorial service, based on Psalm 23, was entitled “Rest Assured.” I admire my dad very much and for many reasons, not the least of which is that his peaceful demeanor welled out of the spring of his Jesus-centered faith, even to his last breath. He was the same person in public and in private—his God-induced integrity inspires me and will continue to do so for eternity. Throughout his life, he possessed a serenity that I desire for myself, a tranquil fortitude grounded in his conviction that Jesus died for him, and that his past, present, and future rested in the arms of his Creator-Redeemer. And even though my father was a religious leader, a minister, and a shepherd of his flock, he was primarily a sheep following the Good Shepherd, who had laid down His life for him. Jesus said, “My sheep know my voice” (John 10:27, CEV).

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I am certain that my parents will recognize their Shepherd's voice in the resurrection morning and will follow Him throughout eternity.

What is it about Psalm 23 and its writer that ministers to us, regardless of our upbringing, race, age, or situation? Whether we live in abundance—in green pastures and waters of rest—or find ourselves in the valley of the

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shadow of death, we all can relate to the song of this sling-hurling ancient shepherd boy who cried a lot and who could sing and play his lyre to soothe even a mad king—and who later became a king himself. David, the only person in the Bible called a man after God’s own heart, inspires me with his vulnerability and his yearning for intimacy with God—when he was in the pit of sin and when he was on the top of the world. And he discovered that the only path to a deep soul-searching awareness of God’s love for us leads through brokenness. When we are broken, we have nothing to use as payment. And that’s when we can fully accept God’s gift of grace, salvation, and purpose. All is a gift. And we are filled with praise and thanksgiving, even while in the cave of affliction and pain. Yes! All of us yearn for such an intimacy with God. And hopefully through this book we will get to know a bit more about David, the man after God’s heart, who also foreshadowed the Davidic King who would later come to lay down His life for His sheep. I can’t wait to explore how a man like David, with so many ups and downs, who committed grave sins, who pretended to be crazy, and who was conscience-stricken for cutting off a corner of the robe of a maniac-king, was viewed by God as a man “after My heart” (Acts 13:22). Thanks for joining me in this exciting biblical journey! Let’s dive into the Scriptures! Here we go! Woo-hoo!

God's plan

As the prophet Samuel grieved over the failings of the king whose heart had departed from God, he received a heavenly message to go to Bethlehem to anoint a new king. Interestingly enough, the crazy king, Saul himself, had already received this verdict from God through Samuel: “Your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a *man after His own heart*, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people” (1 Samuel 13:14; emphasis added). What kind of regal, majestic king was this that God had prepared for Himself? Oh boy, was Samuel in for a surprise!

“Now the LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected

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a king for Myself among his sons’ ” (1 Samuel 16:1). Since the prophet, aware of the increasing madness of the king, is afraid for his life, the Lord sends him to Bethlehem to sacrifice a heifer (verse 2). So Samuel heads to Bethlehem with an animal in tow and a horn of oil hidden from prying eyes, in order to anoint a new king.

God had a plan. I love it! When everything around me

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seems to fall apart, I need to remember that God has a plan. Nothing takes Him by surprise; He is never early or late; nothing escapes His notice or is above His head. He has a plan and possesses the power to execute it! That's good news, isn't it? He usually doesn't reveal His whole plan to us, though; only the next step we need to take. But He knows the full plan, and we can trust Him with it. Back in Bethlehem, the scope of His plan was greater than anyone could have imagined! One thousand years later, in the same fields where Samuel found the future shepherd-king, a choir of angels would announce the birth of the Savior of the world, the King of heaven and earth, the descendant of David who would set us free from sin. Same town, same fields, same plan. God always acted in patterns, geographically and historically, so that we wouldn't miss the Savior when He came. *He was The Plan* all along!

And God said to Samuel: "I will show you what you shall do" (verse 3). Great! Hurry up! Let's get going. Imagine how exciting it is to anoint a new king! So what exactly was God looking for in this new ruler, the man after His own heart?

God's view

The elders of Bethlehem are a little nervous to see such a great religious figure in their seemingly unimportant little town. But Samuel sets their minds at ease by explaining

that he has come to sacrifice. He also consecrates Jesse and his sons and invites them to the sacrifice (verses 4, 5). All is going as planned. Surely this prophet of God will spot the new king immediately. He has an eye for these things. After all, he's done it before. And let's remember that Saul was tall, a head above everyone else in Israel!

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This new king wouldn't be less, for sure. Right? *Wrong!*

Have you experienced that—when you think you know what God wants, when you know the way, God throws you a curveball? I am so glad that even God's prophets are human! Because that's exactly what happened to Samuel. When Jesse's sons entered and Samuel saw Eliab, he thought: "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him" (verse 6). But God made this a teaching moment for him. The Lord responded with one of the most important aphorisms we have in the Bible regarding God's view of humanity: "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because 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' " (verse 7). Yikes!

Yep! So true! We often get stuck in externals, pomp

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and circumstance. The parade continued, and all the sons of Jesse seemed more than qualified. Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah—all seven boys. But God had not chosen any of them (verses 6–10). Had Samuel gotten the wrong town? A different address? Was the GPS broken? But the prophet was a quick learner, and he asked Jesse: “ ‘Are these all the children?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep.’ Then Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here’ ” (verse 11). The youngest, a shepherd, had not even been invited to participate in the sacrifice with the rest of the family. By their standards he didn’t qualify. The youngest wasn’t their choice. But he was God’s.

God’s choice

I love it! I love it! I love this pattern of God: He chooses the reject, the underdog, the little one, the least, and the last. It makes me feel loved and accepted, with all my imperfections. God is in the business of choosing the unlikely ones. Woo-hoo!

There had been occasions when God had chosen the youngest sibling instead of the oldest (see Genesis 25:23; 48:14, 19–20)—but not for a king! Was it possible that He was choosing the youngest brother, a shepherd boy, as the king of Israel? “So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome

appearance. And the LORD said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.' Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (verses 12, 13). David! This is the first time we encounter the name of this boy who would be king. No other person in the Bible bears that name. Only him, the man

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after God's own heart. And this is the first time that David meets Samuel. Later we are told of one other time the two of them met (1 Samuel 19:18).

So, Samuel anointed the unlikely candidate—the first of three times that David was anointed. The second was many years later when he was anointed as king over the house of Judah (see 2 Samuel 2:4), and the third, when he became the king over all Israel (see 2 Samuel 5:3). But all of this is still far in the future. For

the present time, in Bethlehem, he is given the Spirit of the Lord (1 Samuel 16:13) and enrolled in God's school of brokenness, where he is to learn things not taught in any other school. His soul will be trained to seek after God's heart. Just like you and me, he must be trained in the art of not returning the spears that are thrown at

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him. He must learn to sing and cry and to never stop talking to God no matter how dark it gets. He must be trained to pray and sing in the pits of despair, in caves of abandonment, and in mountain strongholds, addressing God as “*my* God.” The shepherd boy will learn to depend on God as his own Shepherd. When his heart is broken, he will find comfort in the only One who can restore the soul.

David has been anointed the king to unify the nation, to place Israel on the map, to be part of God’s covenant line, and to be included in the lineage of the coming Davidic Messianic King, the Savior of the world and the eternal King. Oh! And did I mention it? He has been anointed to be a man after God’s own heart; therefore, he will attend God’s school for the brokenhearted.

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul (Psalm 23:1–3;
emphasis added).

Individual or Small Group Study Questions

1. Do you feel connected to the story of David in the Bible? Why?
2. Why does God in the Bible seem to always choose the least, the last, the most insignificant, and so forth?
3. Explain the meaning of 2 Corinthians 12:9. What is the relationship between grace and weakness?
4. Samuel thought he would recognize the new king by his appearance. Do you think we often judge people by appearances? How can we switch to God's method instead?
5. Why was David, with his checkered track record, a man after God's own heart?