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**Open the Conversation**

Take some time to build relationships with the students:

* Ask for each student’s high and low from the week.
* Today’s RBQ (Relationship Building Question): If you had 24 hours and unlimited money, how would you spend that time. Where would you go, what would you do, etc?

**Introduction**

In the story The Fellowship of the Ring by J.R.R. Tolkien, a moment comes when someone must volunteer to carry a spiritually and emotionally heavy burden. It will be a dangerous, long, and costly journey filled with opposition and enemies. Many mighty warriors and famous leaders blinked in the sunshine, considering the weight of the decision. The one who spoke up to volunteer was a Hobbit--the smallest, weakest, and least sophisticated one there. As the journey played out, he showed an inner strength that no one would have imagined by measuring his appearance only.

What are some other examples of a person being chosen for appearance over their heart or character? How does this compare with the way God judges?

**Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

1. How does it encourage you to know God knows what’s happening and already has plans for your life even when you may fail or be overlooked?
2. What is an area of life you are most likely to make a decision based on how someone or something looks outwardly? Why can this be a problem?
3. How have you felt rejected because of a lack of outward skills or appeal? How does this reminder that the Lord judges much differently than people do encourage you?
4. How can you be more intentional about looking at others with God’s perspective instead of according to your own thoughts and judgments?
5. When have you seen or experienced God using an unlikely person to accomplish great things for the kingdom? When has He used you in an unexpected way?

Wrap Up

Review the questions above together. Which one is sticking with you? Write that question or put it into your phone, somewhere that you will see it again later today. Sit with God and the question together and allow Him to lead your next steps.

*Ask for any prayer requests and pray for one another.*

**Extended Cut**

Narrative accounts that tell stories like this one in Scripture can seem easier to read and interpret than other parts of the Bible, but paying attention to details is important. We need to put aside the context in which we live and think, and try to understand as much as possible about the context of the original writing. We can also look for revelation about God’s character and His ways. We see clearly in this text that God considers a person’s heart to be much more important than even the person’s gifts, talents, or appearance. He isn’t looking for goodness, because only He is truly good. But He is looking for hearts that are fully committed to Him. (see 2 Chronicles 16:9.)

The prophet Samuel was brokenhearted that King Saul had turned away from the Lord and was leading in an ungodly manner. Samuel mourned the spiritual decline of Saul until the Lord instructed him to go and anoint the next king of Israel from a specific family in Bethlehem. Samuel surveyed Jesse of Bethlehem’s sons as God instructed but did not get the Lord’s approval to anoint any of them. When David, the youngest and least physically impressive son, was brought before Samuel, he knew David was the one God had chosen. Although people prioritize how a person looks on the outside, God is more concerned about the inside. The heart matters most to God.

Samuel spoke to the people of Israel on behalf of God and when king Saul turned to ungodly ways, it grieved Samuel’s heart. As Samuel was mourning, the Lord let him know that it was time to do something about the situation. God assigned Samuel to anoint the next king who would follow Saul. Although it may have seemed that God’s plans were falling apart, the reality is the Lord knew this was going to happen when Israel insisted on having a king, and He had a plan in place. **Human failure is never the end of God’s plans**. What incredible news!!

Samuel was given a tall task of identifying the next king, but the Lord had already identified His chosen king, so Samuel’s primary task was to listen to the Lord. The next king would be one of Jesse’s sons. Samuel’s task brought about excitement but also fear. Saul was still king and would not respond favorably to the idea of another king to replace him. Saul had been warned of the consequences of his ungodly choices but ignored them and did his own thing repeatedly. Samuel was aware of Saul’s depravity at this point and knew he could be killed if word got out. Samuel had a choice to obey the Lord or be overcome by his fears.

God assured Samuel that He would guide Samuel and show him the next steps to take. God spelled out the details of how the anointing would take place so that all Samuel needed to do was trust and obey. All believers will face the choice of whether to take the safe and comfortable route or trust the Lord and obey what He calls them to do. Just as Samuel had an honest conversation with the Lord and shared his fears, we can do the same. Our Lord welcomes our honesty and can more than handle our fears. Despite his legitimate concerns, Samuel obeyed the Lord. Samuel told the leaders in Bethlehem that he came to offer sacrifices and proceeded to follow God’s instruction. Samuel invited Jesse and his sons to join him at the sacrifice. Everything happened as God ordained and told Samuel it would be. We can always trust God, even when we face real concerns.

As Samuel began the process of selecting from Jesse’s sons, he looked for who appeared the kingliest. That is what most people would do in this situation, but none of the sons was the right one. Samuel was using his physical eyes and human standards to determine which son might be the one. When he saw the eldest and observed that he was a tall, good-looking man, Samuel assumed he found the one who would be anointed.

But God corrected Samuel. Samuel was drifting toward the same way of thinking that led Israel to choose Saul as their first king. Saul had the impressive appearance of a leader, but this was not most important. In Samuel’s case, Eliab, the eldest son of Jesse, might have looked the part but he was not the right man because he was not chosen by the Lord. Outward appearances do not define people or determine their value in the Lord’s economy.

God cares more about people’s hearts than the way they look. Unlike God, we do not have the ability to determine the heart of a person. This makes it even more tempting to make decisions based on what we can see. Instead, we should seek the Lord and follow His directions every step. Christ can ask the Holy Spirit to lead us, even though we are unable to discern the complete truth about others. 6 Personal Study Guide God wants us to pursue His way of thinking and stay focused on His perspective instead of following our natural inclinations. Judging according to our own sight and thoughts is not always wise. We should be intentional about resisting the flesh and surrendering to the Holy Spirit. We can only do this as we abide with the Lord and continually seek His guidance. Jesse’s other sons also came before Samuel but none of them was the one God had chosen. Although any one of these sons looked the part and were perfect potential kings according to the world’s eyes, none of them lined up with God’s plans. It was time for Israel to see the difference between a king picked by God and a king picked by the people.

Samuel heard from the Lord that one of Jesse’s sons was the next king but then God refused each of the seven that were present. In response, Samuel acted with spiritual confidence when he could have doubted or questioned the Lord. Asking if there were any more sons they had yet to meet, Samuel revealed his faith in the direction of God.

Finally, David was brought forward. David was out tending sheep and had not been invited to the sacrificial feast. David was only brought at Samuel’s insistence. This is another reminder that God doesn’t judge by outward appearances but often chooses the unlikely or ordinary to do extraordinary things. The Lord delights is using unlikely people so that He receives the glory over people.

A good shepherd takes care of the sheep and protects them from harm. He learns his sheep and they know his voice. Many of the characteristics of a good shepherd would translate in David’s life to his being a good leader.