

Devotion 12:

## **Our Father Cares About What's On The Inside**

I Samuel 1—31

*“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.’” (I Sam. 16:7)*

We are a visually-oriented society. Like the middle ages when stories were told orally and through art, today's culture in the United States is geared toward the image. Read a book? Most people will wait for the movie to come out. Several years ago, a commercial ironically promoting cameras, touted the expression, “Image is everything.” Most of our information is seen on a television or a computer screen. It must dazzle; it must titillate.

Products are packaged in colorful and oversized containers. The entertainment industry promotes youthful beauty. Diets, exercises, and plastic surgery all attempt to create external beauty. Cosmetics, clothing, and even external accessories such as jewelry, cars, and houses must be pleasing to the eye.

Young females understand the culture. Eating disorders are at an all-time high. A lady often makes one of two choices: to overemphasize her appearance and become obsessed with her body or to compensate with some kind of competence and ignore her body. Yet, despite hours of preparation cleaning up, dressing up, and making up, all ladies deeply desire the bottom line: they want a man to look past the outward appearance and to look intimately at the beauty within.

Fortunately, we have a Father who cares about the inside of us.

As I finish reading I Samuel, what strikes me about the story of God's children of Israel just as they enter the period of having kings is that the story becomes an internal rather than an external story. That is, like realistic literature, the story begins to give some attention to what happens inside the characters and not simply to what happens around them. The most repetitive thought centers around the Spirit or spirits being *inside* people (16:14; 18:10; 19:9, 20) and God changing hearts. (10:6, 9, 26; 11:6; 14:15; 16:13) The key verse quoted after this chapter's title comes from the scene where God is choosing His king among Jesse's sons.

And, interestingly, like women who are created in His image, I think our Father desires for us to care about what is inside Him too. Consider 2:35:

*“I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind.”*

This thought is continued throughout the book in what becomes a contrast between Israel's first two kings, Saul and David. Simply put, what separates the two men is the spirit and heart inside each of them. Hence, Samuel's words to Saul ring as the main transition in the book:

*"'You acted foolishly,' Samuel said. 'You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people.'"* I Sam. 13:13-14

This aspect of our Father appears, at first, to be a good thing for us, especially if we are plain looking physically, which most of us are. (Have you looked closely in a mirror today?) By the way, our brother Jesus was described by Isaiah as *"having no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him."* (Is. 53:2b) But when we realize that the *heart* in Scripture refers to the seat of our thoughts, feelings, and will, we start to squirm. Our thoughts and emotions are often ugly and our will is often weak and nonexistent. Looking inside our hearts, our Father won't see anything more attractive than what is on the outside. I don't know about you, but I am in trouble!

But like every book we have read thus far in the Old Testament, there is some really good news: our Father can change hearts. Think about these passages:

*"The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person."* (I Sam. 10:6)

*"As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day."* (I Sam. 10:9)

*"Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched."* (I Sam. 10:26)

*"When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger."* (I Sam. 11:6)

*"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."* (I Sam. 16:13)

David, a man after God's own heart, wrote in Psalm 51:10-12: *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me."*

Our Father still changes hearts today. The New Covenant promise found in Ezekiel 36:26 reads, *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you....”*

Do your insides need a cleaning? Do you need a heart transplant? Jesus spoke sternly to the Pharisees who answered “no” to those questions: *“Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.”* (Mt. 23:26) Praise God that the blood of Christ has cleansed us and that we have been given a new heart when God’s Spirit entered us at our baptismal conversion. Praise God that *“though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”* (II Cor. 4:16)

We began these thoughts considering women in today’s culture. Our Father’s idea of beauty is found in II Peter 3:3-5:

*“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.”*

Our Father cares about what is on the inside.