David – Developing a heart for God

The story of David reveals him as someone prepared to be incredibly vulnerable. In his psalms he pours out his weaknesses, fears and struggles in vivid and honest descriptions. Yet he was also a man of faith, used by God; fully human, yet his experiences and passionate heart longings point us to the living God. This study guide takes an overview of his life, selecting key events to show his character and his relationship with God.

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Getting the Most Out of David

When I was a child my hero was Superman. Like him, I wanted to be faster than a speeding bullet, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound and able to bend steel in my bare hands. Using a bath towel for my cape, I flew around the house, performing imaginary feats of strength and courage.

As I grew up, however, I discovered that Superman was not the best kind of hero. I found it impossible to be like him, no matter how hard I tried. Bullets simply wouldn't bounce off me and neither would harsh words, fears, disappointments, illnesses or a hundred other weaknesses that are common to a frail, fallen humanity.

Bullets didn't bounce off David either. As I read about his life, I am astonished at how open and vulnerable he was. He records his weaknesses and struggles for all the world to read: “I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail me because of all my foes.” “I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 6:6-7; 51:3-4).

Yet in spite of all his weaknesses, fears, doubts and sins, David was also a man of faith. His life illustrates a tenacious trust in God and an intense desire to know him: “The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” “One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD, . . . to seek him in his temple” (Psalm 27:1, 4). Because of these qualities, God was able to use David mightily, molding and shaping him into a man after his own heart.

I believe we need this kind of three-dimensional role model today—someone who allows us to be fully human, yet who inspires
us to look beyond our weaknesses and frailties to the living God. This study guide allows us to observe David from the beginning of his career to the end of his life. It doesn’t cover every detail but rather selects key events that reveal the multifaceted character of this remarkable man. Each study also focuses on the real hero of every biblical narrative—the Lord himself.

David’s life extended from around 1040 to 970 B.C. Second Samuel 5 records that “David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years” (vv. 4, 5). The biblical writers view David as the greatest of Israel’s kings and the one through whom the ultimate king, the Messiah, eventually came (see Matthew 1:1; Luke 3:31).

It is my prayer that as you study the life of David, you too will develop a passionate heart for God.

**Suggestions for Individual Study**

1. As you begin each study, pray that God will speak to you through his Word.

2. Read the introduction to the study and respond to the personal reflection question or exercise. This is designed to help you focus on God and on the theme of the study.

3. Each study deals with a particular passage—so that you can delve into the author’s meaning in that context. Read and reread the passage to be studied. The questions are written using the language of the New International Version, so you may wish to use that version of the Bible. The New Revised Standard Version is also recommended.

4. This is an inductive Bible study, designed to help you discover for yourself what Scripture is saying. The study includes three types of questions. Observation questions ask about the basic facts: who, what, when, where and how. Interpretation questions delve into the meaning of the passage. Application questions help you discover the implications of the text for growing in Christ. These three keys unlock the treasures of Scripture.

Write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided or in a personal journal. Writing can bring clarity and deeper understanding
of yourself and of God’s Word.

5. It might be good to have a Bible dictionary handy. Use it to look up any unfamiliar words, names or places.

6. Use the prayer suggestion to guide you in thanking God for what you have learned and to pray about the applications that have come to mind.

7. You may want to go on to the suggestion under “Now or Later,” or you may want to use that idea for your next study.

Suggestions for Members of a Group Study

1. Come to the study prepared. Follow the suggestions for individual study mentioned above. You will find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your time spent in group discussion.

2. Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned. The leader will be asking the questions that are found in this guide.

3. Stick to the topic being discussed. Your answers should be based on the verses which are the focus of the discussion and not on outside authorities such as commentaries or speakers. These studies focus on a particular passage of Scripture. Only rarely should you refer to other portions of the Bible. This allows for everyone to participate in in-depth study on equal ground.

4. Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers. Many questions do not have “right” answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly.

When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.

5. Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.

6. Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed
and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have
an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of
the study you will find ways that you can take action individually
and/or as a group.

7. Remember that anything said in the group is considered confi-
dential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific
permission is given to do so.

8. If you are the group leader, you will find additional suggestions
at the back of the guide.
The Lord Looks at the Heart

1 Samuel 16:1-13

In the movie Twins some genetic engineers combine the genes from several of the best men they can find—a brilliant scientist, a powerful athlete, a talented musician, a great artist, and a tall and incredibly handsome hunk. They implant these super genes into a mother’s womb. But by accident, they also implant all of the leftover genetic “junk.” Then nine months later out pops the ideal (according to our culture) baby, who grows up to be the ideal man: Arnold Schwarzenegger. But to everyone’s surprise a second baby also pops out—the embodiment of everything our culture says you don’t want to be as a baby or a man—Danny DeVito!

The implied message of the movie is that if you wanted to pick someone to be CEO of your company or the quarterback for your team or the pastor of your church—or whatever—you’d pick an Arnold Schwarzenegger every time because he is tall, handsome, powerful and intelligent. But the last person you would ever pick would be Danny DeVito because he is short, weak and unattractive.

GROUP DISCUSSION. How does a person’s appearance affect your initial opinion of him or her?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. In what ways do you try to impress people
with your outward appearance?

Israel's first king, Saul, was the ideal candidate—tall, handsome and impressive. Unfortunately, he was also foolish and disobedient. As Israel's second king is chosen, the Lord rejects worldly standards of leadership and selects David, a man after his own heart. Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13.

1. What evidence is there in this passage that Samuel is having difficulty letting go of Saul?

2. What specific instructions does the Lord give Samuel for anointing a new king (vv. 1-3)?

3. Why does Samuel suppose that Eliab is the Lord's anointed (vv. 6-7; see 17:13)?

4. According to verse 7, how does God's judgment differ from ours?

5. The Lord tells Samuel, “Man looks at the outward appearance” (v. 7). What sorts of “outward” things do we tend to look at in people?

6. How does our culture reinforce our emphasis on appearance?
7. Why are outward qualities an unreliable way to judge a person?

8. If you had been given the job of finding the next king of Israel, why would David have been an unlikely choice?

In what sense was he also a good choice (see v. 18)?

9. Why do you think the Lord has Samuel look at each of Jesse’s sons before revealing that he has chosen David (vv. 6-12)?

10. When the Lord looks at our hearts, what specific qualities do you think he values most? Explain.

Take time to pray, asking the Lord to develop those qualities within you.

Now or Later
George Barna writes, “In the past two decades Americans have been burned by leaders who oozed charisma and flashed world-class rhetorical skills but whose underlying character was debatable, at best.” (The Barna Report [Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1998] p. 5). In what ways can we look beyond deceptive appearance and discern a person’s true character?
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