

“Why the Lord specializes in hearts”

1 Samuel 16:1-7 NIV

“The LORD said to Samuel, ‘How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.’

“²But Samuel said, ‘How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.’ The LORD said, ‘Take a heifer with you and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.”’³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.’

“⁴Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, ‘Do you come in peace?’⁵ Samuel replied, ‘Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.’ Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

“⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.’

“⁷**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 people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’**”

The Bible overflows with wisdom and brings splendid insights.

How can such an old book help in this age of advanced technology?

Our tools and know-how might be cutting-edge, but the people using them come from an ancient mold.

This reading proves there’s nothing new about today’s challenges.

This text confirms that our genes and human nature remain unchanged.

These facts should encourage us.

Why?

Because the Bible gives examples of how folks dealt with nearly every test we face.

Pick your problem: the Bible has an “how” and “how not” to handle it example for you.

Recall a Bible truth we recently discussed?

God created the Cosmos and all things in it.

I’m told the most basic cells contain active “blueprints” for growth and reproduction.

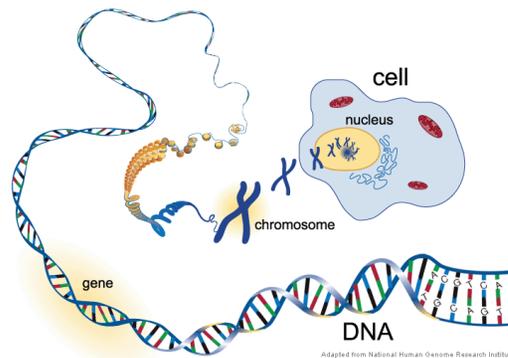
Unless a mind superior to the world’s greatest geniuses first put it there, how did these complex codes get into those cells?

Imagine further the billions of people on this earth, each one having an individual code in his her/genes.

You come completely unique with your own code; thus no true doppelgangers exist.

We often think someone looks like another person we know.

Seeing them side by side, we note resemblances but also realize each ones’ uniqueness.



God our Creator knows our differences; he also intimately knows our hearts and minds.

Isn’t it only right that we honor, trust, and love the magnificent, resplendent Creator of all this complex stuff?

The Bible reveals a 2nd truth: God our Creator tests us here for a greater existence.

He tests our obedience, gratitude and trust.

“Bob, how do you learn about these tests?”

As in Jesus’ parable of the talents (bags of gold), Bible evidence consistently shows it:

“Again, it (the kingdom of God) will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more.”

“¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹“After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.”¹

In this parable, the man going on a journey represents God; we are his servants.

God entrusts his wealth to us.

The gold some of us stash, and everything else, belongs to God.

God holds us accountable for what he entrusts to us.

He doesn’t give the same assignment to all.

He trusts each of us with certain of His assets and He holds us responsible for them.

Everything to which we so possessively cling belongs to God.

We receive loans on a trial basis.

Israel’s experiences going from Egypt to the Promised Land prove this point.

God gave Israel numerous laws for a reason: “So the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today.”²

Israel’s numerous health laws were for their “good” and “survival.”

God’s law required diseased people to stay outside town until they were healed.

They had to cover their mouths and if anyone approached, identify themselves as unclean if.

Infected folks remained under strict quarantine.³

The Lord gave these laws as heart obedience tests, “² You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”⁴

¹ Matthew 25:14-19 NIV

² Deuteronomy 8:1 NASB

³ See Leviticus 13:45, 46 for isolation instructions.

⁴ Deuteronomy 8: 2, 3 NASB

From the human side, you know what happens when tests and challenges come.

In testing we often ask why we have to endure such stuff—**“Why is this happening to me?”**

Some folks get upset; blame others, wag fingers, run to the TV cameras, point fingers, and angrily display certain fingers.

The Bible focuses on the nation of Israel and its neighbors.

In Israel’s entire history, regardless of the leader in charge, certain elements grumbled.



About 1050 BC when Samuel lived, Israelite folks griped a lot.

What was their beef?

They weren’t happy with the government God set up for them.

Kings ruled all the neighboring countries and city-states.

The Israelites bellyached wanting a king just like other folks.

You might enjoy this comparison from Proverbs 30:29-31, which came a little after Samuel’s time:

“There are three things that walk with stately stride—no, four that strut about: ³⁰ the lion, king of animals, who won’t turn aside for anything, ³¹ the strutting rooster, the male goat, a king as he leads his army.”



I once met one of these “strutters.”

When I was in high school, two friends went with me on an overnight trip to Seaside and Cannon Beach on the Oregon coast.

My 46 Chevy coupe transported us and also served as our motel.

At one of the beaches in the morning, we drove the Chevy on the sand at the water’s edge.

Our eyes looked mostly for females, but a strange procession grabbed our attention.

How that single file animal parade came together remains a life mystery for me.

A Billy goat strutted near water’s edge, trailed by two nanny goats, and a Dachshund dog; I warned you it was weird.



The author of Proverbs featured sets of 3s and 4s but could easily have added a fifth that swaggers and struts.



As you guess, I refer to male teens of our species.

We three did our share of strutting that trip, but that Billy goat outclassed us.

Whether that Billy considered us as rivals for his nannies or hated humans in general, Doc Hansen, the veterinarian might know.

Strutting Billy veered toward us and we teen “strutters” found safety on top of my Chevy.

Thus Proverbs compares strutting lions, roosters, and male goats to a king leading his army.

Israel’s people wanted a king “to go out before us and fight our battles.”⁵

They thought a compelling, strutting leader would inspire them to greatness.

The Lord chose a tall, strong, modest, conscientious farm boy named Saul to be Israel’s first King.

Saul stood head and shoulders over everyone else; I picture a guy with Shaquille O’Neal’s stature.

At King Saul’s coronation Samuel gave this charge to the king and to the people:

“Be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you.”⁶

In some ways, Saul proved his potential; he became a mighty warrior and military leader.

But Saul and the people took their eyes and hearts off God.

Saul worried about appearances, his image, and about what people would say.

Saul forgot God’s power: he and the people neglected to follow God’s word.

⁵ 1 Samuel 8:20 NASB

⁶ 1 Samuel 12: 24 NIV

This formerly modest guy wanted to erect a monument in his own honor.

It sounds to me as if he wanted the equivalent of a presidential library.

In intriguing fashion Samuel confronted Saul:

“Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.”⁷

Using the gifts and opportunities he gives, the Lord wants us to trust Him, obey Him, and believe in His mighty power.

Hoping to hide our inadequacies, we try to impress others with appearances of success.

When things go wrong, we blame others.

The Lord sent Samuel to Bethlehem for the purpose of anointing a new king.

A farmer-rancher named Jesse had eight sons, seven of whom were in town and whom Samuel invited to dinner that day.

God had chosen one of Jesse’s sons to become Israel’s new king.

As our text reads:

“When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab (the eldest and evidently the tallest) and thought, ‘Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.’

“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 people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’

Forget our outward appearances.

The Lord looks at our hearts and minds.

Think of the vogues, fads, trends, and ploys churches use to attract numbers.

We don’t know what’s in anyone’s heart.

We cannot judge others.

We can only clean our own hearts and minds and use the gifts and opportunities God gives us to honor and glorify Him.

⁷ 1 Samuel 15:17

Last week we spoke of the fact that God gives his Holy Spirit to those who repent and are baptized into Christ.

God’s Spirit dwells in God’s people.

But certain things grieve God’s Spirit:
“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice (that is, the desire to cause injury or distress to another). 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”⁸

Some of us think that because we are baptized and attend church, we’re OK.

This scripture causes me to think about the great salads Norma fixes for me each evening. I try to eat with care, but a check of my place mat and the floor indicates that significant portions of my salad never get to my mouth.



If Norma didn’t clean the floor daily, we’d probably have sufficient accumulation for an indoor compost pile every month.



This Ephesians text warns me that my heart and mind need regular cleaning; otherwise, I might be grieving God’s Spirit.

“The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Throngs, latest trends, and entertaining worship don’t indicate God’s truth.

Crowds and popularity come and go, but the will and Word of God stand forever.

I pray that we’ll all exalt God, trust God’s power, thank God, humbly use the gifts he gives us, and keep our hearts true to Him.

⁸ Ephesians 4:30-32 NIV

My goal as God’s servant must be this:

boldly share God’s powerful good news
of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection for
our sins,

while not letting my doubts, fears,
bitterness, or other weaknesses
hinder God’s message.

**God bless you and may he say to all of
us: “Well done, good and faithful
servant, enter into the joys of heaven.”**

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