

The Right Match

[Samuel] asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep” (1 Samuel 16:11).

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Song: “Change My Heart, O God”

When organ transplant teams search for a heart recipient, they don't look at hair or eye color, personal achievements, or IQ. When making their decision, they look at blood type, the size of the heart in comparison to each candidate, and other factors that truly matter for a successful transplant. Ultimately, they choose someone who will be the best possible match.

David didn't appear to be the right candidate to be anointed king. He wasn't the oldest, the strongest, or the best-looking of his brothers. But he was the one who understood what it meant to care attentively and faithfully for his father's sheep. God's choice of David as a future king was a surprise to everyone. But God could see what others could not: David had the heart of one who would serve and lead well, a heart that matched God's criteria.

No matter how we try, our own strivings or accomplishments don't qualify us for service in God's kingdom. Rather, as we submit our hearts to be shaped by Him, He prepares us for the work He has for us to do.

Father, my heart is open to You today. Please make it fit for the assignments You have for me. In Jesus' name, amen.

December 2–8. **Ruth Anne Burrell** lives in the Kansas City area, where she enjoys finding new coffee shops, trying out new recipes, and dreaming up new stories to tell.

Nevertheless

The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, “You will not get in here.” . . . Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David (2 Samuel 5:6-7).

Scripture: 2 Samuel 5:1-10

Song: “Just As I Am”

Sean Lewis was born with cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. Nevertheless, he has made it his mission to continue pressing toward his goals. With the support of family and friends, he participates in marathons, advocates for others with disabilities, and has become a motivational speaker. Through everything he does, he seeks to spread the message that God can and will use anyone who is willing to serve Him, no matter their circumstances.

David’s story is also marked by “nevertheless” situations. He was the youngest brother; nevertheless, God chose him. Goliath threatened David’s life; nevertheless, David defeated him. Saul hunted David to kill him; nevertheless, David escaped and later became king in Saul’s place. The Jebusites mocked and ridiculed David; nevertheless, he captured their fortress. Over and over again, God enabled David to triumph in adversity.

Sometimes we may feel that our circumstances or deficits disqualify us from serving God. But when God chooses us for a task, He also gives us what we need to complete it. With God as our strength, our apparent weaknesses are only the beginning of our own “nevertheless” story.

Father, thank You that Your grace is sufficient for me today. As I trust and follow You, please bring glory to Your name through me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

His Enduring Word

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. . . . For no word from God will ever fail” (Luke 1:34-35, 37).

Scripture: Luke 1:26-38

Song: “Every Promise of Your Word”

The Rose of Hildesheim—a wild dog-rose bush that climbs the walls of Hildesheim Cathedral in Germany—is believed to be the oldest rose in the world. Known as the Thousand-Year Rose, it was destroyed when the cathedral was bombed during World War II. However, its roots survived, and after new growth pushed through the rubble, the remarkable rosebush bloomed once again.

The Word of the Lord that Gabriel brought to Mary seemed impossible. Certainly, Mary didn’t understand how she could give birth to a son—let alone the Son of the Most High! Yet God’s will was not hindered by anything Mary saw as an obstacle. The angel assured her that God’s Word would never fail, and in response Mary’s lips echoed the trust that was in her heart: “May your word to me be fulfilled” (Luke 1:38).

When God makes a promise, it will be fulfilled, even when we can’t see how. His Word is rooted deeply in the truth of His character, and no damage, desecration, or destruction on earth will ever keep His enduring Word from springing up to its fulfillment.

Father, thank You for Your never-failing Word. Like Mary, I want to be ready to submit to Your will for my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.

A Refuge from Fear

Blessed are all who take refuge in him (Psalm 2:12).

Scripture: Psalm 2

Song: “Under His Wings”

My dog is afraid of candles, which means family birthdays are mildly traumatic experiences for him. He'll be sitting next to my chair wagging his tail, but as soon as the lighter flicks on, his ears flatten, and he retreats to a far corner until the candles are all blown out. Considering the tiny size of the flames, I can't help laughing a little at his sudden retreat. Of course, I go to comfort him afterward.

To our God, who is enthroned in Heaven, even the combined power of earth's nations is such an insignificant threat that He laughs at rulers' plans and efforts to overthrow Him, and He readily grants power to His Son, the King of kings, to break the nations into pieces. But to those who serve the Lord with an awed understanding of His power, He provides a place of safety and refuge in His presence.

Whether we feel frightened by the threats of leaders who disrespect God, or by wars, or by natural disasters, or by circumstances that feel out of control, or even by daily activities that feel scary to us, God offers us an alternative to our fear. When placed beside His power, the things we shrink from become small by comparison, and in Him we find a secure place of refuge and protection.

Father, thank You for reminding me of Your greatness today. I give You each of my fears and worries, and I choose to trust You as my safe refuge. In Jesus' name, amen.

Complete Transformation

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned (Isaiah 9:2).

Scripture: Isaiah 9:1-7

Song: “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

During a trip to Switzerland with my dad, we made a stop in the mountain town of Zermatt, hoping to enjoy views of the iconic Matterhorn Peak. Sadly, the day we visited was extremely cloudy. We took a cable car up the mountain and still could barely see anything. But the day we were scheduled to leave dawned bright and clear. The sunrise changed everything, chasing away any remaining clouds and highlighting the snowy peak with beautiful pinks and golds.

Isaiah 9 describes the coming of God’s chosen One, whose arrival would change everything. The people would go from living in deep spiritual darkness to rejoicing in the light of His coming. With His appearance, the promised Son of God would bring justice, righteousness, and peace. Nothing would be as it had been.

Jesus changes everything. He brings hope, joy, and peace into our lives. In times of grief and loss, He is our wonderful counselor. As our everlasting Father, if we wander from Him, He draws us back to himself and to our spiritual family. Even the hardest and most challenging circumstances are different because of His promise to one day chase away every remaining cloud of darkness with the light of His everlasting presence (Revelation 21:1-4).

Father, in times of doubt, fear, and grief, help me to remember that Jesus is with me and that He knows exactly what I need. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Called to Share

Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake (Romans 1:5).

Scripture: Romans 1:1-7

Song: "Go Tell It on the Mountain"

I had a friend in college who loved introducing others to the things she loved, whether it was a favorite movie, television show, or book series. Her joy was evident whenever someone else became excited about something she had shared with them. By the time we all graduated, many of us had new favorite shows or books, thanks to her enthusiasm.

The apostle Paul had a strong sense of his own calling, and he considered it his life mission to introduce others to Jesus and to help them know their own calling as believers. In today's passage, Paul explains that believers are called to obedience that comes through faith, called to belong to Jesus, and called to be God's holy people. Additionally, as believers, we join in the mission to call others to Jesus through the gospel message.

The story of Jesus' transforming love at work in our lives is the best thing we can share with others. Even though it might feel uncomfortable or intimidating at times, bringing the gospel message to others is a call we are meant to obey (Matthew 28:18-20). Let's be ready this Christmas season to share the gospel message so others will hear God's call to come to Him.

Father, forgive me for sometimes fearing to tell others about You. Give me boldness to talk about how You have changed my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Greater Call

[God told Nathan to tell David,] “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16).

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:4-17

Song: “I Surrender All”

In 1876, young Lilius Trotter (1853–1928) met one of England’s most well-known art critics, who told her he could take her raw talent and make her into one of England’s greatest living artists. The pull to cultivate her artistic ability was strong, yet ultimately, she realized she couldn’t dedicate herself to art and still seek God’s kingdom first. A few years later, she felt called to mission work in Algeria and spent the rest of her life sharing the hope of Jesus with the people there.

David’s desire to build a house for God was a sincere one, but it wasn’t what God wanted. God only wanted David to continue doing what He originally anointed him to do—to shepherd His people as their king. In His goodness to David, God promised to establish a house for him—a posterity—that (in Christ) would ultimately rule forever. In a sense, what David had wanted to do for God—build a house for His name—God did for David.

Sometimes our good desires must be set aside for the sake of God’s greater calling. As we seek God’s kingdom first in our lives, He will lead us into His plans beyond our own pursuits and with effects that last far beyond our own lifetime.

Father, I want to pursue Your kingdom first, above and beyond my own desires. Help me to discern Your call and follow You faithfully. In Jesus’ name, amen.