

Our Bodies and Identity

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[0 : 00] The scripture reading comes from the book of 1st Samuel chapter 16. Please follow along on the bulletin or on your own Bible.

Starting in verse 1, we read, The Lord said to Samuel, How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?

Fill your horn with oil and go. I will send you to Jesse, the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.

And the Lord said, Take a heifer with you and say, I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do.

And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you. Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him, trembling, and said, Do you come peaceably?

[1 : 08] And he said, Peaceably. I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice. And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Lord said to Samuel, Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him.

For the Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel.

And he said, Neither has the Lord chosen this one. Then Jesse made Shama pass by. And he said, Neither has the Lord chosen this one.

And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, The Lord has not chosen these. Then Samuel said to Jesse, Are all your sons here?

[2 : 24] And he said, There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep. And Samuel said to Jesse, Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.

And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him, for this is he.

Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.

And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah. This is the word of God. Thanks, Annabelle. Am I on? Can you guys hear me? Yeah?

Okay. Thanks. Thanks, Niels. My name is Oscar. If you don't know me, it's a privilege to be delivering God's word today together as a church family.

[3 : 28] To our church family. Let me pray for us as we dive into God's word. Father, we come before you, Lord.

And we ask that all of us here, God, myself included, Lord, that our hearts would be with awe, filled with awe as we look into your word, God, and as we receive your spirit.

Father, I pray, God, that as we look at body again more closely, and as we look at body and identity today, Lord, that we would see, Lord, that we are secure in you as children of God.

That you love us. That you delight in us. I pray especially, Lord, for those of us today, God, that may struggle a bit with our identity or with our appearance, how we look.

God, that you would fill our hearts with your love and goodness and security that can only be found in Jesus. I pray particularly for our youth who are with us in service today, God.

[4 : 29] I pray, Lord, that the eyes of their hearts will be opened to receive your word today, that they would be impacted by your word, Father. So we just commend this time, commit this time to you in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. So, yeah, we're in week two of a six-week sermon series on body and faith, where we're looking at what the Bible says about our physical bodies.

Last week, Kevin started us off, and he spoke about our bodies and creation, showing us that our bodies are not inconsequential.

Our bodies matter. Our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made by God who knows us intimately and delights in us. And today, we're going to look at our bodies and identity.

Is there a ringing sound? Can you guys? Closer? Okay. Is that better? Is it better? Okay. Now, I think that we all know this phrase, don't judge a book by its cover.

[5 : 37] Take any book. The title may be one word or a phrase, something innocuous, or maybe something eye-catching. Maybe there's a photograph on the front of the book or a vague picture.

But until we actually open up the book and read it, would we appreciate the theme, would we appreciate the theme, the lesson, or would we appreciate the writing style, the prose, the poetry?

Until we venture inside the pages, would we understand the storyline and the characters of the book, the meat and heart of the book? And isn't it true that the way we identify people, at least in part, is like judging a book by its cover?

We look at a person's appearance, their face, their body. Are they tall? Are they short? Their skin color? And we make an assessment, a judgment. But in today's passage from 1 Samuel 16, the Bible tells us that God doesn't value us based on our appearance.

God doesn't look at the cover of the book. God looks at what is inside. And what is inside is not just our heart, but also our body and how we use our body.

[6 : 51] And so what I hope we see today is that it's faith in Christ, in our heart, lived out through our body, that reflects our identity as children of God.

And because this is our identity, we can be secure in Christ and honor God with our heart and with our body. And so today's big idea is that our identity in Christ is that of a child of God, through faith in Christ in our hearts, and lived out in our bodies.

Now, in the world's view, how we look, our body type, or how in shape or out of shape we are, is such a big part of our identity.

For many of us, it shapes how we see ourselves, how others perceive us, or how we want to be perceived, and also how we view others. Of course, the word identity is such a big and complicated word.

In simple terms, I think we can define identity as something we look to, to feel a sense of self-worth and value. In Hong Kong, separate from our physical appearance, our identity is often shaped by, number one, family background.

[8 : 03] Do we come from a well-known prominent family, or perhaps not? Education. Where do we go to school? How about career? I think this one is big for us here in Hong Kong.

I think that for many of us, our career, our title, really is who we are. That is our identity. I'm a lawyer. I'm a doctor. I'm a banker.

I'm a PhD student. I'm a business owner. I'm a manager. I'm a partner. Or how about relationship status? I admit, this one is especially difficult to talk about.

But I think that for some of us, our identity is tied to who we're dating, or who we're married to, or if we're dating or married at all. And that's why I think that when we break up, we lose our bearings, and we lose a sense of who we are.

In Western society, what seems to be elevated in today's culture, when it comes to identity, is this idea that we need to be true to who we are. My body isn't the real me.

[9 : 07] My gender isn't the real me. What I feel inside is the real me, and therefore, I can do whatever I want with my body. We will touch upon this in more detail when we speak about body and gender in a few weeks.

But on the topic of body and identity, there's no doubt that culture and the world around us shape how we view physical appearance, the body, and identity. Think about how much money we spend on our face, just our face alone.

In the U.S., one source indicates that the global spend on cosmetics is upwards of \$100 billion a year. Or think about the types of cosmetic surgeries people go through, some of which are quite expensive and perhaps even dangerous.

And it isn't just women. All right? Us guys, we're also a part of this too. A survey by Deloitte suggests that in the U.S., men actually spend more on overall beauty products than women.

Surprisingly, yes. It's true. Don't be ashamed, guys. It's okay. I used lotion this morning on my face. Now, if you're sitting here, now if you're sitting here and you don't care about your looks, nor do you feel any social pressure to look a certain way, don't fall asleep quite yet.

[10 : 20] Maybe you're married and you're like, eh, I don't care about how I look. I'm already married. I don't have to impress my spouse. Maybe I'm peak, maybe I'm peak maxing. Maxing, by the way, means maximizing a physical appearance.

I learned that recently as I was researching this sermon. Even if that is your view, even that could be your view, the social pressure on how we look and the world's obsession with our bodies likely affects someone near and dear to your heart.

Maybe your wife. Maybe your husband, as he gets a bit older and his hair starts thinning. I think mine is a little bit at the moment. Thank you for caring for me, honey.

Maybe your brother or sister. Maybe your parents. Maybe your teenage, maybe your child as he or she is reaching their teenage years. Maybe someone in your CG. Maybe someone sitting around you right here today in church.

And given the rise of social media and the pressure of always looking good and having to put our best face and body forward as our identity, look at the rise in body dissatisfaction, especially among teenagers and young adults.

[11 : 28] The skincare company Dove did a study which indicated that only 2% of women would describe themselves as beautiful. Even actors, supermodels, and pro athletes struggle with how they look.

And it just goes to show how much pressure the world places on how we look and how much value that we place on how we look. And look at some of the consequences. In the UK, the NHS reports that the number of children that started treatment for eating disorder, bulimia, anorexia, and binge eating, increased by over 100% in the six years ending 2023.

Or look at teen bullying. One report in the US suggests that one in five students reported being bullied in school. And in many cases, the drivers of bullying are linked to physical appearance, race or ethnicity, or disability.

In other words, it was about the appearance. This affects all of us, whether we think about it a lot or not at all. And in today's passage from 1 Samuel 16, even the prophet Samuel gets lured into this way of thinking.

Saul, the first king of Israel, rejected God, and therefore God rejected him as king of Israel. God then sends Samuel to visit a man in Bethlehem named Jesse, instructing Samuel that one of Jesse's sons would be the next king.

[12 : 52] Samuel looks at Jesse's son, Eliab, and is impressed with Eliab's physical stature. And Samuel thinks, surely this must be God's anointed one. God, of course, has other plans, and he tells Samuel in verse 7 of the passage, Do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature, because I have rejected him.

For the Lord sees, not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. Jesse's six other sons are presented to Samuel before Samuel, but none are chosen by God.

Samuel then asks Jesse, Are all your sons here? to which Jesse replies that his other son, his youngest son, David, is in the shepherd fields. Jesse was asked to bring before Samuel all of his sons, and he didn't even think about bringing David, his youngest son, who was probably the least impressive in terms of physical appearance.

For the Lord sees, not as man sees, and man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart. And so as David emerges, God tells Samuel, This is the one who will be my king.

Even Samuel, the prophet of God, didn't understand that God doesn't esteem us based upon how we look. Our identity, according to God, isn't based on whether we are tall or short, or whether we are physically attractive or not at all.

[14 : 18] God doesn't esteem us because of our resume, nor our title, nor our social influence, nor our standing. God esteems us because of our heart. And so now the question is, what did God see in David's heart?

In 1 Samuel, and also in the book of Acts, God says this about David. I have found in David, the son of Jesse, a man after my heart. What does that mean, a man after my heart?

A man after God's heart? Well, the Bible describes David in many ways. On his appearance, he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. On his courage, a man of valor, a man of war.

On his musical talents, he was skillful in playing the lyre. David was also described as prudent in speech, a man of good presence. But of all the ways the scripture describes David, the most important aspect of his character, the foundation of his life, and the driver of all his ambition was that David loved God dearly.

He knew God intimately and he loved God dearly. And David's identity was secure as a child of God. David's writings from the book of Psalms paint a beautiful picture of his relationship with God.

[15 : 38] Here are a few examples. Psalm 139, we read this last week. David believed that God knew everything about him and loved him. He knitted me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you for I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. Psalm 16, David's life ambition was to be with God and to know God. In your presence there is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 100, he knew God to be faithful. His steadfast love endures forever and his faithfulness to all generations. Through reading these psalms, we see a window into David's heart.

But importantly, although our passage today says that God looks on the heart, it isn't saying that David's body was irrelevant. In fact, David's body mattered a lot.

He spent years protecting his father's sheep, perfecting his hand-to-hand combat skills and defending his father's sheep from wild lions and wild bears. And just like God was preparing David to be shepherded over Israel by first shepherding his father's flock, God was training David's body in the shepherd fields in preparation to fight Goliath and then subsequently to lead Israel's armies against all of God's enemies.

[16 : 55] You could say that David's body acted out what was in his heart. When it was wartime, he didn't just sit back and hope for the best. He went out and fought with his body.

His heart and body worked hand in hand. Of course, as a side note, David, although David was physically trained and prepared to fight, he knew that at the end of the day, if it was just his own strength, he would fail every time.

He believed in faith that it was God to be the one to deliver him from his enemies. And so, for David, in all of his life, from when he was a boy in the shepherd fields to when he was a king on the battlefield, his heart and his body worked together to worship and to honor God.

David's body mattered. Jesus' body mattered. We know from Isaiah there was nothing physically attractive about Jesus. Isaiah says that he had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him.

And yet, Jesus fully embraced his humanity taking on a human body. His body was the means by which he communed with the world when he walked the earth.

[18 : 10] And even now, we can relate to Jesus in so many ways because he had a body like we have full of frailty. And he experienced pain like we face.

And of course, it was Jesus' body that he gave up that was broken for us on the cross. David's body mattered. Jesus' body mattered.

Our bodies matter. God doesn't look at God's body. God doesn't look at appearance. What we look like, are we attractive or not, are we tall or short?

And yet, we use our physical bodies to act out our worship and honor of God. God doesn't look at appearance and yet, we use our physical bodies to act out our honor and worship of God.

God. And yet, for David, in spite of being an incredible man of God, David was highly imperfect and sinful. In that verse we read in Acts just now about David being a man after God's heart, the end of that sentence actually is that God describes David also as a man who would do all my will.

[19 : 23] A man after my own heart who would do all my will. Well, David did not always do God's will. David did not always honor God with his heart and his body.

We all know the story, right? David slept with another man's wife and then he murdered the husband. And so, although God esteemed David because of his heart and God esteemed David because of his body or his action, what he did, for us, we need to remember that we aren't saved because of the quality of our hearts nor by anything we could do with our bodies.

There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. Our sin isn't forgiven because of anything we could possibly do for the one who is perfect, Jesus Christ, has done everything already for us on the cross.

We are saved by faith in Christ alone, by the grace of Christ alone. And so, therefore, we should remember there's nothing we could do to impress God.

Perhaps consciously or subconsciously, we try to impress others by looking a certain way. Maybe we go to the gym to try to sculpt our bodies in a more attractive way. Maybe we choose certain clothes that stand out.

[20 : 37] But if our faith and hope is in Christ, and God the Father considers us, he already sees beauty because in his Son he sees beauty and in us he sees his Son.

Say that again. If our faith and hope is in Christ, when God the Father considers us, he already sees beauty because in his Son he sees beauty and in us he sees his Son.

And remember that God's idea of beauty isn't like man's. Jesus, when he rose from the grave, he still bore the scars of the cross on his body. If we saw Jesus walking down the street in Hong Kong and we looked at him, we may think him hideous for he would still have the holes of the cross on his wrists.

But his Father sees him as beautiful and perfect. And that is how God sees us. And so even though our hearts and bodies work together to pursue God and to love God and to honor God, this cannot earn God's love.

For us, it's a response. It's a reflection of the love we experience first from him. It's an outpouring of worship and adoration because we're grateful for Jesus. But it can never earn God's love.

[21 : 59] When God the Father considers us, he sees his precious Son, Jesus, whom he loves with an everlasting undying love. And so therefore, we can be secure in our identity as children of God.

And so for us, what does it mean to be secure in our identity as children of God? Well, the Apostle Paul in Romans 8 describes identity in God like this.

For we do not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father. Before we put our faith and hope in Christ, we were spiritual orphans getting tossed around in the ways of culture and being slaves to fear and sin.

But now, if our hope and faith is in Christ, we have been adopted into God's family. We have been given a new identity as children of God.

God, the creator of heaven and earth, the eternal God of the universe, says, you are my precious child. Come to me and I will give you rest. I welcome you into my home and into my family.

[23 : 12] You are my precious child and I love you. God knows every hair on your head. He made all of our eyes and all of our fingerprints unique. Think about that. Tens of billions of different fingerprints across billions of individually crafted bodies because our bodies are uniquely, fearfully, and wonderfully made by a God who knows us intimately.

And so, do you know Him? Do you trust Him? Do the ruminations of your heart and the actions of your body reflect this? The word Abba from the verse in Romans 8 means Daddy in Aramaic.

It's used, I think, 48 times or so in Psalms. Every so often, my two boys, Axel and Elliot, their twin boys are five years old, they would cry out either at home or in the grocery store, Daddy, I need you.

Daddy, I need you to tie my shoes. Daddy, I need you to button my shirt. Daddy, I need you to fix my toy. Daddy, I need you to lift me up. I can't see. My boys can say, Daddy, I need you for pretty much anything that comes to mind because I guess after five years of life, they're pretty secure in knowing that they're my children and they're pretty secure in knowing that if I am able to, I will do whatever I can to help them.

I'll do whatever I can to take care of them. And so, do we cry out to our Abba Father? Do we know that we are children of the Most High God?

[24 : 40] And maybe if we're really honest with ourselves, we don't always believe that we're children of God and the insecurity of being an orphan sometimes or often weighs on us, especially when we're hooked to our phone two hours a day and we're looking at all the beautiful people on social media or maybe we get caught in our thoughts and we think that why doesn't the opposite sex like me?

What's wrong with me? Or maybe we think about life and we think we should be further along in life with a better title at work or maybe we should marry with kids by now. But the anecdote to any insecurity we have about our identity, it doesn't come from improving how we look or adding accolades to our resume and it doesn't come from being in any relationship on earth.

King Saul, the sort of anti-David is a good case study of someone who is highly insecure on the surface King Saul had everything going for him. He was tall, he was good looking, the Bible says that there was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he and of course he held the biggest title of all, King, King of Israel.

But in spite of all these impressive external qualities, Saul had a problem in his heart. He worshipped and analyzed his position and status and what he valued most it seems was honor and praise from men.

His identity you could say was tied to his position as king and the honor he received as such and sadly this resulted in Saul making some very bad decisions and God rejecting him as king.

[26 : 22] You see if our identity is tied to the physical or to the material how we look what we've achieved we will inevitably be drawn to what the world values and loves and we'll never be content nor satisfied and we'll always be insecure and wondering if we're good enough and like Saul we will possibly make some very bad decisions and so we need to move our focus away from ourselves and our focus up towards God the one who created us the one who knows everything about us the one who loves us and we know how much he loves us because of Jesus Christ the one he gave the one that gave his body and his blood for us on the cross but the truth is that we won't feel comfort in saying I'm a child of God unless we have a sense of who God is we won't feel loved by God unless we know who our lover is we won't be thankful that the God of the universe rescued us from sin and slavery and adopted us into his family unless we know who our adopted father is and so like King David we must constantly remind ourselves of our father's sovereign majestic character we must remind ourselves of his awesome indeed terrifying power we must remind ourselves that the sovereign yet merciful

God loves us so much he would send his son Jesus to die for us we must remind ourselves of the gospel we are called his image bearers but if we don't have a high view of him what image are we bearing last year Celeste and I we adopted the newest member of our family from the Hong Kong dog rescue her name is Toffee when Toffee first came into our home for the first few days she was a nervous wreck her tail was down she would hide in the corner she wouldn't eat nor drink she even threw up a few times just because Toffee was legally adopted into our family it didn't mean that she automatically experienced or felt our love she didn't yet comprehend her new identity as a member of our family of course over time as we spent more time with Toffee as we showed her our love through cuddles through feeding her through bringing her out on family outings she she became secure in her new identity as the fourth child of the child family the kids call her their baby sister and so for us as adopted children of God we must continue to be reminded of God's nature excuse me one second of God's nature of God's character and his father's love for us maybe we do have a sense but we're so busy with work and life and kids that we forget

I don't think there's any magic formula to know God I think all of us in this room are on the same journey together and I think even the quote unquote most mature Christians only get a tiny sense the majesty of God but that tiny glimpse that is still a truly awe inspiring and beautiful picture so all of us let's get let's get into God's word let's be in prayer get on our knees let's pray the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts to see the living God to understand with a deep with a deep knowledge in our hearts how much he loves us let's pray the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our hearts to worship our great king let's pray that for ourselves and let's pray that for each other I just have two quick ways that we can respond to today's message the first is just to focus our minds on things above

John Piper says that for God to open our eyes to his glory in the Bible he must first cut away all of his competitors in our hearts and so this week when we pull out our phones to look at Instagram or other social media apps or when we're thinking about buying another article of clothing to impress or when we're at the gym pumping iron or whatever it is that we are doing that puts our attention on outward appearance first let's remind ourselves to hold fast to the truth that God doesn't look at outward appearance let's remember that we are children of God first number one focus our minds on things above and number two repentance repentance repentance have we added fuel to the world's fire by judging other people based on how they look perhaps we treat some colleagues well because they look a certain way and some colleagues not as kind with less kindness because they look a certain way maybe it's how we treat the opposite sex maybe it's how we treat our children we make comments to them about their physical appearance that may not be the most encouraging perhaps we need to repent of this maybe we need to repent of viewing appearance like the world does and not how

God does let me close yes the world around us puts a lot of pressure on us to look a certain way and to be attractive it's been that way since ancient times even Samuel made that mistake but God doesn't look at the external appearance God looks at our hearts and God looks at what we do with our bodies and yet there is nothing we could do to impress God nor earn God's love it's only by putting our faith and hope in Jesus Christ that we can be secure in our identity as children of God and as we grow to understand how much God loves us we respond with love coming out of our hearts and we respond as we act that out in our bodies for his glory for his honor and for his praise let's pray together father it's it's a challenging message lord because every day the pressure cooker of the world is bearing down on us and saying that we need to look better it's summertime now and people are saying we need to look better for summer

[33 : 11] God I pray lord that as we consider your word lord your truth as we consider what you have said in this passage from 1st Samuel 16 that you do not look on the appearance you look on the heart I pray that we will be secure in our identity as your children that we would know deeply that you love us that you created us that you know us everything about us even our even our faults even our darkest secrets even the stuff that we are ashamed about and you love us with an undying love because you are our children because father you love Jesus and in us you see Jesus help us lord to really grasp grasp that deeply today tomorrow and always may it not just be an interesting thought or something that we will say to our friends or even think about but may it be a reality in the way we love you and the way our hearts cry out to worship you and the way that thank you god for your word today and we pray lord that your holy spirit would be with us for the rest of the service lord as we respond to you in

Jesus name amen