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Recently I read a story about someone who felt invisible, as though no one saw her due to being overweight. She explained,

People didn't acknowledge me. People didn't talk to me in the line at the grocery store.

Nobody wanted to help me when I was shopping. But then I lost the weight. Now people open doors for me. Employees seek me out to ask if I need help. I am no longer invisible. But I still feel the pain of those who are judged for their weight, their color, their gender, or their sexual preference.

Even after having gone through this experience of being invisible, she discovered that she did not see certain people in her own world, such as when she went to a hardware store looking for a particular item. She wrote:

At my local Home Depot recently, I nearly tripped over an employee in a wheelchair who was approaching me to see if I needed help. He was unable to speak, but held a tablet in his lap. At a tap of the screen, the tablet voiced, "May I help you find something?" Taken aback at the

newness of it all, I muttered what I always do, "No, I'm just browsing, thanks." But then I realized I did, indeed, need help finding something. So, I turned and said, "Yes, actually, where can I find these?"

The young man beamed, tapped his screen again, and it voiced, "Please follow me."

He took me to the aisle I needed and showed me what I was looking for. I thanked him, another tap, and the screen voiced, "Is there anything else I can help you find?"

"No, thank you very much!" I responded. Tap. Voice. "You're welcome."

Now when I shop there, I seek out Dylan, and he beams every time I ask him for help. He is not invisible to me anymore.¹

As I read her story, I began to wonder what people I may not notice. Who are the invisible people many of us may not see? Maybe those who worship in a different way than we do, such as the Muslims, Jews, Baha'is, or Sikhs who live and work in our area? Or maybe the homeless people living in our community, tucked away in corners around our



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town? I once heard from a homeless woman who told me that she often feels invisible. She said, “People look away when they see me, as though they don’t want to acknowledge that I exist. But I’m a person just like they are. Just because I’ve run into a bad situation doesn’t make me any less human. I love God just like they do.”

Sometimes we’re tempted to make decisions about people based on their appearances, making judgements about their value and abilities. Even the prophet Samuel made value judgements when selecting the next king of Israel. The story begins with Samuel disappointed and mourning about the first king, King Saul. God tells Samuel “I have rejected Saul as king over Israel, so prepare to anoint with oil another one I have selected. Go to the house of Jesse, and from them I will select the next king.”

When Samuel met Jesse and his sons, he first noticed the oldest, Eliab, and thought to himself, “He has to be the one the LORD has chosen.” (CEV)
“Samuel, don’t think Eliab is the one just because he’s tall and handsome. He isn’t the one

I’ve chosen.” (CEV) “Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart.” (CEB)

Samuel met with the next oldest son, Abinadab, but God said, “I haven’t chosen him either.” Onto the third son, Shammah. “Nope, not this one either.”

Jesse brought all seven sons to Samuel, but not one of them was who God had in mind. I imagine Samuel might have thought he was on a wild goose chase, so he asked, “Is this all your sons?” to which Jesse replied, “Well, the youngest one is out watching the sheep.” I suppose he didn’t think he would be fit to be a king, but Samuel decides to ask Jesse to send for him anyway. When the youngest came in from the fields, God inspired Samuel to realize this was the next king: “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”

Samuel was trying to play by the rules of selecting the oldest and most handsome son, but God had something else in mind: choosing the youngest, but more importantly, by looking into the heart. When we think of one’s heart, we often think of emotions: love, compassion, caring. When the writers of this story from 1 Samuel used the Hebrew



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word לֵבָב (lebab), often translated as heart, they had a much broader understanding in mind, for the word also means mind, inner self, will, soul, and understanding. The word includes one's entire self, inside and out, from the depths of one's thoughts to the actions one lives.



If God looks at the *lebab*, our entire selves, inside and out, we might feel a bit concerned, for I imagine deep within each of us lurks thoughts and emotions many might be afraid to admit. Two years ago the animated movie *Inside Out* illustrated how the happy and joyful eleven-year-old girl Riley had other emotions hidden within her. She had mostly Joy within her, but when her family moved to a new city, she had trouble adjusting to her new surroundings, and the other emotions of Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust began to emerge. Life began to spiral out of control to the point where Riley ran away from home, hoping that finding her way back to her previous community would restore Joy again.



It's a wonderful movie exploring the complicated emotions within children, an idea that

developed as the author noticed the changing personalities emerging from his own daughter. The movie portrays the emotions so well that the *New York Times* has listed it as one of the best 25 movies of the 21st century.² I wonder if it's so popular because we realize that complicated emotions exist deep within each of us.

Sometimes we may wish we had a cure for some of the deep emotions rumbling around inside of us, such as

Alfred Adler, a famous psychologist, [who] once put an ad in the paper for his Fourteen-Day Cure Plan. He claimed that he could cure anyone of any mental or emotional difficulty in just fourteen days if they would do just what he told them to.



One day a woman who was extremely lonely came to see Adler. He told her he could cure her of her loneliness in just fourteen days if she would follow his advice. She was not very enthusiastic, but she still asked, "What do you want me to do?"

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Adler replied, “If you will do something for someone else every day for fourteen days, at the end of that time, your loneliness will be gone.”

She objected profusely, “Why should I do anything for someone else? No one ever does anything for me.”

Adler supposedly responded jokingly, “Well, maybe it will take you twenty-one days.”³

We know how difficult it is to change, and although a 14-day cure may seem simplistic, we know that God continues to love us even when looking on our insides and discovering who we truly are. God looked beyond David’s younger stature and looked on the inside and saw him as a great leader, even though many years later David

committed terrible sins. Often attributed to David, Psalm 51 expresses God’s ability to cleanse us from the inside out:

1 Have mercy on me, God,
according to your faithful love!
Wipe away my wrongdoings
according to your great compassion!
2 Wash me completely clean of my guilt;
purify me from my sin!
10 Create a clean heart for me, God;
put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!



God can put a new spirit within each of us, cleansing us from the inside out, helping us to look beyond the outsides of others, looking past their differences, listening to one another, and celebrating that on the inside we all look alike, created by God from the inside out.



¹ Clergy Stuff, Program Resources, Sept-Dec 2017, p. 61.

² www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/06/09/movies/the-25-best-films-of-the-21st-century.html

³ Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 1277-1284). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #97.