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Have you ever become nostalgic about something from the past? Maybe you have some fond memories of the good old days when you were young—or if you have children, you may cherish memories of when they were young. That’s been happening to me a lot lately—I’ve been reflecting on when my children were younger.

Maybe it’s because I have a son who graduated from college and a daughter from high school who will begin college in two months and I can’t figure out how they both got to this age so quickly. It seems like last month that I was teaching Jonathan how to ride a two-wheeler bicycle, holding onto the seat while he peddled around the yard. It seems like only yesterday when I watched Rebekah during her dance recitals, pirouetting across the stage ever so gracefully.

Maybe it’s because they both pulled out the family photo albums and began looking through baby pictures, which of course led to stories about their younger years. Or maybe it’s because Jonathan

was looking through his memory box, which is a plastic tote filled with drawings and papers and all kinds of things from his younger years. Or maybe it’s because the months are drawing closer when they will both be gone—Jonathan to a job in Germany and Rebekah to college. I’m not quite sure I’m ready for this different way of being dad, for during the past 22 years there has always been a child or two in the house.

As my memories have wandered through the past years, I recall all the wonderful times we had as a family—the school plays and field trips, band concert and dance recitals, and our conversations about God and faith. But I also recall the times when I made mistakes, for none of us enter the world of parenting with an instruction manual. Raising children is a process of trial and error. And when I finally thought I had figured out my kids, they suddenly changed and I had to learn all over again.

We even see the confusion of parents reflected in the biblical stories, and in the story from the

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book of Samuel, Jesse seems to be more swayed by the popular cultural messages than by his heart as a dad. The narrator of the story tells us that Samuel was to select a new king, so he takes his container of oil that was used to anoint each new king, and he heads for Jesse's family. He arrives to worship with the family, which is where the first portion of the story ended in the scripture we heard read. The story continues as Jesse brings his sons for Samuel to meet. He meets the oldest son. This surely must be the next king of Israel, for he is tall and very handsome looking. But God said to Samuel, "Not this one. Don't look on his outward appearance or his height. Humans look at the outward appearances, but God looks on the heart."

So Dad Jesse decides to select another son for Samuel to meet, hoping he might be the next king. "No, not this one." Dad tries again and brings the next son he thinks might be the king, but guess what Samuel replied? "No, not this one." Jesse continued this until he had brought seven sons

before Samuel, but none of them would become the next king.

Finally Samuel asks if there are any other sons, to which Jesse replies that the youngest is out watching the sheep. "Well, go get him."

When this youngest son finally arrives, the narrator describes him as a handsome boy with beautiful eyes and a reddish color. We may wonder: *what kind of description is that?*

I imagine Jesse might have thought, "How can this be the one? He's not big and muscular—by no means the athlete of the family. He's just the little kid out watching the sheep. Surely he cannot be the one Samuel is looking for to be the next leader of our people."

As a dad, this story makes me wonder. How many of you are also dad? Have you ever done something similar to Jesse—ever overlooked the potential of your child? We sometimes get so caught up with the expectations of what the media or

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others say that we miss the reality of the actual gifts of our children.

Friday I went on another field trip with Lebanon Kids to a team building event. The leader was telling the kids how we are all important parts of the team, though we often get caught up with the beautiful pictures on the covers of magazines, thinking that's what we're supposed to look like. But then he explained, "It's all a lie. They can take anyone's picture; use editing software and airbrush techniques to make the person look perfect. Without all those extra enhancements, they look plain, just like all the rest of us."

As Dads, we don't always know who to listen to. We were not given a parenting handbook and we don't always know what to do.

But sometimes we pretend that we know everything or that we are not afraid of anything, as one little girl was trying to understand when she asked her dad, "Are you afraid of the dark?"

"No, I am not afraid of the dark."

Then she asked, "Are you afraid of snakes?"

"No, I am not afraid of snakes either."

"How about long slimy worms, daddy? Are you afraid of them?"

He replied, "No, I'm not afraid of any of those things—not even those slimy worms."

The girl thought for a moment and then she concluded, "Then the only thing you're afraid of is Mom!"¹

I think what I've learned through the past 22 years of parenting is that I'm always *becoming* a dad. It's a process, one that evolves and changes from day to day. Just because one has a son or daughter does not make one a dad, but one *becomes* dad by watching our children grow and by delighting in the potential within each child.

Even the youngest child could become king, as in the story from 1 Samuel. I think the story about Jesse trying to figure out which son Samuel will choose reminds us to pay attention to our kids. The story ends with Samuel selecting Jesse's youngest

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son, who will grow to become the famous King David. Just imagine what would have happened had Jesse not called him in from the field, thinking he could never amount to much more than watching the sheep.

This story is more than about the process of becoming a dad, for it speaks to all of us, whether or not we are parents. It's a story to remind us to see the potential in one another, in those sitting near us. We are all children in God's family, and God delights in seeing the gifts and potential within all of us.

This story also reminds us to see and hear the children in our congregation, to not leave them out

with the sheep, but to welcome and include them as full participants in our church family.

Today I invite you to think of one child within our congregation and all the gifts and potential within him or her. Let that child or youth know how much you appreciate him or her. If that child is not here today, send a note this week to one child in our congregation saying how much you appreciate him or her.

Let's not leave anyone outside watching the sheep. Let's instead welcome them into God's family, celebrating the gifts and potential of each child of God.

¹ Adapted from *1002 Humorous Illustrations*, Michael Hodgkin, 134.