



E2E

Eternity to Eternity

BOOK 8 | LESSONS 76-90

E2E

Eternity to Eternity

NEW HOPE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

When my dad died last Summer, we were heartbroken. We grieved his passing, and we are still reflecting on his life. As our family considers his walk with God over his lifetime, we can identify patterns. We can see cycles of growth through the years that began with invitations from God.

For example, after salvation, God invited him to forsake his pagan lifestyle and submit his life to Him. My dad wisely chose to connect to the body of Christ, and he began attending church. He heard God's Word, but the allure of his old lifestyle and the desires of his fallen nature stretched him to the breaking point.

There were times he failed to trust God, and he occasionally relapsed into old habits. My dad would feel the Holy Spirit's sting of conviction, confess his sins openly to God and his family to receive forgiveness. These crises of faith resulted in ongoing epiphanies about God, about himself, and the true nature of what it means to mature into Christlikeness.

In 1982, God invited my dad to join Him in missionary work. My dad sold most of our possessions, quit a well-paying job, and enrolled in Bible school at 46 years old! One would have expected God to open the floodgates of blessings to make my mom and dad's life comfortable and happy for their sacrifices. Instead, my mom and dad had numerous health struggles, they suffered dire financial needs, and struggled with missionary life. The trials my mom and dad endured actually intensified moving forward!

What was God up to? My dad's decision to say yes to God and become a missionary initiated a cycle of growth with trials that stretched his faith to the breaking point. This pattern of growth repeated itself throughout his lifetime. My dad thought he was doing big things for God, but God was breaking him so He could do bigger things through him.

In the passages we will cover in this next book, King David, Solomon, and Elijah experienced this same breaking, maturing process after invitations from God. God took each one of these men to the very end of their human capacity and met them there with His sufficiency.

You should not be surprised by God's unanticipated invitations to you to join Him in what He is doing. Don't be shocked that partnership with God involves startling epiphanies about your own incapacity, God's gracious provision, and the need to walk in dependence on Him and not yourself. Welcome to E2E book 8.

Ric Bruce wrote lessons 77, 78, 81, 83, and 88. I wrote lessons 80, 85, and 86. Jacob Iverson wrote 76, 79, 82, 84, 87, 89, and 90. Darla Prether created the awesome cover and arranged the lessons with her God-given design abilities. Sam Eling gave the lessons an online presence on our church website, nhchurch.com. We pray that what you hold in your hands is our humble attempt to move out of the way and let God do big things through our feeble abilities.

All glory to God,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. K. B. Jr.' with a stylized, cursive script.

Richard Bruce Jr, Discipleship Pastor

LESSON 76

Nathan Rebukes David

The name “Enron” has become synonymous with “fraud” in today’s business world. In the early 2000s, Enron’s CEO Jeffery Skilling and Enron’s chairman Kenneth Lay perpetrated a clever accounting scam that duped government auditors. They exploited accounting loopholes and shady financial reporting to hide billions of dollars in debt from failed deals and projects, ultimately leading to Enron’s record-breaking bankruptcy. Before the disaster, whistleblower Sherron Watkins tried in vain to expose Enron’s accounting scandal to the world. Years after the bankruptcy, Watkins shared that she felt like a crew member aboard the *Titanic* trying desperately to alert the captain to a gaping hole in the side of the boat. Instead of acknowledging Watkin’s allegations, however, Enron management marginalized and ignored her.¹

King David—”a man after God’s own heart”— committed egregious crimes in taking another man’s wife, murdering him, and covering it up. Proverbs 28:13 says, “Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.” Not even a king can escape the consequences of sin. David’s day of reckoning came through the prophet Nathan, who delivered one of the most dramatic rebukes ever recorded in the Bible. To his credit, unlike Skilling and Lay at Enron, King David confessed his sin and experienced God’s mercy. Let’s study the tense moment of Nathan’s confrontation of David in 2 Samuel.

Key Scripture

2 Samuel 12:1-13 (NASB) *Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him and said, “There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a great many flocks and herds. 3 But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and his children. It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom, and was like a daughter to him. 4 Now a traveler came to the rich man, and he*

was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd, to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him; rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

5 Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. 6 He must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion."

7 Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! 9 Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. 10 Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' 11 Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household; I will even take your wives before your eyes and give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. 12 Indeed you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun.'" 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die."

Nathan used a clever parable to confront King David with his sins of adultery and the murder of Uriah. By subtly drawing David into the story emotionally, Nathan allowed David to tighten the noose around his own neck. The words "You are the man!" must have echoed around David's court like a gunshot, drawing a collective gasp from the listeners. David drew the correct conclusion and confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord." He had, and now David would face God's judgment and experience His mercy.

Consider the following:

1. Talking to Kings: During the time of King David, ordinary people viewed monarchs with an aura of divinity. Kings of the ancient world positioned themselves above reproach and beyond scrutiny, even from the law. Just consider a few of Samuel's warnings to the people when they demanded a king other than God in 1 Samuel 8. "This will

be the procedure of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and place them for himself in his chariots... and some to do his plowing and to reap his harvest... He will also take your daughters for perfumers and cooks and bakers..." Clearly, the king was no one to be trifled with. The indirect style of confrontation in the ancient Near East typically used storytelling to make points subtly, particularly when addressing difficult issues with kings and officials.² Indirect methods of communication are a common form of communication in the Middle East to this day. Nathan's approach to opening the rebuke with a parable allowed him to show the king respect, but the move also served a deeper strategic purpose: it allowed David to arrive at his own conclusions. David had unwittingly passed judgment on himself as king, and his judgment was binding.

2. The Parable's Power: A parable delivered at the right time by the right source can change the world, as we see in 2 Samuel 12 when Nathan declares, "You are the man!" Parables formed a key part of education in ancient Israel. Prophets, priests, kings, and later Jesus himself delivered complex moral truths in the relatable moral wrapping of a parable. Scholars Elwell and Beitzel say of Jesus' parables, "An understanding of parables is essential if one is to understand the teaching of Jesus, since the parables make up approximately 35 percent of his recorded sayings. At no point are the vitality, relevance, and appropriateness of his teaching so clear as they are in his parables... The parables are not merely illustrations for Jesus' preaching; they are the preaching, at least to a great extent. Nor are they simple stories; they have been truly described as both 'works of art' and 'weapons of warfare.'"³ Since God authored Nathan's parable, it's no surprise that it too is both a work of art and weapon of warfare. The parable of the poor man and his beloved lamb resonates with and illustrates God's character traits of justice and empathy, values which speaks to all human cultures regardless of the latest social or political trends. By declaring his own guilt, David demonstrated the effectiveness of parables in conveying truth/ethical principles.

3. No One Is Above God: No one can claim superiority to God. Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes." Similarly, Psalm 47:8 states, "God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne." Since God is King over all, God's standards of morality

and ethics have no exceptions. Perhaps the central question in each Christian's life is how they respond to the kingship and authority of God in their lives. Those who accept God's judgment and admit their sin might still experience consequences as David did, but they will also experience God's tender mercy. Where are you today? Do you consider yourself an exception to God's rule over creation and all mankind? Are you hiding sin in your life that you know God would disapprove of? If so, acknowledge, "I am the man/woman," and confess your sin to God. He already knows.

The parable of the rich man stealing the poor man's lamb illustrates the central role of parables in illustrating God's truth in the ancient world. Parables communicate equally well today. We should use similar illustrations to explain truth to children, our lost coworkers, and to other believers as we interact with them. Through Nathan's bold and well-timed parable, David learned the inescapable reality that all people's actions are subject to God's authority. David condemned himself by condemning the man in the parable, humbly acknowledging his sin. This story reminds us today that God holds us accountable for our actions while offering redemption through acknowledgment and repentance of our sins.

Point to Ponder

"Every happening, great and small, is a parable whereby God speaks to us, and the art of life is to get the message." -Malcolm Muggeridge.

From Learning to Living

Like David, we each face moments in life when it feels like we can get away with doing something we know is wrong. Speeding in our cars or using our phones while driving provides simple, everyday examples. We do these things because we believe no one will notice and because we believe no one (including God) will condemn us. But they are against the law. These little moments reveal our character and what we believe about God. What we believe about God determines what we do next. We should be individuals who, even under pressure or in private, choose to flee from temptation, displaying the obedience that God desires from each of us.

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your steadfast love and Your unyielding justice. Teach us to embrace accountability, not as a burden but as a guide to living rightly before You. Help us to see our own faults as clearly as we see others' and give us the courage to admit our wrongs. Thank You for parables in Your Word that make truth understandable. May Your Spirit guide us in wisdom and integrity so that our lives will glorify You in all that we do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LESSON 77

The Tragedy of Amnon and Tamar

God created the ideal family in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve walked with each other and with God free from shame, embarrassment, guilt, sin, or miscommunication. After the fall, however, bitterness took root as sin's deep dysfunction tore relationships apart. Perhaps you've experienced sin's devastating relational consequences within your own family. One of the most tragic examples of sin's consequences in the Bible centers around Amnon's violation of his half-sister Tamar. We'll explore how the royal family crumbled under the weight of Amnon's sinful desires and how the situation was exacerbated by David's lack of engagement. *Warning:* this passage forces us to confront uncomfortable realities about sinful nature, human responsibility, and ultimate justice. The story is graphic and features wanton sexual violence. Most importantly, this chapter in the Bible points us to the deep need for a perfect King—the Messiah, the only One who can redeem mankind from utter brokenness.

Key Scripture

2 Samuel 13:1-39 (NASB) *Now it was after this that Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar, and Amnon the son of David was in love with her. 2 But Amnon was so frustrated on account of his sister Tamar that he made himself ill, for she was a virgin, and it seemed too difficult to Amnon to do anything to her. 3 But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother; and Jonadab was a very clever man. 4 And he said to him, "Why are you, the king's son, so depressed morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" So Amnon said to him, "I am in love with Tamar, the sister of my brother Absalom." 5 Jonadab then said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill; when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Please have my sister Tamar come and give me food to eat, and have her prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat from her hand.'" 6 So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; when the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please have my sister Tamar come and make me a couple of pastries in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand."*

7 Then David sent a messenger to the house for Tamar, saying, “Go now to your brother Amnon’s house, and prepare food for him.” 8 So Tamar went to her brother Amnon’s house, and he was lying in bed. And she took dough, kneaded it, made pastries in his sight, and baked the pastries. 9 Then she took the tray and served them to him, but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, “Have everyone leave me.” So everyone left him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food into the bedroom, so that I may eat from your hand.” So Tamar took the pastries which she had made and brought them into the bedroom to her brother Amnon. 11 When she brought them to him to eat, he took hold of her and said to her, “Come, sleep with me, my sister.” 12 But she said to him, “No, my brother, do not violate me, for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do this disgraceful sin! 13 As for me, where could I get rid of my shame? And as for you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel. Now then, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you.” 14 However, he would not listen to her; since he was stronger than she, he violated her and slept with her.

15 Then Amnon hated her with a very great hatred; indeed, the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, “Get up, go away!” 16 But she said to him, “No, because this wrong in sending me away is greater than the other that you have done to me!” Yet he would not listen to her. 17 Then he called his young man who attended him and said, “Now throw this woman out of my presence, and lock the door behind her!” 18 Now she had on a long-sleeved garment; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king dressed themselves in robes. Then his attendant took her out and locked the door behind her. 19 Tamar took ashes and put them on her head, and tore her long-sleeved garment which was on her; and she put her hand on her head and went on her way, crying out as she went.

20 Then Absalom her brother said to her, “Has Amnon your brother been with you? But now keep silent, my sister, he is your brother; do not take this matter to heart.” So Tamar remained and was isolated in her brother Absalom’s house. 21 Now when King David heard about all these matters, he became very angry. 22 But Absalom did not speak with Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar.

23 Now it came about after two full years that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baal-hazor, which is near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king’s sons to celebrate.

24 And Absalom came to the king and said, “Behold now, your servant has sheepshearers; may the king and his servants please go with your servant.” 25 But the king said to Absalom, “No, my son, we should not all go, so that we will not be a burden to you.” Though he urged him, he would not go; but he blessed him. 26 Then Absalom said, “If not, please have my brother Amnon go with us.” But the king said to him, “Why

should he go with you?" 27 Nevertheless Absalom urged him, so he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.

28 Then Absalom commanded his servants, saying, "See now, when Amnon's heart is cheerful with wine, and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then put him to death. Do not fear; have I not commanded you myself? Be courageous and be valiant." 29 And the servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons got up and each mounted his mule and fled.

30 Now it was while they were on the way that the report came to David, saying, "Absalom has struck and killed all the king's sons, and not one of them is left." 31 Then the king stood up, tore his clothes, and lay on the ground; and all his servants were standing by with clothes torn. 32 And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, David's brother, responded, "Let my lord not assume that they have put to death all the young men, the king's sons, for only Amnon is dead; because this has been set up by the intent of Absalom since the day that he violated his sister Tamar. 33 So now, may my lord the king not take the report to heart, claiming, 'all the king's sons are dead'; but only Amnon is dead."

34 Now Absalom had fled. And the young man who was the watchman raised his eyes and looked, and behold, many people were coming from the road behind him by the side of the mountain. 35 And Jonadab said to the king, "Behold, the king's sons have come; so it has happened according to your servant's word." 36 As soon as he had finished speaking, behold, the king's sons came and raised their voices and wept; and the king and all his servants also wept very profusely.

37 Now Absalom had fled and gone to Talmai the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day. 38 So Absalom had fled and gone to Geshur, and was there for three years. 39 And the heart of King David longed to go out to Absalom; for he was comforted regarding Amnon, since he was dead.

Ammon, David's eldest son, became obsessed with his half-sister Tamar, the beautiful daughter of David. Ammon devised a plan to lure Tamar into his room under the pretense of illness. Once she arrived, he forced himself on her, ignoring her desperate pleas to consider the consequences. After the assault, Ammon's "love" turned immediately to hatred, and he cruelly sent Tamar away. Tamar, devastated, mourned in her brother Absalom's house. Absalom, filled with quiet rage, plotted revenge against Ammon. King David heard of these events and, though angered, took no decisive action against Ammon. Two years later, Absalom executed his plan for revenge, inviting all the king's sons to a feast and ordering his servants to kill Ammon.

Absalom then flees to Geshur, and David, though grieving, fails to restore justice or peace in his household.

Amnon ruined Tamar's life. He crushed her prospects as a future wife, brutalized her physically and emotionally, and stole her innocence. What he did can only be described as pure evil. As we reflect on this dark chapter, we must remember God sovereignly chose the house of David in 2 Samuel 7 to bring forth the Messiah, knowing full well that evil men like Amnon would come through David's lineage. Despite God's promises to always preserve David's line, God never promised David immunity from sin's consequences. In 2 Samuel 13, we witness the beginning of a tragic chain of events that would fracture David's household. However, despite the chaos caused by sin, God would preserve a remnant of David's line through King Jesus.

Consider the following:

1. The Unchecked Consequences of Lust. James 1:14-15 reminds us, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." Amnon's desire for Tamar became a sinful obsession. Instead of controlling his urges or seeking wise counsel, Amnon allowed his unchecked lust to fester. He shamelessly acted on his base urges, destroying his sister and fracturing David's family in the process. This illustrates a broader biblical theme firmly in place since the Garden of Eden: unchecked lust, greed, and desire outside God's design always leads to ruin. Amnon's disregard for Tamar's dignity was a direct violation of the covenant law (Deuteronomy 22:25-29), showing how sin always moves us away from God's covenant blessings into destruction.

2. David's Failure to Administer Justice. David's lack of response to the tragedy jumps off the page. Though he was enraged by what happened to Tamar, he took no action against Amnon. The fact that the victims and perpetrators of these crimes were David's children complicated things, of course. According to Jo Ann Hackett, "It has often been pointed out that this narrative is sprinkled liberally with relational words. Absalom is called David's son in 13:1, and Tamar is Absalom's sister. Amnon is also called David's son (2 Sam. 13:1), and Tamar Amnon's sister (2 Sam. 13:2). Jonadab's relation to them all is clearly spelled out in verse 3, and he addresses Amnon as 'son of

the king' in verse 4. In the same verse Amnon refers to Tamar as 'my brother Absalom's sister.' And so it goes, as the narrator emphasizes the intertwining relationships in this polygamous family."⁴ Perhaps David's own guilt over his past sin with Bathsheba prevented him from taking decisive action. Since he himself had committed sin in this area, David's actions had compromised his moral authority within his own household. Regardless of the cause, David's inaction not only enabled further injustice but served to highlight the need for a greater King—Jesus—who would rule perfectly.

3. The Slow, Quiet Poison of Revenge. Absalom's response to his sister's rape took time. He told Tamar not to mention it while his heart filled with quiet bitterness toward Amnon. Rather than dealing with the situation openly or seeking justice through proper channels, he harbored a secret resentment for two years, plotting against Amnon and waiting for the right moment to strike. Absalom's revenge not only led to the death of his brother but also set off a series of events that would eventually lead to his own death. Bitterness was the poison Absalom took hoping Amnon would die. Romans 12:19 says, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." Revenge, rather than bringing justice or healing, perpetuates a cycle of violence and destruction.

The story of Amnon and Tamar demonstrates the far-reaching consequences of sin, even within God's covenant community and the royal family. Amnon's lust, David's passivity, and Absalom's vengeance all prove that sin fractures relationships, families, and the very fabric of society. More importantly, it reveals the inadequacy of human rulers and points us toward the need for a righteous King, Jesus Christ, who brings true justice and healing.

Point to Ponder

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13).

From Learning to Living

God's covenant called David to both holiness and grace. Similarly, God's Word calls believers to action to eliminate sin. As members of the body of Christ, we have the duty to boldly confront communal and individual sins with God's justice and mercy. Like Amnon, are there areas in your life where you've allowed unchecked desires to fester? Or have you, like David, avoided an obvious sin issue because of fear or guilt? Don't let sin fester—deal with sin immediately!

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom and courage to confront sin in our lives and our communities with humility and love. Please give us the grace to forgive others where we have been wronged. God, we need your justice and mercy to reign in our hearts, families, and society. We are broken, lost, and sinful people hopelessly trapped in sin. Rescue us. Amen.

LESSON 78

The State of David's House

Our culture tells us, “Follow your heart,” but Scripture paints a complex picture of our emotions and desires. Our hearts often deceive us, leading us into paths that may feel right in the moment but ultimately end in destruction. Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

Today's passage explores what happened when David's royal family allowed unresolved emotional tension and sin to fester. King David's partiality toward his son Absalom led to a fragile reconciliation, which lacked signs of genuine spiritual repentance. As a result, this flawed reunion set the stage for one of Israel's most dreadful civil wars. King David, Joab, and Absalom, each dealt with emotions and sin in different ways. As you read the story, pay attention to how Joab manipulated the king's heart and how Absalom's return led to unrest rather than peace. The tragedy of Absalom, David's estranged son, vividly illustrates the consequences of failing to address sin head on.

Key Scripture

2 Samuel 14:1-15:13 (NASB) *Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was drawn toward Absalom. 2 So Joab sent a messenger to Tekoa and brought a wise woman from there, and said to her, “Please follow mourning rites, and put on mourning garments now, and do not anoint yourself with oil but be like a woman who has been mourning for the dead for many days. 3 Then go to the king and speak to him in this way.” So Joab put the words in her mouth.*

4 Now when the woman of Tekoa spoke to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and prostrated herself, and said, “Help, O king!” 5 And the king said to her, “What is troubling you?” And she answered, “Truly I am a widow, for my husband is dead. 6 And your servant had two sons, but the two of them fought in the field, and there was no one to save them from each other, so one struck the other and killed him. 7 Now behold, the entire family has risen against your servant, and they have said, ‘Hand over the one who struck his brother, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed, and eliminate the heir as well.’ So they will extinguish my coal which is left, so as to leave my

husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth."

8 Then the king said to the woman, "Go to your home, and I will issue orders concerning you." 9 The woman of Tekoa said to the king, "My lord, the king, the guilt is on me and my father's house, but the king and his throne are guiltless." 10 So the king said, "Whoever speaks to you, bring him to me, and he will not touch you anymore." 11 Then she said, "May the king please remember the LORD your God, so that the avenger of blood will not continue to destroy, otherwise they will destroy my son." And he said, "As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."

12 Then the woman said, "Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king." And he said, "Speak." 13 The woman said, "Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in speaking this word the king is like one who is guilty, in that the king does not bring back his banished one. 14 For we will surely die and are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up. Yet God does not take away life, but makes plans so that the banished one will not be cast out from Him. 15 Now then, the reason I have come to speak this word to my lord the king is that the people have made me afraid; so your servant said, 'Let me now speak to the king, perhaps the king will perform the request of his slave. 16 For the king will listen, to save his slave from the hand of the man who would eliminate both me and my son from the inheritance of God.' 17 Then your servant said, 'Please let the word of my lord the king be comforting, for as the angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and evil. And may the LORD your God be with you.'"

18 Then the king answered and said to the woman, "Please do not hide anything from me that I am about to ask you." And the woman said, "Let my lord the king please speak." 19 So the king said, "Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?" And the woman replied, "As your soul lives, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or to the left from anything that my lord the king has spoken. Indeed, it was your servant Joab who commanded me, and it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant. 20 In order to change the appearance of things your servant Joab has done this thing. But my lord is wise, like the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all that is on the earth."

21 Then the king said to Joab, "Behold now, I will certainly do this thing; go then, bring back the young man Absalom." 22 And Joab fell on his face to the ground, prostrated himself, and blessed the king; then Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has performed the request of his servant." 23 So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. 24 However, the king said, "He shall return to his own house, but he shall not see my face." So Absalom returned to his own house and did not see the king's face.

25 Now in all Israel there was no one as handsome as Absalom, so highly praised; from the sole of his foot to the top of his head there was no impairment in him. 26 And when he cut the hair of his head (and it was at the end of every year that he cut it, because it was heavy on him, so he cut it), he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels by the king's weight. 27 And to Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a woman of beautiful appearance.

28 Now Absalom lived two full years in Jerusalem, yet he did not see the king's face. 29 Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but he would not come to him. So he sent word again a second time, but he would not come. 30 Therefore he said to his servants, "See, Joab's plot is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the plot on fire. 31 Then Joab got up, came to Absalom at his house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set my plot on fire?" 32 Absalom answered Joab, "Behold, I sent for you, saying, 'Come here, so that I may send you to the king, to say, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me still to be there."' Now then, let me see the king's face, and if there is guilt in me, he can have me executed." 33 So when Joab came to the king and told him, he summoned Absalom. Then Absalom came to the king and prostrated himself with his face to the ground before the king; and the king kissed Absalom.

15:1 Now it came about after this that Absalom provided for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him. 2 And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the road to the gate; and when any man who had a lawsuit was to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call out to him and say, "From what city are you?" And he would say, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." 3 Then Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but you have no one to listen to you on the part of the king." 4 Moreover, Absalom would say, "Oh that someone would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has a lawsuit or claim could come to me, and I would give him justice!" 5 And whenever a man approached to prostrate himself before him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. 6 Absalom dealt this way with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel.

7 Now it came about at the end of four years that Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow which I have made to the LORD, in Hebron. 8 For your servant made a vow while I was living in Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.'" 9 The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he got up and went to Hebron. 10 But Absalom sent spies throughout the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron!'" 11 Then two hundred men went with Absalom from Jerusalem, who were invited and went innocently, for they did not know anything. 12 And Absalom sent for

Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh, while he was offering the sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, for the people continually increased with Absalom. 13 Then a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom."

David's family was deeply fractured and dysfunctional. After Absalom killed his brother Amnon in revenge for the rape of his sister Tamar, he fled to Geshur. For three years, David mourned but took no practical steps to reach out to Absalom. Joab noticed David's deep longing for reconciliation with his estranged son and devised a manipulative plan to bring Absalom back. He employed a woman from Tekoa to deliver a parable about a family feud, subtly leading David to recognize the need for mercy. Perhaps Joab had seen the prophet Nathan employ a similar tactic with spectacular results when he confronted David with his sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 12. Moved by Joab's concocted story, David allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem but refused to see him face-to-face for two years. This half-hearted reintegration failed to heal the wounds of the past. Absalom grew increasingly bitter and desperate for recognition, eventually setting Joab's field on fire to demand an audience with his father. When the two finally met, David kissed Absalom, signaling superficial reconciliation. However, David's kiss just plastered over the unresolved tension between father and son. Absalom began to plot against his father, slowly winning the hearts of the people by positioning himself as a just and compassionate alternative to David's rule. Eventually, he led a rebellion, forcing David to flee Jerusalem.

Consider the following:

1. Reconciliation Without Repentance Rings Hollow. David and Absalom's broken relationship dominates this sad chapter in biblical history. The story highlights a significant spiritual truth: reconciliation without repentance and two-way communication doesn't work. Both parties were at fault here. When David allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem without speaking to him, Absalom's sin continued to fester. Absalom had to set Joab's field on fire to get David's attention! David should have sought out his son. Absalom, for his part, consistently demonstrated a heart hardened by pride and ambition. David's failure to confront Absalom's sin directly led to a shallow, temporary peace. This fragile truce eventually collapsed under the weight of unresolved

issues. True reconciliation must be grounded in genuine repentance. This means acknowledging wrongdoing, seeking forgiveness, and turning away from the behaviors that caused the rift in the first place. In Luke 17:3, Jesus taught about the importance of repentance in the process of forgiveness: “If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.” Without repentance, David’s actions made matters worse. In your own relationships, how often do you seek a quick fix rather than doing the hard work of repentance and forgiveness? Peace makers sometimes seek to smooth over conflict without addressing the underlying issues, but this peace is tenuous at best and proved disastrous in Absalom’s case.

2. Manipulating Leadership Ends in Disaster. As David’s military commander, Joab had significant influence over the king, and he used that power to manipulate David’s emotions. Rather than confronting David directly, Joab orchestrated a scheme involving the woman of Tekoa and coerced David into bringing Absalom back. God had placed David in a position of trust and influence as the leader of Israel. Joab sought to deceptively manipulate David through an elaborate ruse rather than confronting David directly. Joab’s plan may have followed culturally acceptable methods of influencing unpredictable and vengeful kings, but it did nothing to heal the fractured relationship between David and his son. Instead, it contributed to Absalom’s eventual rebellion. In 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul challenges us to reject secretive and deceptive practices: “We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.”

3. Ambition and Pride Lead to Rebellion. Proverbs 16:18 warns, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” Absalom’s return to Jerusalem failed to soften his heart. Instead, it encouraged his pride and ambition. He took the opportunity presented by his return to the capital city to stroke his own ego by providing, “for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run ahead of him” (Samuel 15:1). His physical appearance, charisma, and political cunning won him favor among the people, but he used these God-given attributes for his own selfish gain. Absalom’s selfish ambition sought to usurp his father’s throne rather than serving God’s people or seeking justice. Ultimately, in his unchecked ambition and pride Absalom rebelled not just against his father’s authority but also against God’s authority, setting him on a path of destruction.

2 Samuel 14-15 challenges us to address sin head-on, seek genuine repentance, and guard against manipulation and pride. David's failure to confront Absalom's wrongdoing and Joab's manipulative leadership set the stage for a painful chapter in Israel's history. Unresolved sin allowed to fester always leads to devastating consequences. In this dark story, Absalom's unchecked ambition led to rebellion and bloodshed. True reconciliation requires more than forgiveness; it demands repentance, humility, and a commitment to truth. As we reflect on this passage, examine your relationships. Are you addressing issues and communicating thoroughly, or are you seeking quick fixes? Is pride or ambition driving the behaviors that others praise in your life? Are you using your influence to manipulate or to serve?

Point to Ponder

True peace requires deep healing through repentance and reconciliation.

From Learning to Living

The world's best self-help books and peacemakers can only achieve temporary peace without true repentance. However, Scripture calls us to something deeper: biblical reconciliation rooted in humility, truth, and transformation. Reflect on a tense relationship in your life. What is the root cause of the conflict? Have you addressed it with honesty and humility, or have you tried to sweep it under the rug with a wink and a nod? This week, take a step toward true reconciliation. Have the conversation, ask for forgiveness, or offer a loved one unconditional mercy, as the Holy Spirit prompts you. Seek God's wisdom and guidance as you work toward fully restoring relationships in a way that honors Him.

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the lessons Your Word teaches about healing in relationships. Give us the courage to confront the root issues in our lives and relationships with honesty and humility. Protect us from the dangers of pride and ambition, and help us to lead with integrity. May we seek Your will above our own, and may our lives reflect Your grace, truth, and love. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

LESSON 79

David Flees Absalom

A simple verb can convey a lot of meaning. For example, instead of using “said,” an author can choose verbs like “shouted,” “yelled,” or “spat.” These alternatives all help an author provide insight into a character’s thoughts and actions, exposing hidden aspects of their personality. For example, when we are introduced to the character of Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, he “bowed, but ventured only a word or two.” The verb “ventured” depicts his reserved nature and prepares the reader for what will come later in the story.

In 2 Samuel 15, David’s son Absalom usurped the throne, and David was forced to flee Jerusalem. Though this was the direct consequence of David’s sin, pay close attention to the verbs the author chose to use when telling the story. They not only show how David left, wept, and fled, but also how David trusted God and what his response can teach us about how to respond to discipline and unknown situations.

Key Scripture

2 Samuel 15:13-18, 24-37 (NASB) *Then a messenger came to David, saying, “The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.” 14 So David said to all his servants who were with him in Jerusalem, “Arise and let’s flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go quickly, or he will hurry and overtake us, and bring disaster on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword.” 15 Then the king’s servants said to the king, “Behold, your servants will do whatever my lord the king chooses.” 16 So the king left, and all his household with him; but the king left ten concubines behind to take care of the house. 17 The king left, and all the people with him, and they stopped at the last house. 18 Now all of his servants passed by beside him, and all the Cherethites, all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come with him from Gath, passed by before the king.*

[King David encouraged the Gittites to go back to their homeland, but their leader Ittai faithfully refused David, and he along with his six hundred men chose to follow David into the wilderness.]

24 Now behold, Zadok also came, and all the Levites with him, carrying the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar came up until all the people had finished crossing over from the city. 25 And the king said to Zadok, "Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back and show me both it and His habitation. 26 But if He says this: 'I have no delight in you,' then here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him." 27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Are you not a seer? Return to the city in peace, and your two sons with you, your son Ahimaaz and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. 28 See, I am going to wait at the river crossing places of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me." 29 So Zadok and Abiathar returned the ark of God to Jerusalem and remained there.

30 And David was going up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, and his head was covered, and he was walking barefoot. Then all the people who were with him each covered his own head, and they were going up, weeping as they went. 31 Now someone informed David, saying, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "LORD, please make the advice of Ahithophel foolish."

32 It happened as David was coming to the summit, where God was worshiped, that behold, Hushai the Archite met him with his coat torn, and dust on his head. 33 And David said to him, "If you go over with me, then you will become a burden to me. 34 But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; even as I was your father's servant in time past, so now I will also be your servant,' then you can foil the advice of Ahithophel for me. 35 Are Zadok and Abiathar the priests not with you there? So it shall be that whatever you hear from the king's house, you shall report to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. 36 Behold their two sons are there with them, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son and Jonathan, Abiathar's son; and by them you shall send me everything that you hear." 37 So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

[Absalom entered Jerusalem along with Ahithophel, David's former friend and advisor. At Ahithophel's counsel, Absalom raped the concubines David left behind, fulfilling what Nathan prophesied in 2 Samuel 12.]

Suggested Reading: 2 Samuel 15:13-16:23, Psalm 3, Psalm 41

David was no stranger to running after having spent nearly 15 years in the wilderness pursued by King Saul. However, this time the outcome was far less clear to David. As a young man, David knew he was God's anointed and that despite Saul's actions, he would one day rule Israel. This time, God was silent about his future.

David didn't know the outcome of his plight or if he would survive, but he didn't pout, whine, or hide. Instead he rested on three things: that he was still God's chosen king, that a rebellion against God's anointed was a rebellion against God Himself, and that God promised to establish his lineage forever. David trusted that God had everything under control and was fully surrendered to His will, saying, "Perhaps the LORD will see my affliction, and then the LORD will return to me good in place of his curse today." (16:12)

Consider the following:

1. David was a model of servant leadership. When most leaders are in danger during an uprising or political turmoil, they usually place a high priority on their own lives, often leading the efforts to flee. David, though, was not the first to leave. Instead, he allowed his household to "pass before him" and placed himself between any pursuers and those he cared about. His posture was one of humility: barefoot and in torn clothes, mourning for the lives that would be lost and the relationship that had been broken. His response is not one of fear and self-loathing but of singing praises to God. David's humble posture was contagious to those around him, turning what could have been a panicked withdrawal into an orderly processional.

2. This story foreshadowed Christ's rejection and sacrifice. In their commentary on Second Samuel, authors Fisk and Vannoy point out that "The Christ-anticipating features of this chapter are hard to miss, as David treads the path of our own Savior King 'on the night he was betrayed' (1 Cor. 11:23; Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20), out of Jerusalem, through the Kidron Valley, and up the Mount of Olives in quiet sadness and suffering." The similarities extend beyond the route he took. Both Christ and David were betrayed by a close friend, Jesus by Judas, and David by his advisor, Ahithophel. Both were more concerned with the people around them than with their own lives. What is more striking than the similarities, though, are the differences. While the priests and religious leaders seemed to stand with David (2 Sam. 15:24–29), Christ was arrested at their behest. While David was accompanied by many of his friends and family, all abandoned Christ. While David chose to continue from the Mount of Olives into the wilderness, Christ chose to go back into the city, knowing it would cost His life. Most notably, everything that happened to David was the direct result of his sin (2 Sam. 12:10),

while Christ “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (1 Pet. 2:22–23), all so that He could bear “our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” and so that “by His wounds, we might be healed” (1 Pet. 2:24).

Though the direct result of his sin, David didn’t shirk or hide from his responsibilities. He could have run, self-medicated, or tried to pass the blame. Instead, he accepted responsibility for his actions. He didn’t know the outcome of his circumstances—if he would even make it through alive—but he knew how God would want him to respond: humbly, righteously, justly, and lovingly to those around him. Like David, we may not know how our difficult situations will turn out, but we can follow his model and strive to be a Christlike example to those around us.

Point to Ponder

“The will of God will not take us where the grace of God cannot sustain us.” Billy Graham

From Learning to Living

After we’ve confessed our sins to God, it can be difficult to approach Him again. We often contend with lingering shame, guilt, or the ongoing consequences of our actions. David confessed his sin with Bathsheba before God and now had the confidence to reach back out to Him. We can follow his example and boldly approach God knowing that “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).”

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, we know difficult circumstances are inevitable. We acknowledge that there may be seasons where You feel silent or distant. Give us the strength to remain faithful regardless of our circumstances and to reflect Christ in our attitudes, words, and actions.

LESSON 80

Absalom Killed

Fallen heroes are a regular feature of the sin-cursed world we live in: Sports heroes caught doping, pastors committing sexual sin, financial advisors who are bilking their vulnerable clients out of millions with deceitful ventures like Ponzi schemes. The list goes on and on. These moral contradictions violate our deepest sentiments, destroy the respect we once held, and breed seething disgust for our leaders.

Absalom, fueled by a lust for power and a murderous disrespect for David, brazenly entered the city of Jerusalem as the new king. Fickle subjects quickly rallied to him and began plotting with him to destroy David, ironically doing the very things they disrespected David for! David had fled across the Jordan to the city of Mahanaim where his friend Barzillai fed and encouragement to him. He was surrounded by only a small contingent of troops who were cut off from weaponry, supplies, and family. The threat of death hung heavily over everyone who dared remain loyal to David.

While Absalom partied at the capital, Joab and the rest of David's troops were strategizing for war. Outnumbered, David and his men decided to fight Absalom in a dense forest near Mahanaim. This gave David's seasoned troops a tactical advantage.

On the day of battle, David divided his troops into three companies: one led by Joab, another by Abishai, and the third led by a foreigner Ittai, who commanded a contingent of Philistine mercenaries. On that fateful morning, David gathered his generals and gave a strict command not to hurt Absalom. Pay attention to each character in the story and the role they played in the drama below.

Key Scripture

2 Samuel 18:6-18 (NASB) *Then the people went out into the field against Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. 7 The people of Israel were defeated there before the servants of David, and the slaughter there that day was great, 20,000 men. 8 For the battle there*

was spread over the whole countryside, and the forest devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.

9 Now Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. For Absalom was riding on his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. And his head caught fast in the oak, so he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule that was under him kept going. 10 When a certain man saw it, he told Joab and said, "Behold, I saw Absalom hanging in an oak." 11 Then Joab said to the man who had told him, "Now behold, you saw him! Why then did you not strike him there to the ground? And I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt." 12 The man said to Joab, "Even if I should receive a thousand pieces of silver in my hand, I would not put out my hand against the king's son; for in our hearing the king charged you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Protect for me the young man Absalom!' 13 Otherwise, if I had dealt treacherously against his life (and there is nothing hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." 14 Then Joab said, "I will not waste time here with you." So he took three spears in his hand and thrust them through the heart of Absalom while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak. 15 And ten young men who carried Joab's armor gathered around and struck Absalom and killed him.

16 Then Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing Israel, for Joab restrained the people. 17 They took Absalom and cast him into a deep pit in the forest and erected over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled, each to his tent. 18 Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and set up for himself a pillar which is in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to preserve my name." So he named the pillar after his own name, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day.

[Two messengers were commissioned to take news of the battle to King David. David waited anxiously as the two messengers came to him one at a time, one bearing good news that Absalom was defeated but the second messenger arrived with sad news.]

31 Behold, the Cushite arrived, and the Cushite said, "Let my lord the king receive good news, for the LORD has freed you this day from the hand of all those who rose up against you." 32 Then the king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And the Cushite answered, "Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be as that young man!"

33 The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Recommended reading: 2 Samuel 18-19

David's loyal troops fought hard and filed triumphantly back into Mahanaim, but instead of being met by cheers and a heroes' welcome, they were greeted by David's wailing. What should have been rejoicing turned into shame as the man they all loved and were willing to die for was grieving for the man who wanted to kill them all! It was an understandably surreal moment. As the consequential suffering for his adultery continued, David must have thought a million times, "I should have walked away!" Consider the following:

1. Despite Absalom's death and the sound defeat of his fellow usurpers, the nation was slow to welcome David back (2 Sam. 19:9-12). The seeds of discontent sown by Absalom were still in full bloom as the northern ten tribes returned home to bury their dead. Bible scholar David Brown comments, "The kingdom was completely disorganized. The sentiments of three different parties are represented in 2 Sam. 19:9,10: the royalists, the adherents of Absalom who had been very numerous, and those who were indifferent to the Davidic dynasty. In these circumstances the king was right in not hastening back, as a conqueror, to reascend his throne. A re-election was, in some measure, necessary. He remained for some time on the other side of Jordan, in expectation of being invited back. That invitation was given without, however, the concurrence of Judah."⁵ Absalom's rebellion was birthed in the city of Hebron, the town David ruled from before moving to Jerusalem. David's own tribe had conspired against him, and this must have added immeasurable pain to David's already broken heart. David eventually used carefully chosen rhetoric to shame his tribe by saying, "You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king? (2 Sam. 19:12)."

2. Let's think about the characters in the story and the roles they played. David was God's anointed servant-leader while Absalom was a rebel who mercilessly undermined David for advantage. He lusted for preeminence and was willing to destroy God's work to be who he wanted to be. Absalom's troops were those willing to side with a handsome critic who had beautiful aesthetics but lacked spiritual substance. Joab, David's nephew, was opportunistic and used his relationship with David and his holy calling to bully others. David's loyal troops chose to love the God of David and look past David's faults to see the greater picture of God's program. Barzillai, who welcomed David into Mahanaim chose to lay self aside, trust God, and invest unselfishly without considering the costs. A host of other Israelites stayed in the shadows and let Absalom sin against David without complaint.

Absalom's rebellion can be a metaphor for how dramas play out in our churches today. Which character are you playing in the spiritual enterprise you are involved in? Are you the servant leader facing the barrage of criticism? Are you the rebel who spreads discord to tear it all down just to be heard? Are you one of the rebel's followers lurking hungrily in the shadows, joining him in the destruction of others? Are you one of the unnamed, disinterested characters who sits idly by while God's anointed was unjustly expelled from the holy city? Are you the bully who forces people to bend their will to yours because your way is obviously the right way? Are you a contented follower who is willing to take your cue from leadership and influence graciously when appropriate? Are you the Barzillai, the peacemaker, who risks his reputation to reach out to those caught in the backlash of hostility? Which character do you most closely resemble in the body of Christ?

David's return to the city was marked by even more drama. As David was traveling back to Jerusalem, Sheba, a Benjaminite, denounced David and incited a rebellion. He took a following of the northern ten tribes and fled north. Awkwardly, Judah was the only tribe who welcomed David home! Sheba was eventually killed, and David became the undisputed—but brokenhearted—king of Israel once again.

Point to Ponder

Spiritual maturity is marked by servanthood not preeminence.

From Learning to Living

Spend a few minutes and memorize Philippians 2:5-7: "5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (NIV)

Prayer Point

God, I pray that I will set self aside and serve others with a whole heart. Help me to look past the humanness of others and see the bigger picture of your redemption program guarding my heart against division and drama.

LESSON 81

Psalm Summary Part 1: Psalms 1-75

The song “We Shall Overcome” galvanized and defined the U.S. Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s. Originally a gospel song, activists adapted it and frequently sang the song during protests, marches, and gatherings. It came to symbolize hope, unity, and the fight for racial equality.

In the same way that “We Shall Overcome” resonated deeply with the Civil Rights Movement in its time, the songs found in the book of Psalms formed the heartbeat of ancient Israel’s spiritual life, expressing God’s law in poetic form. Various ancient authors, including King David, created many types of psalms on numerous occasions many of which have been preserved in God’s Word. From the wisdom of Psalm 1 to the personal laments of Psalm 22 and 51, to the royal hope found in Psalm 72, these ancient songs connected Israel’s story with God’s covenant promises, His law, and ultimately, the coming Messiah and the future eternal state. Today, the psalms still teach us how to worship, how to cry out in our brokenness, and how to give thanks.

In this lesson, we will look at four specific chapters from Psalm 1-75, examples of some of the best literature in history. The psalms we will study teach us how to live according to God’s law, endure trials with faith, and wait with hope for Jesus’ imminent return.

Key Scripture

Psalm 1 (NASB)

*How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.*

*The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.”*

Genre: Wisdom Psalm

Summary: Psalm 1 sets up a clear contrast between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous person meditates on God’s law, while the wicked person follows a path that leads to destruction. This foundational psalm teaches that obedience to God’s law leads to a blessed life.

Psalm 22:1-18

*My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.
O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer;
And by night, but I have no rest.
Yet You are holy,
O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
In You our fathers trusted;
They trusted and You delivered them.
To You they cried out and were delivered;
In You they trusted and were not disappointed.
But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.
All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,
“Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him.”
Yet You are He who brought me forth from the womb;
You made me trust when upon my mother’s breasts.
Upon You I was cast from birth;
You have been my God from my mother’s womb.
Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.
Many bulls have surrounded me;
Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me.
They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravening and a roaring lion.
I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.
My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.
For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;*

*They pierced my hands and my feet.
I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;
They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.*

Genre: Lament

Summary: Psalm 22 begins with a cry of anguish and abandonment, words that Jesus quoted on the cross. It expresses the suffering of the psalmist in vivid terms, but it ends with hope and trust in God's deliverance. This psalm not only reflects personal suffering but also points forward to Christ's crucifixion.

Psalm 51:1-13

*Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
And my sin is ever before me.
Against You, You only, I have sinned
And done what is evil in Your sight,
So that You are justified when You speak
And blameless when You judge.
Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.
Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners will be converted to You.*

Genre: Lament Psalm

Summary: In Psalm 51, David pleads for God's mercy after his sin with Bathsheba. This psalm is a powerful expression of repentance, asking for cleansing and renewal. David's heartfelt confession teaches us about God's grace and the joy of forgiveness.

Psalm 72

*Give the king Your judgments, O God,
And Your righteousness to the king's son.
May he judge Your people with righteousness
And Your afflicted with justice.
Let the mountains bring peace to the people,
And the hills, in righteousness.
May he vindicate the afflicted of the people,
Save the children of the needy
And crush the oppressor.*

Genre: Royal Psalm

Summary: Psalm 72 is a royal psalm, praying for the reign of a righteous king who will bring justice and peace. This psalm looks beyond Israel's earthly kings to the promised Messiah, whose rule will extend to all nations and fill the earth with God's glory.

Recommended Reading: Psalms 1, 22, 51, 72

Psalm 1, the gateway and introduction to the book, contrasts the righteous and the wicked, urging readers to meditate on God's law. Psalm 22 points forward to Christ's suffering, expressing the cries of anguish that all believers experience in a beautiful song of lament. Psalm 51 is David's raw and heartfelt confession after committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband, another Psalm of lament but also of thanksgiving. Finally, Psalm 72, a royal Psalm, looks ahead to the reign of the ideal king, presenting a vision of the Messiah's ultimate rule over all nations.

Consider the following:

1. The Law in Poetry Form: Psalm 1 This Psalm argues that true blessing and peace come from delighting in the law of the Lord. The word law here, or *Torah*, doesn't just mean rules and regulations. It refers to God's guidance and teaching. This psalm contrasts two opposite paths: the righteous person meditates on God's Word while the wicked person turns away from it. In the Bible, meditation goes deeper than thinking about or knowing something. Biblical meditation involves internalizing God's teachings and letting them shape our lives. Psalm 1 paints a picture of a person who is "like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water" (Ps. 1:3), symbolizing stability and fruitfulness. As we read and reflect on Scripture, how can we draw from Scripture's life-giving water more consistently? This reflection

and rooting will change our lives and the lives of future generations. As Allen Ross reflects in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, “If a person meditates on God’s Word, his actions will be godly, and his God-controlled activities will prosper, that is, come to their divinely directed fulfillment...” like a tree planted by streams of water.

2. Lament as Worship: Psalms 22 and 51 Lament is a key theme in the psalms, showing us that worship should include more than simple praise and upbeat optimism. In fact, psalmists often cried out to God in heartbreaking pain and utter anguish. Psalm 22, for example, opens with words that Jesus quoted on the cross: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1). This psalm begins as a cry of anguish but turns to hope and trust in God’s deliverance by the end (Ps. 22:22-31). The psalmist expressed deep trust that God would hear his cry for help and act. Psalm 51 is another type of personal prayer: a prayer of repentance. After David’s sin with Bathsheba, he pours out his heart to God, asking for forgiveness: “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Ps. 51:10). In this psalm, David blends lament and thanksgiving, reminding us that even when we suffer the consequences of sin, God’s still shows mercy. Psalms like these invite us to trust God with our deepest emotions and hurts, knowing He listens and cares. Lament and anguish, expressed worshipfully, heal our broken hearts. Lament psalms don’t pretend to have all the answers, but they express trust and faith in God as the ultimate judge and good King of the universe.

3. A Royal Hope: Psalm 72 and the Messianic King Psalm 72 asks God for a king who rules with justice, cares for the needy, and brings peace to the land of Israel. The psalm looks beyond Israel’s human kings, however, to express hope for an ultimate Messianic King who will establish God’s perfect kingdom throughout the earth. The psalmist expresses a deep longing for a world where justice reigns and all nations acknowledge God’s authority. Of course, Psalm 72 points forward to Jesus, who fulfills this royal hope as the promised descendant of David. Jesus embodies the prophetic idea of Immanuel, God with us, ruling in righteousness and peace (Isaiah 7:14). The imagery in this psalm, of a king whose “dominion will extend from sea to sea” (Ps. 72:8), invites us to reflect on the coming Messianic Kingdom, when Christ will rule and reign physically on earth from Jerusalem.

The psalms are a rich tapestry of wisdom, lament, thanksgiving, hope, and much more. Psalms 1, 22, 51, and 72 represent key themes of the entire book—obedience to the law, personal lament, repentance, and the royal hope for a perfect king. In the next lesson we will examine more psalms from Psalms 76-150. Together, the book of Psalms teaches us how to live righteously, cry out to God in times of need, and look forward to the reign of the Messiah.

Point to Ponder

“As we read the Psalms, we are entering into the sanctuary, the place where God meets men and women in a special way.” -Tremper Longman III⁶

From Learning to Living

Take time this week to meditate on Psalm 1 and examine your relationship with God’s law. Are you delighting in it, or have you drifted toward “the counsel of the wicked”? Reflect on Psalm 22 in moments of struggle, remembering that even Jesus lamented. Use Psalm 51 as a model for confession, and hold fast to the hope of Psalm 72—Jesus, the perfect King, is coming.

Prayer Point

God, give me a heart that delights in Your law, seeks Your forgiveness in times of sin, and trusts in Your sovereign plan for salvation. Please give me the grace and strength to live out these psalms, trusting in Christ’s kingship and His mercy every moment. Amen.

LESSON 82

Psalm Summary Part 2: Psalms 75-150

Understanding anything, whether life, art, or scripture, requires an understanding of context. Without context questions like who, what, when, where, and why, or great moments in TV, movies, and books wouldn't carry the same emotional weight. For example, if you didn't know that Darth Vader was an evil villain bent on taking over the galaxy, the reveal that he's actually Luke Skywalker's father wouldn't carry the same emotional impact.

We wouldn't normally jump into a book halfway through or pull out quotes from movies without understanding the full story. But with the Bible, we sometimes feel lost about where to start and end up flipping it open—often to the book of Psalms. We pick a random verse and think it's fine without the context because we think the psalms are “just prayers and songs.”

In the last lesson, we discussed the importance of the psalms, how they reflect the law, and some of the timeless lessons they teach. In this lesson, we'll examine three specific psalms, exploring their unique context and what they meant to the people who first prayed them. As you read, pay close attention to the emotions of the writer and what they could communicate to the people who first read them.

Key Scripture

Psalm 89:1- 52

I will sing of the graciousness of the LORD forever; To all generations I will make Your faithfulness known with my mouth.

For I have said, “Graciousness will be built up forever; In the heavens You will establish Your faithfulness.”

*“I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to My servant David, I will establish your descendants forever And build up your throne to all generations.”
Selah*

The heavens will praise Your wonders, LORD; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones.

For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD,

For our shield belongs to the LORD, and our king to the Holy One of Israel.

A God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all those who are around Him?

Once You spoke in vision to Your godly ones, and said, "I have given help to one who is mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people.

LORD God of armies, who is like You, mighty LORD? Your faithfulness also surrounds You.

I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him,

You rule the surging of the sea; When its waves rise, You calm them.

With whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him.

You Yourself crushed Rahab like one who is slain; You scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.

The enemy will not deceive him, nor will the son of wickedness afflict him.

The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all it contains, You have established them.

But I will crush his adversaries before him, and strike those who hate him.

The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon shout for joy at Your name.

My faithfulness and My favor will be with him, and in My name his horn will be exalted.

You have a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted.

I will also place his hand on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before You.

He will call to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.'

Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! LORD, they walk in the light of Your face.

I will also make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

In Your name they rejoice all the day, and by Your righteousness they are exalted.

I will maintain My favor for him forever, and My covenant shall be confirmed to him.

For You are the glory of their strength, and by Your favor our horn is exalted.

So I will establish his descendants forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

“If his sons abandon My Law and do not walk in My judgments, if they violate My statutes and do not keep My commandments, then I will punish their wrongdoing with the rod, and their guilt with afflictions.

But I will not withhold My favor from him, nor deal falsely in My faithfulness.

I will not violate My covenant, nor will I alter the utterance of My lips.

Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David.

His descendants shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me.

It shall be established forever like the moon, and a witness in the sky is faithful.” Selah

But You have rejected and refused, You have been full of wrath against Your anointed.

You have repudiated the covenant of Your servant; You have profaned his crown in the dust.

You have broken down all his walls; You have brought his strongholds to ruin.

All who pass along the way plunder him; He has become a disgrace to his neighbors.

You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries; You have made all his enemies rejoice.

You also turn back the edge of his sword, and have not made him stand

in battle.

*You have put an end to his splendor
And cast his throne to the ground.*

*You have shortened the days of his youth;
You have covered him with shame. Selah*

*How long, LORD?
Will You hide Yourself forever?
Will Your wrath burn like fire?*

Remember what my lifespan is; For what futility You have created all the sons of mankind!

What man can live and not see death? Can he save his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah

Where are Your former acts of favor, LORD, which You swore to David in Your faithfulness?

Remember, LORD, the taunt against Your servants; How I carry in my heart the taunts of all the many peoples, with which Your enemies have taunted, LORD, with which they have taunted the footsteps of Your anointed.

*Blessed be the LORD forever!
Amen and Amen.*

Genre: Royal Psalm

Summary: Ethan the Ezrahite witnessed the fall of the southern kingdom and the house of David. Unable to understand God’s plan, he called out to God in confusion, grief, and anger, pleading for Him to remember His covenants.

Psalm 90:1-17

*LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were born
Or You gave birth to the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.
You turn mortals back into dust
And say, "Return, you sons of mankind."
For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it passes by,
Or like a watch in the night.
You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep;
In the morning they are like grass that sprouts anew.
In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew;
Toward evening it wilts and withers away.
For we have been consumed by Your anger,
And we have been terrified by Your wrath.
You have placed our guilty deeds before You,
Our hidden sins in the light of Your presence.
For all our days have dwindled away in Your fury;
We have finished our years like a sigh.
As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,
Or if due to strength, eighty years,
Yet their pride is only trouble and tragedy;
For it quickly passes, and we disappear.
Who understands the power of Your anger
And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?
So teach us to number our days,
That we may present to You a heart of wisdom.
Do return, LORD; how long will it be?
And be sorry for Your servants.
Satisfy us in the morning with Your graciousness,
That we may sing for joy and rejoice all our days.
Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us,
And the years we have seen evil.
Let Your work appear to Your servants
And Your majesty to their children.
May the kindness of the LORD our God be upon us;
And confirm for us the work of our hands;
Yes, confirm the work of our hands.*

Genre: Lament

Summary: Moses, destined to die in the wilderness along with the rest of those who fled Egypt, was overwhelmed by God's correction and the overall brevity of life. Through prayer, Moses found comfort in the eternity of God and that "while all else fades and vanishes, God is unchanging, a home and refuge for His People."

Psalm 110: 1-7

The LORD says to my Lord:

“Sit at My right hand

Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”

The LORD will stretch out Your strong scepter from Zion, saying,

“Rule in the midst of Your enemies.”

Your people will volunteer freely on the day of Your power;

In holy splendor, from the womb of the dawn,

Your youth are to You as the dew.

The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind,

“You are a priest forever

According to the order of Melchizedek.”

The LORD is at Your right hand;

He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.

He will judge among the nations,

He will fill them with corpses,

He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

He will drink from the brook by the wayside;

Therefore He will lift up His head.

Genre: Royal Psalm

Summary: King David looked forward to a time when the Messiah would be a king, priest, victorious warrior, and would rule with justice forever.

Recommended Reading: Psalms 75-150

The book of Psalms is divided into five distinct books, each ending with a doxology and ending with “praise the Lord” or “Amen.” Although each individual psalm was written during a different period and by different people, they were compiled in an order to help the original readers understand the law. Each book of psalms parallels one of the first five books of the Old Testament.⁷ Additionally, this layout helped readers understand God’s provision and promises despite His punishment. The psalms above are from the last three books and express Israel’s collective feelings after they were disciplined by God for their sin (Psalm 89), how they cried out for mercy (Psalm 90), and how God would be faithful to them by restoring their land, uniting them as a nation, and providing a Messiah for them (Psalm 110).

Consider the following:

1. God's Covenant with David: Psalm 89 As the Babylonians destroyed the southern kingdom of Israel, leveled the walls of Jerusalem, and left Solomon's great temple in ruins, Ethan the Ezerhite called out to God in the midst of his anger, grief, and confusion. While praying, he tried to understand the destruction he witnessed with the promises God made, frequently repeating them back to God: *"I have made a covenant with My chosen; I have sworn to My servant David, I will establish your descendants forever and build up your throne to all generations"* (Psalm 89:3). Since a son of David no longer sat on the throne, it looked to Ethan that God had abandoned His covenant. Yet, through prayer, Ethan reflected on God's greatness and Israel's blessed status and ultimately chose to trust God in his uncertainty.

Although Ethan couldn't see it, God had not forgotten His people. As William MacDonald reminded us, "Nothing will ever alter God's love for David, and nothing will affect the covenant He has made. There will always be a throne of David; a royal line will be perpetuated forever."⁸

2. God's Fatherly Discipline: Psalm 90 Psalm 90 is commonly recited at funerals due to its somber tone and reminder of the shortness of life. This psalm opens the fourth book of psalms and introduces the theme the other songs in the book will follow: God's fatherly correction of His people Israel. Written by Moses while the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, this bleak prayer would have reminded the original hearers, as well as its later readers, that their sin would always result in disciplinary correction. It reminded the readers that life is short, so they should be mindful of how they spend their time. It encouraged people to live according to the wisdom found in God's Word (v. 12).

Though the brevity of life is the main theme, this prayer also reminds readers of God's faithfulness: "LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations" (v. 1). Guiding readers from eternity past, through their time of correction, Moses reminded the readers of a future where God (v. 17) can satisfy them. It's He who holds all seasons, even times of correction, in His hands. He never stops loving His people even when they are unable to fully experience His goodness (v. 14).

Commentator William MacDonald argues that the psalm should be replaced in Christian funerals because for those who believe in Christ, “death has lost its sting, and the grave has been robbed of its victory.”⁹

3. God’s Promised Messiah: Psalm 110 Placed in the middle of the fifth book of psalms, this prayer would have offered the original readers hope that God had not abandoned them and would fulfill His promises to send a Messiah. Because this psalm prophetically references the Messiah, it is the most quoted psalm in the entire New Testament. It promises a Messiah who will rule from Zion with justice and shatter the enemies of Israel, something that the ancient readers of the psalms would have longed for amidst the political turmoil of the Old Testament. More importantly, it explains how the Messiah would be both a king and a priest. In Israel, priests belonged to the Levitical order and could not also be kings. However, David prophesied that the Messiah would belong to the order of Melchizedek, referencing the king-priest from Genesis 14. Just as Melchizedek was both priest and king, so too would be the Messiah.

In Matthew 22, Jesus quoted Psalm 110:1: “The LORD says to my Lord,” and asked the Pharisees, “What do you think about Christ? Whose son is He?” They correctly answered that the Messiah would be a son of David. Jesus then challenged them: how could David, as king, refer to his own descendant as LORD? The only answer is that David’s son—the Messiah—would be both God and man. Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy and psalm. He came as king, is now the priest for all people, and one day will reign from Zion forever.

Together these three psalms reflect Israel’s collective feelings at specific points in time and walk the reader from confusion, to acceptance, to anticipation for the coming Messiah. Martin Luther called the book of Psalms “a little Bible, and the summary of the Old Testament.” This is absolutely true since throughout Scripture, we’ve seen God’s people make mistakes and wrestle with the consequences of those mistakes, feeling as if God is distant or has abandoned them. As is demonstrated in these passages, God is faithful to his people, forgiving them, and providing a way to reconciliation. Thankfully, we no longer have to worry if God has turned His back on us. If we believe in Jesus’s death and resurrection, we have forgiveness and peace with God (Romans 5:1).

Point to Ponder

Context is key!

From Learning to Living

After Jesus rose from the dead, He instructed the disciples to read the Bible with Him in mind: “ the things that are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” This week, read the following psalms and take careful note of all the ways they point to Jesus: Psalms 45, 72, and 118. As you read, take time to consider what the verse or passage might have meant to the original readers. You may also want to explore resources like a commentary or Bible dictionary to deepen your understanding.

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, Your Word is alive and speaks both to the original audience and to us today. Help us approach it with humility, seeking to understand its true message. May we find joy in the truths we uncover! Amen.

LESSON 83

Solomon's Ascension

Steve Jobs had a rocky start as the visionary cofounder of Apple. In the early days, Jobs gained recognition for his groundbreaking ideas, but coworkers chafed at his difficult personality and controversial management decisions. His inability to work well with others eventually led to his ousting from the company he helped to create. Jobs returned to Apple years later, wiser and more experienced, and helped lead the company to unprecedented success with innovations like the iPhone and iPad.

Jobs' experience illustrates the challenges many leaders face. Leaders often excel in some areas and fail in others, resulting in a mixed legacy of triumph and mistakes. Similarly, King Solomon's reign was characterized by a mix of devotion to God and compromise, ultimately setting the stage for the downfall of Israel despite the golden age Israel experienced during his reign.

As we turn to the opening chapters of 1 Kings, King David lies dying in Jerusalem. His son Solomon is ascending the throne, and many challenges await the new king. 1 Kings 3:3 captures King Solomon's early reign, demonstrating Solomon's devotion to God tempered by a troubling reality: "Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, *except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.*" Read the full story in 1 Kings.

As David grows old and frail, his son Adonijah declares himself king without his father's consent. However, Bathsheba and the prophet Nathan intervene, reminding David of his promise that Solomon, Bathsheba's son, would succeed him. David orders that Solomon be anointed as king, and Solomon is publicly proclaimed, celebrated, and seated on the throne. This act quashes Adonijah's claim, leaving him fearful for his life, though Solomon grants him mercy.

Key Scripture

1 Kings 2:1-4, 10-12 (NASB) As David's time to die drew near, he charged

Solomon his son, saying, 2 “I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. 3 Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn, 4 so that the LORD may carry out His promise which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’

10 Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David. 11 The days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years he reigned in Hebron and thirty-three years he reigned in Jerusalem. 12 And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

1 Kings 3:3-14 (NASB) Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. 4 The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, “Ask what you wish Me to give you.”

6 Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. 9 So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

10 It was pleasing in the sight of the LORD that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. 13 I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. 14 If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.”

Recommended reading: 1 Kings 1-3

During the final days of his reign, King David, weakened by age, was caught in a power struggle within his own family. In the first chapter, Adonijah, the fourth son of David, attempted to seize the throne, but through the intervention of Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba, Solomon was anointed king.

As Solomon assumed power, he demonstrated his God-given wisdom. In 1 Kings 3:16-28, Solomon judges a dispute between two women, both claiming to be the mother of the same baby. The women present their case to King Solomon, with each arguing that the living child is hers and the dead child belongs to the other. To determine the true mother, Solomon proposes to cut the baby in two and give each woman half. One woman immediately agrees, but the other begs Solomon to give the child to the other woman rather than see it killed. Solomon then declares the compassionate woman the true mother.

But his early actions betrayed a dangerous mix of faithfulness and compromise, particularly in his worship and marriage practices. Solomon's choices set the stage for the rest of his reign and plotted a dangerous course for the future of Israel as a nation. In fact, the end of Solomon's reign also marked the end of the unified kingdom of Israel.

Consider the following:

1. The Political Intrigue of Solomon's Ascension Solomon's rise to power reflects the broader cultural context of Ancient Near Eastern monarchies where succession crises often led to bloodshed and upheaval. Even though King David had specifically named Solomon the future king in 1 Kings 1:30 and 2:22, Solomon's path to the throne presented significant political challenges. Sensing David's death drawing near, factions vied for power, claiming royal favor or birth order to claim the throne. Adonijah, David's son from Haggith, was the eldest surviving son and therefore presumed to be the natural heir to the throne. A quick response from Nathan the prophet and Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, highlights God's use of ordinary people in ensuring His will prevails. In fact, the *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* states, "One of the great theological contributions of Kings is to emphasize the working of God in the Solomonic succession, not through direct divine intervention, miracles, prophets, or sacred institutions, but through ordinary

personalities and individuals working in the secular sphere.”¹⁰ Nathan’s role proved crucial. Not only did he anoint Solomon as king, but he also acted as a mediator between God and the royal family. Solomon’s eventual coronation secured political stability while fulfilling biblical prophecy and honoring David’s promises to Bathsheba. God often works through the quick thinking of ordinary, imperfect people and mundane circumstances to carry out His will.

2. Solomon’s Mixed Devotion: A Heart Divided 1 Kings 3:1 briefly states that Solomon made a marriage alliance with the king (pharaoh) of Egypt. The next three verses give us a glimpse into Israel’s spiritual life at this time, noting, “The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days. Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, *except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.*” This verse highlights a problem: from the time the tabernacle at Shiloh was destroyed (1 Samuel 4) until Solomon constructed the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6), there was no centralized place of worship for Yahweh. According to Gary Smith, “When the Israelites came into the land of Canaan, they were ordered to destroy the high places of the people who lived in the land lest the Israelites be tempted to worship the Canaanite false gods and accept their immoral behavior. The Israelites were to worship God at the tabernacle at Shiloh. An exception to this practice existed in the years between the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines and the construction of the temple in Jerusalem by Solomon. During this short period... a group of prophets of God worshiped at the ‘hill of God’ (1 Sam. 10:5, probably Gibeah or Gibeon).”¹¹ While Solomon’s behavior may have been allowed temporarily since there was no tabernacle or temple during his early reign, the practice of worshiping at the high places renewed an ongoing refrain of tension between worship of the true God and syncretistic, animistic practices. The worship of foreign gods would ultimately plague Solomon’s later reign and spell the downfall of the entire kingdom. Despite his wisdom, Solomon’s divided heart tarnished his reputation.

3. A Gift with a Price Solomon’s request for wisdom rather than riches, long life, or the destruction of his enemies demonstrated his humility and discernment. God responded by also granting Solomon what he did not ask for: long-life, wealth, and peace in his kingdom, which resulted in a legendary, golden age still remembered as the

height of Israel as a nation. God never intended Solomon to use His gifts selfishly, however. Instead, wisdom served as a practical tool for governance in the ancient world. Solomon's famous judgment involving two women and a baby (1 Kings 3:16-28) demonstrated his insight but also proved Solomon could sit as a judge and shepherd of God's people. According to the *Evangelical Commentary of the Bible*, "In the ancient Near East 'shepherd' was a stock term for 'king,' and even gods could be so styled."¹² In the Ancient Near East, common people viewed the king as the shepherd of his people, responsible for maintaining order, justice, and righteousness. Solomon's wisdom allowed him to fulfill this role effectively, but it also came with clear cultural expectations. Even today, participation in leadership is both a blessing and a burden. Consider the responsibilities that come with the gifts and talents God has given you. How is God calling you to use His gifts to lead others? Have you counted the weighty cost that such leadership carries?

The early chapters of 1 Kings paint a portrait of Solomon as a complex figure—a man of deep faith and wisdom, yet one who appears to compromise at the outset. Like Steve Jobs, Solomon's reign would see incredible highs like the building of an opulent palace and a magnificent temple, but his legacy was also marred by compromise. True spiritual leadership requires both devotion and discernment, and even small compromises have devastating consequences. Historically, Solomon's reign reflects a broader theme in Israel's history: the challenge of remaining faithful to God despite worldly temptations. How can you remain fully devoted to God in a world full of competing influences this week?

Point to Ponder

The truly wise give God complete devotion.

From Learning to Living

Solomon's early reign teaches us that our love for God must be accompanied by a commitment to His ways, without compromise. Like Solomon, we may face temptations to conform to the world's practices or take shortcuts in our spiritual lives. See if any of these

subtle compromises have crept into your life:

1. My prayer life primarily centers around asking God for a better job, more money, good health, and more stuff.
2. The websites I frequent are 99% good. Sometimes I mess up and go where I shouldn't, but God forgives me, and my behavior doesn't hurt anyone else.
3. God sits on the throne of my life... except when I'm making decisions about my business and my free time. God has delegated those areas to me.

This passage challenges us to examine where we might be compromising in our own walk with God and to seek His wisdom to stay faithful in all areas of our lives.

Prayer Point

Lord, we thank You for the example of Solomon, who sought wisdom above wealth. Help us to love You wholeheartedly and to walk in Your ways without compromise. Grant us the wisdom to lead our lives and those around us with integrity and faithfulness, reflecting Your glory in all that we do. Amen.

LESSON 84

Solomon Builds the Temple

The 1956 classic movie *The Searchers* ends with one of the most famous scenes in film history. After rescuing his niece and bringing her safely home, John Wayne's character stands in the doorway of her house. The doorway slowly closes as he turns and confidently walks off into the horizon. The closing door symbolizes the closing chapter in the life of his character, while his saunter away from the camera represents new beginnings for the characters in the movie.

Like the ending to this classic film, the people of Israel had the opportunity to close a chapter in their history. They finally had possession of the land God had promised them, they had peace with their neighbors, and they had a leader who seemed determined to honor their covenant with God. Under the previous leadership of King David and now his son Solomon, it looked like they would step confidently into a new era as God's chosen people as they prepared to build a temple to be His dwelling place on earth.

Key Scripture

1 Kings 6:1-7, 11-14 (NASB) *Now it came about in the four hundred and eightieth year after the sons of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD. 2 As for the house which King Solomon built for the LORD, its length was sixty cubits and its width twenty cubits and its height thirty cubits. 3 The porch in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits in length corresponding to the width of the house, and its depth along the front of the house was ten cubits. 4 Also for the house he made windows with artistic frames. 5 Against the wall of the house he built stories encompassing the walls of the house around both the nave and the inner sanctuary; thus he made side chambers all around. 6 The lowest story was five cubits wide, and the middle was six cubits wide, and the third was seven cubits wide; for on the outside he made offsets in the wall of the house all around in order that the beams would not be inserted in the walls of the house.*

7 The house, while it was being built, was built of stone prepared at the quarry, and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any iron tool heard in

the house while it was being built.

11 Now the word of the LORD came to Solomon saying, 12 “Concerning this house which you are building, if you will walk in My statutes and execute My ordinances and keep all My commandments by walking in them, then I will carry out My word with you which I spoke to David your father. 13 I will dwell among the sons of Israel, and will not forsake My people Israel.”

14 So Solomon built the house and finished it.

[Like the outside of the temple, Solomon paid careful attention to detail to make the inside feel sacred and holy. Nearly every surface was covered with intricate carvings or precious metals, and the furniture was meticulously crafted to be both beautiful and functional.]

1 Kings 8:22-23, 33-34, 41-43, 54-61 (NASB) *Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven. 23 He said, “O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing lovingkindness to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart...”,*

33 “When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy, because they have sinned against You, if they turn to You again and confess Your name and pray and make supplication to You in this house, 34 then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers...”

41 “Also concerning the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name’s sake 42 (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, 43 hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name.

54 When Solomon had finished praying this entire prayer and supplication to the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread toward heaven. 55 And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying:

56 “Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant. 57 May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, 58 that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His

ordinances, which He commanded our fathers. 59 And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, 60 so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else. 61 Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day.”

Recommended Reading: 1 Kings 5-8, 2 Chronicles 2-7, 1 Kings 8:1-66

In Deuteronomy 12:5, God promised that once His people reached the promised land, He would choose a place among them to make His permanent home. It would be this home where not just Israel but the surrounding nations could come and worship Him. Now, 480 years after He delivered them from slavery (1 Kings 6:1), He honored that promise. As author Paul Benware observed, “the high point in Israel’s history in the Old Testament was perhaps the dedication of this temple...Both king and people were united in the obedience to the law of God. Solomon’s marvelous prayer on that great day of dedication gives a fitting illustration to those prosperous days in Israel.”¹³ For now, the disunity and political turmoil that characterized Israel’s history, Saul and David had finally ended. Despite the unity of the people and peace in the land, the temple still followed the familiar format of the tabernacle: God was separated from His people, only priests had access to Him, and the consequences of sin could only be covered, not removed.

Consider the following:

1. Our lives are shaped for God’s eternal temple. Normally, worksites are filled with the sounds of cutting, hammering, and workers shouting, but the temple was built and assembled in silence. “The house, while it was being built, was built of stone prepared at the quarry, and there was neither hammer nor axe nor any iron tool heard in the house while it was being built.” (1 Kings 6:7). The stones were cut offsite, then carefully transported to the construction site to be assembled. The silence was to emphasize the importance of the work and show reverence and respect to the process and to the One who would be dwelling in the temple when it was finished. 1 Peter 2:5 compares us to stones like those in the temple: “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy

priesthood.” Like the stones of the temple, we’re also being prepared offsite for our heavenly home. Pastor Colin Smith encourages us saying, “Everything that God is doing in your life is shaping you for your eternal destiny. Your pain and suffering are like the hammer and chisel, shaping you to be a living stone in God’s temple. When Jesus Christ returns, the preparation will be complete, and God’s people will be a glorious temple in which His presence dwells.”¹⁴

2. We have access to God’s holiness through Christ. Everything about the temple emphasized God’s holiness. If we walked inside the temple today, the workers’ painstaking attention to every detail would shock us. The intricate carvings on the walls and the gold and silver furniture on the floor clearly displayed the sacredness of the temple to anyone who entered. Like the tabernacle before it, the most important spot in the building was the inner sanctuary or Holy of Holies, a 60 by 40-foot room in the center of the building which only one priest could access once a year. Flanked by golden cherubim, this is where the ark of the covenant was housed and where God’s presence resided. Even though God’s presence resided there, the people could not interact directly with Him. Unlike Adam and Eve walking with God, the people could not go and speak to Him; His presence was walled off. Because of their sin, the people could not have access to God. When Christ died, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two (Matt 27:51), symbolizing how God’s presence is now accessible to all people at any time. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, we can now “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb 4:16)

3. God wants all people to come to know Him Solomon dedicated the temple with a lengthy prayer, outlining several important truths for the people. First, he emphasized God’s power, reminding them that while the temple was God’s dwelling, no manmade structure could contain His immense greatness (1 Kings 8:27). Second, he reiterated God’s covenants with both himself and the people, giving clear instructions for when they sinned: “...if they turn to You again and confess Your name and pray and make supplication to You in this house, 34 then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers.” (1 Kings 8:33-34). Finally, he gave special attention to non-Jewish people, highlighting God’s desire for all nations to know Him.

Solomon stressed that God is powerful and just, yet faithful to His promises. If anyone confesses their sins and believes in Him, God is faithful and just to forgive them (1 John 1:9).

After seven years of construction, the temple was finished, and the presence of the Lord came to dwell there. After years of idolatry, disunity, and political turmoil, it seemed Israel was starting a new chapter in their history. Finally, they were all united under a godly king and seemed committed to following the covenant God had established with them. The Old Testament is full of stories of a holy and just God, coming to reach out to sinful people like us. Back then, He dwelled in a temple, but today He lives in those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior. May our lives reflect Solomon's dedication prayer: "May He turn our hearts to Him, to walk in obedience to Him."

Point to Ponder

"The temple was never meant to actually house God but was intended to be a house for His name." - Dennis McCallum

From Learning to Living

Has the Lord called you to a new season of life? Maybe you're faced with an important decision and unsure which path to take. When stuck between two choices, we can follow Solomon's example as he helped Israel enter a new chapter in their history. First Solomon followed the guidance of older and wiser counsel (1 Chron. 28); second, he evaluated his decisions and actions in light of God's word (1 Kings 8:12-21). When you're making a decision, seek counsel from others. Lean on their wisdom and experience to help evaluate your options. Most importantly, use God's word as a lens to determine whether your choice is wise and glorifying to Him.

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, You tenderly reach out to sinful humanity. You love us and dwell among us despite our faults and failings. Thank You that Your presence is no longer tied to a building but made accessible through the work of Your Son. We are grateful that we no longer need an outside mediator but can approach You boldly. Amen.

LESSON 85

Proverbs – Whose Am I?

“Where did you go to school?” It’s a common conversation starter that brings back memories of high school – the buildings, classrooms, and school culture where we spent so many hours growing up or dumbing down (depending on our choices). We begin to think about fellow students, teachers, and coaches who had quirky sayings that still haunt us at random times. One coach, when students would offer up lame excuses, repeatedly quipped, “If ifs and buts were candies and nuts, we’d all have a Merry Christmas!”

Proverbs are common phrases that we use to reinforce lessons about life and the true nature of reality. We say things like, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” “early is on time,” “better late than never,” “squeaky wheels get the grease,” and “what parents allow in moderation, children will enjoy in excess.” We use proverbs like these to offer advice, teach guiding principles, argue points and re-direct those who are “straying from the beaten path.”

In the Ancient Near East, gaining notoriety, creating proverbs, and wisely speaking them into the lives of others was the epitome of an honorable life. The Hebrew word for proverbs, *masalim*, means “to be like” or “compared with.”¹⁵ These proverbs, mostly written by Solomon, compare wisdom with foolishness, right behavior with wrong behavior, etc. The book of Proverbs is a collection of “... pithy, succinct phrases which condense the wisdom of experience.”¹⁶ Solomon lived life to the fullest, evaluated his experiences, and then penned 29 chapters of proverbs that instruct the ignorant, guide the wise, and warn the foolish. The proverbs are written in a tender, father-son, master-learner style. The last two chapters, 30 and 31, were added by Agur and Lemuel, whom we know nothing about other than their names.

The book of Proverbs is divided into four sections.¹⁷ These divisions are marked by shifts in literary style, emphasis, or intended audience. As we soberly digest the selected verses below, “listen” for a symphony of theological thought and religious instruction playing

quietly in the background while a feast of practical wisdom is served up by renowned sages. Enjoy each of the four sections.

Key Scripture

1. Words to the Wise (Chps.1-9) This section encourages God's people to avoid consorting with evil men, to consider wisdom's rewards, abstain from sexual sin, and consider God while conducting business and living life. Notice the Holy Spirit's tender urgency in the following scriptures.

a. **Proverbs 1:7-10** *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction. 8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction And do not forsake your mother's teaching; 9 Indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head And ornaments about your neck. 10 My son, if sinners entice you, Do not consent.*

b. **Proverbs 2:1-5** *My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, 2 Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; 3 For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; 4 If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; 5 Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God.*

c. **Proverbs 3:1-5** *My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; 2 For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you. 3 Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 So you will find favor and good repute In the sight of God and man. 5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.*

2. **Words of the Wise** (Chps.10-22:7) In this section the sage author sifts through data from personal experience and passes on the conclusions he has observed. He uses many antithetical comparisons to emphasize his points. Here is just a sampling of the abundance of these chapters.

a. **Proverbs 15:1-7** *A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. 2 The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, But the mouth of fools spouts folly. 3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Watching the evil and the good. 4 A soothing tongue is a tree of life, But perversion in it crushes the spirit. 5 A fool rejects his father's discipline, But he who regards reproof is sensible. 6 Great wealth is in the house of the righteous, But trouble is in the income of the wicked. 7 The lips of the wise spread knowledge, But the hearts of fools are not so.*

3. **Words for the Wise** (Chps. 22:8-24) In chapter 22, the sage author transitions from comparisons and begins to preach wise words to his audience. In this section the proverbial sayings can be several lines long and often include the reason for the teaching. Observe the authority of the teacher and the overt encouragement to not repeat the unavoidable consequences of foolish decisions.

a. **Proverbs 22:17-23** *Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, And apply your mind to my knowledge; 18 For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you, That they may be ready on your lips. 19 So that your trust may be in the LORD, I have taught you today, even you. 20 Have I not written to you excellent things Of counsels and knowledge, 21 To make you know the certainty of the words of truth That you may correctly answer him who sent you? 22 Do not rob the poor because he is poor, Or crush the afflicted at the gate; 23 For the LORD will plead their case And take the life of those who rob them.*

4. **Words from the Wise** (Chps. 24-31) The proverbs in this section call the reader to a higher standard of morality. Culture will always try and dictate norms to God's people, but the sages from these last eight chapters are goading us to a higher standard of ethics—one that places all of our faculties at God's disposal. Notice how the following verses illustrate the ideal wife. Proverbs chapter 31 exemplifies the high ideals of living wisely.

a. **Proverbs 31:10-13; 23-31** *An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her, And he will have no lack of gain. 12 She does him good and not evil All the days of her life. 13 She looks for wool and flax And works with her hands in delight. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, When he sits among the elders of the land. 24 She makes linen garments and sells them, And supplies belts to the tradesmen. 25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, And she smiles at the future. 26 She opens her mouth in wisdom, And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. 27 She looks well to the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness. 28 Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: 29 “Many daughters have done nobly, But you excel them all.” 30 Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. 31 Give her the product of her hands, And let her works praise her in the gates.*

Life is filled with practical considerations. How do I make an honest living? How do I manage my finances well? Am I using my time productively? Am I honest with those around me? The important choice is to trust God and apply biblical principles to daily living or trust myself and live by my instincts and cultural whims. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” (Prov. 1:7)

Consider the following:

Proverbs is its own glossary of terms. In the introduction, Proverbs 1:2-5, Solomon uses the following: wisdom, instruction, understanding, righteousness, justice, integrity, prudence, knowledge, discretion, and learning as follows:

2 To know **wisdom** and **instruction**,
To discern the sayings of **understanding**,
3 To receive instruction in wise behavior,
Righteousness, justice, and integrity;
4 To give **prudence** to the naive,
To the youth **knowledge and discretion**,
5 A wise person will hear and increase in **learning**,
And a person of understanding will acquire wise counsel.

Let's look at the street-level usefulness of the above terms in Proverbs using the literal Hebrew definitions: A man desires to wisely steward over his finances (**wisdom**). He is motivated to a life of disciplined learning (**instruction**) about how money works. He ponders carefully the advice (**sayings of understanding**) of learned money managers and is a man of financial transparency, uprightness, and honor (**righteousness, justice, integrity**). He shrewdly (**prudently**) interacts with others to not get taken advantage of, and he applies what he knows (**knowledge**) to increase his management skills. He shows resourcefulness (**discretion**) to confidently overcome financial obstacles. Finally, he is ever embracing (**learning**) even wiser financial practices, and he chooses to be transparent and seek the wise counsel of others more learned than he moving forward.

Imagine if you applied these principles to your personal finances and to all of life's realities! Welcome to Proverbs.

The Proverbs are pronouncements about street level realities. They offer wisdom to the foolish, righteous alternatives to those living wickedly, and they give informed, self-aware options to the naïve. The struggle of mankind is to see ourselves as foolish, wicked, and naïve. We often spend, eat, drink, and work foolishly while we ignore the fact that "wisdom shouts in the streets." (Prov 1:20)

Point to Ponder

"Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise." Proverbs 19:20 NIV

From Learning to Living

In the above example using the glossary of terms, finances was used to illustrate the practical usefulness of the Proverbs. Now think of a reality where you need to gain wisdom and walk that reality through all the terms. It could read something like this: I desire to wisely steward over food. I am motivated to a life of disciplined learning about how food (nutrition) works, etc. Enjoy and be wise.

Prayer Point

God, You desire that every facet of my being is in alignment with Your original purposes. Help me to humbly admit need and be transparent, teachable, and open to what the Proverbs reveal about my heart and what they offer as wise alternatives to foolish living.

LESSON 86

Ecclesiastes

Could you stand up at King Solomon's funeral and say with integrity, "He lived a good life"? Solomon's life and reign took place during the spiritual zenith of ancient Israel. During this time, Solomon used his God-gifted wisdom to construct a temple to worship the Lord, build his own house, shore up the wall around Jerusalem, and to engineer a host of other impressive building projects. The surrounding nations were paying tax tribute to Israel which included many thousands of pounds of gold per year (1 Kings 10:14). The wealthy African queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame from a thousand miles away. She visited Israel, and after taking in the glory of Solomon, Scripture records that, "...there was no more spirit in her" (1 Kings 10:5). Solomon's overwhelming grandeur had the Queen on the verge of fainting.

However, after beginning well, Solomon fell dramatically into sin. Many of his 1000 wives and concubines were idol worshipping pagans from the surrounding nations. They led Solomon to sanction (or perhaps even participate in) grossly immoral idol worshipping, child sacrificing, and drunken binges that lasted for days, possibly weeks (1 Kings 11:1-13). Solomon used his wisdom to indulge every aspect of his being, engaging in every imaginable behavior that he and his cohorts could dream up.

As Solomon neared the end of his life, God pronounced judgment on him (1 Kings 11:14-43) and he finally repented. As he wearily emerged from his life of sin, he penned the valuable lessons he learned about life in a book of wisdom called Ecclesiastes. In this book he describes real life and what it means to live down here or "under the sun." What is life?

Imagine Solomon gathering a crowd of anxious onlookers. As the preeminent people of the earth reclined in luxuriant couches, drinking the best wine of the day from golden goblets, their every desire cheerfully attended to by willing servants, Solomon appeared in all his glory. The crowd waited with bated breath as the wealthiest, and the wisest man on the planet got ready to wow them with his

wisdom about how to extract more gusto from life. Their contented smiles would have disappeared when they heard this instead:

Key Scripture

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 (NASB) *“Futility of futilities,” says the Preacher, “Futility of futilities! All is futility.” 3 What advantage does a person have in all his work which he does under the sun?*

No one would have expected Solomon to use the word futility to describe his life. This is the Hebrew word “hebel.” Hebel literally means “breath” or “empty.” It describes the frustration you would feel unwrapping a present on Christmas morning and finding nothing in it! In the eyes of the world, Solomon lived life to the fullest. He had unending pleasure, sage wisdom and knowledge, he built imposing and ego-boosting construction projects, he possessed untold material wealth, and he had unrivaled notoriety in the ancient world. How could a man with everything be feeling empty and frustrated? The following verses describe his luxuriant life in five summary arenas.

- 1. Pleasure – Ecclesiastes 2:1-3, 8b** *“I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, “It is senseless,” and of pleasure, “What does this accomplish?” 3 I explored with my mind how to refresh my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely; and how to seize foolishness, until I could see what good there is for the sons of mankind to do under heaven for the few years of their lives... and [Solomon enjoyed] the pleasures of the sons of mankind: many concubines.”*
- 2. Wisdom – 1 Kings 4:29-32** *“Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. 30 Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all other people, more than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. 32 He also told three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005.”*
- 3. Projects - 2 Chronicles 8:1-6** *“At the end of 20 years during which Solomon had built the LORD’s temple and his own palace— 2 Solomon had rebuilt the cities Hiram gave him and settled Israelites there— 3 Solomon went to Hamath-zobah and seized it. 4 He built Tadmor in the wilderness along with all the storage cities that he built in Hamath. 5 He built Upper Beth-horon and Lower Beth-horon—fortified cities with walls, gates, and bars— 6 Baalath, all*

the storage cities that belonged to Solomon, all the chariot cities, the cavalry cities, and everything Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, Lebanon, or anywhere else in the land of his dominion.”

4. **Material Possessions – Ecclesiastes 2:7** *“I acquired male and female servants and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned many herds of cattle and flocks, more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.”*
5. **Notoriety – Ecclesiastes 2:9a** *“So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem.”*

Solomon had mistakenly concluded that life was another pleasure to experience, another fact to be learned, another project to complete, and another possession to gain. He worked himself into a frenzy and became intensely frustrated by the unending circle of broken promises his indulgences had tantalized him with. In a moment of dramatic emotional collapse, he sullenly declared:

Ecclesiastes 2:18-20 *“I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile. 20 So I began to give myself over to despair concerning all my work that I had labored at under the sun.”*

Solomon’s conclusions would have sent ripples of astonishment through a crowd. The man who had everything was declaring that it all meant nothing. Then, in the following verses, Solomon seized the moment of tension and declared that life (the efforts to gain knowledge, possessions, etc.) is simply a gift from God to be enjoyed.

Ecclesiastes 2:24 *“There is nothing better for a person than to eat and drink, and show himself some good in his trouble. This too I have seen, that it is from the hand of God.” (Lit.: a gift from God)*

Ecclesiastes 3:13 *“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; 13 moreover, that every person who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—this is the gift of God.”*

Solomon ultimately reached the right conclusion: The collective efforts we call life are a gift from God that He meant to be enjoyed with Him! We should thank and honor God as we build honorable reputations, seek pleasure, gain knowledge, acquire possessions, and

complete projects. We should maintain this perspective as we work hard, pay bills, and live life here under the sun. Without exerting God-directed effort, we aren't truly living from a biblical standpoint!

Consider the following:

1. The unknowns of life frustrated Solomon. Solomon lamented that you can amass wealth in your lifetime but then have no control over how it is spent after you die (Eccl. 6:2). You can even choose wisdom and righteousness, then die an untimely death while wicked people are living a nice long life seemingly free of troubles! (Eccl 7:15). Solomon marveled that we have no control over when or how we die (Eccl 8:8), and even if you choose to walk in wisdom, you may avoid an early death but you will—nevertheless—die (Eccl 9:11). Solomon applied all of his wisdom to unravel mysteries like these, but in the end concluded that, "...the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead." (Eccl 9:3). Bible scholar Tremper Longman notes, "The message of the first ten verses of chapter 9 is among the most clearly pessimistic of the entire book, though its thought has already been encountered: Death comes to all and is the definitive end. Acting righteously or religiously does not save anyone from death...The only recourse is for human beings is to eke out whatever enjoyment life offers." (vv7-10). Solomon was so busy lamenting perplexing things about life that he missed out on many opportunities to just simply enjoy life.

2. Solomon developed flawed theology. Solomon repeatedly expressed frustration over his inability to foresee adverse circumstances and control outcomes. He saw corruption in the halls of justice (Eccl. 3:16), tyrannical oppression of disadvantaged people (Eccl. 4:1), hoarding of resources (Eccl. 5:13), gross disrespect of a previous generation (Eccl. 6:3), corruption through bribery (Eccl. 7:7) and many other heart-wrenching experiences. At the beginning of his life, Solomon seemed to form ideas about God through his experience and wrongly conclude that life is meaningless (Eccl. 4:1-3; 6:10). By the end of the book, Solomon began interpreting his experience with a right view of God and concluded, "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright but they have sought out many devices" [Lit.: their own way] (Eccl. 7:29). Solomon wisely concluded that a very good God made mankind who, like Solomon,

often choose to live life without Him.

Recommended Reading: Ecclesiastes 1-13

Solomon's audience would have been squirming. The sage teacher had left them with a very confusing mix of pessimistic observations, admissions of personal failure, and inconclusive thoughts about reality. They would have struggled to know where his talk was heading. So, with a winsome dismissal of his own wisdom and glory, Solomon stepped off the throne of his life and pronounced, "The conclusion, when all has been heard is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl 12:13,14).

Point to Ponder

With God, life is an endless hope. Without God, life is hopeless end.
– Bill Bright

From Learning to Living

Are you counting on fun, material things, notoriety, hobbies, and your own wisdom to fulfill you? You can set those ambitions aside because Solomon has already tested them for you and discovered that earthly pursuits can never bring true joy—only frustration.

True joy is found in living in submission to God's authority on our life, aligning ourselves with His purposes, and exerting honorable efforts to bring Him glory.

Prayer Point

God of Heaven and Earth, may we trust You and never go looking for satisfaction anywhere but in You. May we live in humble submission to what You have allowed in our short lives here on Earth.

LESSON 87

The Kingdom Divided

Jadis, the evil queen in C.S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*, surveyed a world no longer inhabited by any person or living creature and boasted that she was "the last queen but queen of the world!" She proudly explained that during a war with a rival ruler, she uttered the "deplorable word,"¹⁸ a magical word that ended all life. She believed it was better to be queen of nothing than to be ruled by anyone else. Prideful leaders often use this kind of absurd logic. Throughout history, leaders have inflicted untold misery on their people solely to hold onto power. In 1 Kings 12, we meet two rulers who, like Jadis, were committed to doing whatever it took to hold on to their power and whose terrible pride led them to make choices that cost the lives of their subjects and the future of their nation.

Key Scripture

1 Kings 12:3-8, 12-19, 21-28 (NASB) *Then they sent word and summoned him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, 4 "Your father made our yoke hard; but now, lighten the hard labor imposed by your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you." 5 Then he said to them, "Depart for three days, then return to me." So the people departed.*

6 And King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, "How do you advise me to answer this people?" 7 Then they spoke to him, saying, "If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their request, and speak pleasant words to them, then they will be your servants always." 8 But he ignored the advice of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and served him.

12 Then Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam on the third day, just as the king had directed, saying, "Return to me on the third day." 13 And the king answered the people harshly, for he ignored the advice of the elders which they had given him, 14 and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions!" 15 So the king did not listen to the people; because it was a turn of events from the LORD, in order to establish His

word which the LORD spoke through Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

16 When all Israel saw that the king had not listened to them, the people replied to the king, saying, "What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; To your tents, Israel! Now look after your own house, David!" So Israel went away to their tents.

17 But as for the sons of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. 18 Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of the forced labor, and all Israel stoned him to death. And King Rehoboam hurried to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. 19 So Israel has broken with the house of David to this day.

[At this point, the northern 10 tribes officially crowned Jeroboam king.]

21 Now when Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, 180,000 chosen warriors, to fight against the house of Israel to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. 22 But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 23 "Tell Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and the rest of the people, saying, 24 'This is what the LORD says: "You shall not go up nor fight against your relatives the sons of Israel; return, every man to his house, for this thing has come from Me.'" So they listened to the word of the LORD, and returned to go their way in accordance with the word of the LORD.

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and lived there. And he went out from there and built Penuel. 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. 27 If this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will return to their lord, to Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me and return to Rehoboam king of Judah." 28 So the king consulted, and he made two golden calves; and he said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt."

Recommended Reading: 1 Kings 12:1-14:31, 2 Chronicles 10-12

God promised to make Abraham's descendants into a great nation. He promised David that one day one of his descendants would reign over all Israel forever. Now, just two generations after Israel went from a disjointed group of tribes to a unified country, the country fractured in two.

Solomon's death left a leadership vacuum; the nation, so affluent that silver was considered worthless (1 Kings 10:21), did not look to God or evaluate potential leaders against the standard of His law, but eagerly looked for a leader they thought would most likely give them what they wanted—lower taxes and less work to fund their affluent lifestyles.

Because of Solomon's foolish son Rehoboam's actions, the people of the ten northern tribes anointed Jeroboam king, leaving Rehoboam to rule over the southern tribe of Judah (the tribe of Benjamin was seen as part of Judah during this period). Neither ruler followed God's strict laws or instructions for kings. Unlike David and Solomon, neither king sought God's counsel. Their sinful behavior fostered a division among the Israelites that would last to this day.

Consider the following:

1. Jeroboam's pursuit of power led Israel into idolatry and ruin.

Commentator Matthew Henry remarked "Jeroboam did not deserve so good a post, but Israel deserved so bad a prince."¹⁹ Like Saul, David, and Solomon before him, God offered Jeroboam a simple promise: "Then it shall be that if you listen to all that I command you and walk in My ways, and do what is right in My sight by keeping My statutes and My commandments (...) then I will be with you and build you an enduring house as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you" (1 Kings 11:28). However, Jeroboam worried about losing his political power. Instead of following God's clear instructions, he chose to do what was right in his own eyes. Immediately after taking the throne, he attempted to consolidate his rule by diverting the people's worship away from Jerusalem—and by extension, from King Rehoboam—by instituting idolatry and pagan rituals. The people, eager to lighten their tax and work burden followed eagerly. This corrupt foundation caused the northern ten tribes to begin a spiritual decline, which ultimately led them to completely abandon God and be destroyed by the Assyrians.

2. Rehoboam's arrogance and disregard for God led to his downfall.

Rehoboam was Solomon's son but did not inherit any of his father's wisdom. Instead, he seemed to inherit a double dose of the foolishness and sinfulness that characterized much of Solomon's later rule. In many ways, Rehoboam was the opposite of his northern counterpart.

While Jeroboam was concerned that the people may turn away from his leadership and was willing to do anything to keep the people on his side, Rehoboam took the people's devotion for granted. When the people approached him requesting that he lighten their taxes and workload, he ignored the advice of those who served his father and saw the consequences of his extravagance and sinfulness firsthand. Rehoboam foolishly sought advice from his friends, and in a move that mirrored the derision of Pharaoh forcing the Israelites to make bricks without straw, responded to the people's concerns with cruelty and spite.

Rehoboam's life was full of wild ups and downs. Pastor and author Kevin De Young noted: "He would stumble, get humble, and grow strong, only to be humbled again. In the end, Rehoboam faltered because he did not set his heart on seeking the Lord. He did not consider worshipping God and obeying him as something worth working at. He did not hunger and thirst after righteousness, and so he left this world empty."²⁰ A true king is one who, like a shepherd, lovingly cares for His people, guiding them, protecting them, and laying down His life for them—just as Jesus did for us.

3. The pursuit of pleasure leads to spiritual slavery. In John Bunyon's classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian and his companion Faithful are on their way to the king, a metaphor for a Christian on their way to Heaven. Along their path, they encounter the town of Vanity where those on their way to the king are sidetracked by various entertainments and pleasures. The leaders of Vanity understand that even faithful people can be easily enticed and often willingly enslave themselves to these distractions.

Jeroboam followed this same strategy. To keep the people under his control he offered festivals, idols, and other pleasures. Scripture tells us, "Jeroboam thought to himself, 'The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah.'"

Jeroboam's offerings served as alternatives to true worship, but the people willingly accepted these enticements, entering into a form of spiritual slavery. The Hebrew word *pasha*, used when describing the northern kingdom's rebellion²¹, describes both a political and a

spiritual rebellion. This suggests that the people willingly embraced the idolatry Jeroboam introduced, believing it would bring benefits like lower taxes. But instead, they became enslaved to their desires and strayed from the truth.

This story seems like a drastic departure from the promise that God made to Abraham, David, and Solomon. It seemed that many of God's promises depended on Israel being united, but due to the selfishness of two leaders—who would do anything to maintain their grip on power—the kingdom was fractured in two. From this point forward, it seems like Israel would never be the shining beacon that God promised to make them. However, God is just and faithful to keep His promises and not only brought the Savior He promised but will one day unite Israel to be His beacon for the nations.

Point to Ponder

When political power and economic wealth drives men, countries and families divide.

From Learning to Living

Proverbs 28:5 tells us that, “evil people do not understand justice.” We often acknowledge that our leaders are imperfect people but fail to understand that, as fallen people, they may fail to understand the basics of government, justice, and our needs. That's why it's so important to make God's Word the lens through which we evaluate all potential leaders and why we need to put our hope in the Lord instead of our flawed leaders.

Prayer Point

Lord, we confess that, like Israel, we often seek pleasure and relief from hard work. We acknowledge that in our quest for these things, we abandon Your principles and look to leaders willing to do or say anything that keeps them in power while granting us what we want. Give us hearts that desire You above all else so that we may not be enslaved to our desires. Amen.

LESSON 88

Elijah and the Famine

In 2008, a financial famine swept across the world in the form of a massive recession. Markets crashed, banks foreclosed homes, and millions lost their jobs. National banks, government aid programs, churches, and charitable organizations struggled to adjust to the sudden demand on their services, forcing them to adapt and change. Just as there were lessons to be learned during the 2008 financial drought, a devastating famine in Elijah's time provided spiritual insights into trust, provision, and obedience during times of scarcity. Today, we'll explore a biblical drought that shook the ancient world and served as God's judgment on a rebellious king and his people.

King Ahab, described as more evil than all the kings before him, led Israel deeper into idolatry. God raised up Elijah, a prophet from an obscure town, to confront the king and deliver a message of judgment to Ahab: a drought would ravage his kingdom until Elijah prayed for rain. These dramatic events marked the beginning of Elijah's ministry, during which he faithfully served as God's voice in a particularly godless chapter in Israel's history.

Key Scripture

1 Kings 16:29-17:24 (NASB) *Now Ahab the son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. 30 Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him.*

31 It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. 32 So he erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him. 34 In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; he laid its foundations with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun.

17 Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." 2 The word of the LORD came to him, saying, 3 "Go away from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 4 It shall be that you will drink of the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to provide for you there." 5 So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and lived by the brook Cherith, which is east of the Jordan. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he would drink from the brook. 7 It happened after a while that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, "Please get me a little water in a jar, that I may drink." 11 As she was going to get it, he called to her and said, "Please bring me a piece of bread in your hand." 12 But she said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour in the bowl and a little oil in the jar; and behold, I am gathering a few sticks that I may go in and prepare for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." 13 Then Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go, do as you have said, but make me a little bread cake from it first and bring it out to me, and afterward you may make one for yourself and for your son. 14 For thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'The bowl of flour shall not be exhausted, nor shall the jar of oil be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain on the face of the earth.'" 15 So she went and did according to the word of Elijah, and she and he and her household ate for many days. 16 The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke through Elijah.

17 Now it came about after these things that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became sick; and his sickness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. 18 So she said to Elijah, "What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance and to put my son to death!" 19 He said to her, "Give me your son." Then he took him from her bosom and carried him up to the upper room where he was living, and laid him on his own bed. 20 He called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, have You also brought calamity to the widow with whom I am staying, by causing her son to die?" 21 Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD and said, "O LORD my God, I pray You, let this child's life return to him." 22 The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life of the child returned to him and he revived. 23 Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper room into the house and gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." 24 Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the

LORD in your mouth is truth.”

1 Kings 16:29-17:24 introduces us to King Ahab, whose list of sins included idol worship and building altars for Baal. In response to Ahab’s idolatry, God sent Elijah with a message of judgment: a famine would ravage the land. During the drought, God directed Elijah to a hidden place by a brook, where ravens miraculously sustained him. When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to a widow in Zarephath, where her example of faith provided for the prophet. Despite the raging famine, God continued to show His power and faithfulness through answers to Elijah’s prayers, like raising the widow’s son from the dead (17:17-24).

Consider the following:

1. Ahab’s Reign and Baal Worship (1 Kings 16:29-33): Ahab’s reign over Israel marked a sharp decline in the nation’s spiritual condition. 1 Kings states that Ahab “did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him,” (16:33). This specific inditement is remarkable, as idolatry and disobedience had characterized the reigns of previous Northern kings. However, Ahab’s marriage to Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon, marked a spiritual and cultural shift. Jezebel devoutly worshipped Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility and rain. King Ahab allowed and even encouraged Baal worship to spread through the land. Worship of Baal meant embracing an entire pantheon of gods. According to *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible of Manners & Customs*, “El ruled as father of the gods and head of the Phoenician pantheon or family of gods. Baal, his son, ruled as one of the chief male deities and served as god of agriculture. As such he was responsible for fertility of the field and was associated with human and animal reproduction. Baalath, who seems to have been the consort of Baal, represented the principle of fertility and generation. Actually, Baal simply means ‘lord’ and Baalath, ‘lady.’”²² Baal worship directly challenged Yahweh’s sovereignty over creation and specifically broke Israel’s covenant vows to God. The introduction of Baal worship also spurred moral decline, as the worship of Baal often included practices such as ritual prostitution and even child sacrifice.

2. God’s Provision in Times of Judgment (1 Kings 17:1-6): God’s stunning proclamation to Ahab, delivered by Elijah, declared war on

Baal. The withering drought that immediately descended on the land proved definitively that Yahweh, not Baal, deserved worship as the true God in control of the weather and the land's fertility. After this dramatic confrontation, God sent Elijah to the brook Cherith, where he obediently waited out the drought and learned to depend on God for all his needs. Isaiah 55:8 says, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord.'" During this time, God sent food to Elijah using ravens—birds that the OT law declared unclean (Deut. 14:14). Accepting food from ravens would have been very difficult for a devout Jew like Elijah. Today, it would be like eating food from a toilet or a sewer pipe. Just as God used the drought to cause Israel to repent and change, Elijah's time at Cherith deepened his dependence on God. Today, we continue to see God use unlikely situations and unexpected sources to provide for His people. Wilderness experiences always prepare God's people for change. Are you in the midst of a wilderness period in your life? God likely has great things in store for your future.

3. The Widow's Faith (1 Kings 17:8-16): After the brook dried up, God directed Elijah to travel to Zarephath, a city in Sidon. Ironically, Sidon was the heart of Baal worship and Queen Jezebel's home country (16:31). Sidon would likely be the last place on earth that Ahab would think to look for the prophet. Elijah met a widow who was preparing what she believed would be her final meal for herself and her son before they died of starvation. Elijah made a bold request of her. He asked her to make him a small cake first, promising that if she did, God would ensure that her supply of flour and oil would not run out until the famine ends. Incredibly, she believed Elijah and did what he asked. In a time of extreme scarcity, she chose to trust the word of a man she had never met. God rewarded her faith by providing for her and her son for the rest of the famine. The fact that this miracle took place in Sidon, outside of Israel, proved God's sovereignty over all nations, not just Israel. Canaanite gods like Baal, by contrast, were thought to control just a relatively small territory or region. The widow—a foreigner—became a model of faith, while Israel, under Ahab and Jezebel, fell deeper into idolatry. Today, the widow's faith challenges us to look at our view of provision and famine. Do you cling to what little you have out of fear, or like the widow do you trust God to provide as you follow Him?

Elijah's story began with a challenge to a corrupt king ruling a nation

lost in idolatry. Through the prophet's obedience, God proved His sovereignty over nature, His ability to provide, and His power to sustain His people. Elijah's interactions with the widow of Zarephath taught Israel about God and His love for a broken and hurting world. God does not allow His people to wallow, lost in selfish idolatry. Instead, He rescues them and confronts their broken worldviews lovingly, like a good shepherd.

Point to Ponder

Faith activates God's provision in scarcity.

From Learning to Living

In seasons of personal famine—whether financial, spiritual, or emotional—it's easy to give in to fear and hold on to what little we have. However, like the widow of Zarephath, God calls us to step out in faith and trust His provision. Reflect on areas in your life where you feel a sense of lack. How is God asking you to trust Him more in that area?

Prayer Point

Dear God, please give me a heart that trusts You even in hard times. Help me to sacrificially speak the truth to power like Elijah, have the faith to believe You will provide for me like the widow, and seek the wisdom to see through my prevailing culture's lies.

LESSON 89

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

Every election season, political experts focus on discussing the “undecided voter,” people who haven’t fully committed to either political party. These voters often challenge candidates because they straddle the fence between both sides, blending their own beliefs with ideas from each party. Candidates view winning these independent voters as crucial to securing victory, so popular candidates often abandon principles they once held or adopt new positions to win their favor.

In 1 Kings 18, the Israelites found themselves in a similar situation, torn between the worship of Baal or the one true God. The prophet Elijah was called to be God’s instrument to show the truth to these “undecided voters.”

[Because of the people’s idolatry, the land had experienced a three-year drought. God commanded the prophet Elijah to challenge king Ahab to a test to finally discern whose god was the true God.]

Key Scripture

1 Kings 18:20-40 (NASB) *So Ahab sent a message among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. 21 Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. 23 Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire under it. 24 Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people said, “That is a good idea.”*

25 So Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose one ox for yourselves and prepare it first for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it.” 26 Then they took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until

noon saying, “O Baal, answer us.” But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. 27 It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.” 28 So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. 29 When midday was past, they raved until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.

30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD which had been torn down. 31 Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, “Israel shall be your name.” 32 So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed. 33 Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid it on the wood. 34 And he said, “Fill four pitchers with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.” And he said, “Do it a second time,” and they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time,” and they did it a third time. 35 The water flowed around the altar and he also filled the trench with water.

36 At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.” 40 Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.

[Elijah ran back to King Ahab’s home while God miraculously ended the drought by bringing a torrential rain to nourish the dry and barren land.]

Recommended Reading: 1 Kings 18-19:18

This was the ultimate contest: God versus Baal and Elijah against 450 false prophets. Elijah likely felt alone, potentially surrounded by thousands, as the epic showdown began. Scholar Thomas Constable observed that the oxen, as symbols of service, may have represented the people of Israel. The people, were made to serve Yahweh but

instead would be needlessly offered up to an idol. Although the people associated thunder with Baal, they did not hear the voice of their false god. Instead, on a rebuilt altar, soaked past any point where any natural fire could start, God made it clear to the people that He alone was God and that He alone was able to provide the rain they needed.

Consider the following:

1. Spiritual “limpers” in Israel...and the church. Despite their worship of Baal, it is likely many in Israel would have claimed to be followers of the one true God. Rather than reject the truth outright, the people added to their beliefs or slowly changed them over time, which is why Elijah challenged them, saying: “How long are you going to struggle with the two choices? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” In Hebrew, the word Elijah used to describe their struggle is the word *pasach*, which means to hesitate, to dance, or to limp.²³ Today, we may say “why are you on the fence?” In a recent sermon, Pastor Raef Chenery noted that, by adding to the truth the Israelites had developed a spiritual limp.²⁴ They had become too familiar with the world, meaning they had the same goals, pursuits, and ambitions as the world. They had no hatred for their sin and no affection for God. The church today is full of spiritual limpers—those who claim the title of Christian but have slowly combined truth with the culture’s lies. Romans 12 challenges us to guard against this slow progression by seeking not to be “conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). We can do this by presenting ourselves, our goals, and our ambitions daily to God—praying and seeking His will to be glorified above our own.

2. Idolatry turns us into what we worship. Author Carl Trueman noted that idolatry is “the worship of something which looks as if it could deliver but is in fact impotent.”²⁵ The prophets on Mount Carmel fully expected their god to deliver the rain they desperately needed. They had become so convinced by their lie that when rain didn’t come, they did not stop and think that they could be wrong. They did not stop to wonder that perhaps Elijah’s God was the true God. Instead, they became increasingly desperate to be heard by their man-made creation. According to Psalm 115, idols, “Have mouths but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but cannot see; They have noses, but cannot smell; They have hands, but cannot feel; They have

feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat. *Those who make them will become like them.*” This passage is not saying that idolaters are no longer able to speak or hear but that they have become so committed to a lie they are no longer able to see or hear the truth. They become so engrossed in a falsehood they are no longer able to change because to do so would require them to admit that they have believed a lie. Today, we may not be creating statues of Baal and crying for rain, but we do replace God with other man-made objects. Like the Israelites, we seek to fulfill our needs with objects that cannot satisfy us. We idolize political parties, wealth, status, possessions, or ideas, looking to them to meet our needs instead of the One who can truly fulfill them.

3. We should seek to live faithfully, despite cultural challenges.

Elijah was known for living so faithfully that his mere presence was convincing to those around him. When Elijah first challenged Ahab, Ahab greeted him by calling him “troubler of Israel” (1 Kings 18:17). When Elijah spoke, he did not hide or mince words but confidently pointed others to the truth he faithfully clung to. He did not care about winning the challenge, or being right, or beating Ahab, but prayed the outcome would result in three things: that God would be known, that Elijah would be known as His servant, and that all of Israel would turn back to Him. Notice how Elijah kept his focus on his ultimate purpose. Even if Israel didn’t turn back, his desire was for people to know God and recognize that he was His servant. It’s easy to feel discouraged by the direction our culture is heading, especially when so many seem torn between conflicting beliefs. Like Elijah, we can pray for those around us to turn to God and strive to live in a way that reflects His love and truth. Our aim should be to glorify God through our lives and demonstrate our allegiance to Him in all we do.

Once they witnessed God’s miraculous display, the people seemingly rejected Baal, going so far as to slaughter the false prophets. Elijah must have felt his work was done; the people seemed to know Yahweh as the true God and know Elijah as His servant. Taking what could be described as a victory lap, Elijah ran back to Ahab’s palace in Jezreel only to discover that his work was not finished. Like Elijah, we often expect our work to have great or lasting impact. We expect rest after work, revival after spiritual downturn, and others to embrace truth when presented to them. Idolatry, however, is hard to overcome and forces those caught in its grip to limp along, reluctant to give up the

thing they fear could bring rain— or in our case, the peace, prosperity, or security we long for.

Point to Ponder

“God is a God who is not silent.” - Carl Truman

From Learning to Living

Are you a spiritual limper? Has your life become indistinguishable from those around you? Do you hold the same beliefs, consume the same media, or seek fulfillment in the same things as your unbelieving neighbors—more stuff, more security, more friends? If you answered yes to any of these questions, you may be a spiritual limper. Spend time in prayer this week, asking God to reveal how your mind has conformed to the world.

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, give us the ears to hear and mouths to confess that You are Lord. Convict us and expose ways we add to Your Word and idolize man-made objects or ideas. Teach us how to stay true to Your word and glorify You in all we do so that like Elijah, our presence alone can convict and show others that You are God.

LESSON 90

Elijah in the Wilderness

Have you ever noticed how often we use adages—short, memorable sayings that often offer wisdom or life advice? Next time you’re having a conversation, take note how many you hear. You’ll probably start to notice a lot of them—common ones like, “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch,” “When it rains, it pours,” or “He wants to have his cake and eat it too.” While adages often convey some wisdom, not all of them are true. One that has slipped into our thoughts and beliefs is the saying, “God won’t give you more than you can handle.”

We say this when someone is in a difficult season, and we’re not sure what to say and want to be encouraging. However, that’s not what we find in Scripture or in life. Often, we’re put in situations that we can’t handle. We feel overwhelmed, like there’s no end in sight, and our only option is to cling to God like a life raft in a storm.

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah is overwhelmed, frustrated, and dealing with situations that he could not handle on his own. As you read, pay close attention to his attitude, how God cared for and closely interacted with him.

Key Scripture

1 Kings 19:1-18 (NASB) Now Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more so, if by about this time tomorrow I do not make your life like the life of one of them.” 3 And he was afraid, and got up and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah; and he left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked for himself to die, and said, “Enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” 5 Then he lay down and fell asleep under a broom tree; but behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, “Arise, eat!” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a round loaf of bread baked on hot coals, and a pitcher of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again.

7 But the angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him, and said, "Arise, eat; because the journey is too long for you." 8 So he arose and ate and drank, and he journeyed in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God.

9 Then he came there to a cave and spent the night there; and behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 10 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of armies; for the sons of Israel have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they have sought to take my life."

11 So He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD was passing by! And a great and powerful wind was tearing out the mountains and breaking the rocks in pieces before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 And after the earthquake, a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire, a sound of a gentle blowing. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of armies; for the sons of Israel have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they have sought to take my life."

15 The LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 You shall also anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. 17 And it shall come about that the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18 Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Recommended Reading: 1 Kings 19

After three and a half years of non-stop ministry in which he endured famine and drought and evaded a king who was trying to kill him, Elijah was on the brink of burnout. After a miraculous victory over the prophets of Baal – which culminated in the people chanting, “the Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God” – Elijah received a death threat from King Ahab’s wife, Jezebel. Jezebel’s message struck fear in Elijah and pushed him over the edge, leaving him feeling despondent, defeated, and depressed. In his shaken state, Elijah did

what so many of us do when overwhelmed by our problems: he fled. Elijah tried to lose himself in the wilderness, but God never lost him, and He reached out in kindness to care for His servant.

Consider the following:

1. Elijah's passion led to burnout. Over the last three and a half years, Elijah had survived drought and famine, lived on the run from the authorities, witnessed friends and other faithful servants of the Lord executed by the king, and helped kill over 400 prophets of Baal. To say Elijah was likely stressed and his nerves were frayed is an understatement. So, it's no surprise that the seemingly small but threatening letter from a woman miles away would put him over the edge. Elijah felt passionately about his ministry and said twice that he was "zealous for the Lord." One commentator notes that the lows of his emotions matched the highs of his enthusiasm, suggesting that his passion for God and his deep emotional turmoil were intricately tied.²⁶ Like Elijah, many of us approach life with zeal and excitement to be used by God. But like Elijah, we also experience setbacks, stubborn people, traumatic situations, and stress we're not equipped to handle. These events are included in the Bible, so we know that our experiences and emotions are not abnormal. Instead they are reminders we have a loving God who patiently cares for us and walks alongside us in our darkest moments.

2. God patiently met Elijah's needs. Even though Elijah felt like he no longer mattered, he still mattered to God. When preaching on this story, pastor Alistair Begg aptly reminded that "the love of God abounds and is as unchanging as himself."²⁷ God could have been dismissive of Elijah's feelings by telling him to "pull himself up" or to "snap out of it," but instead God responded with patience. When people we love are suffering, it can be difficult to know how to respond, but God provides us with the perfect example of how to care for others in their pain. Notice the four different ways God cared for him:

- a. First, He cared for Elijah's physical needs. Alone in the wilderness, Elijah was tired and hungry and God made sure he was fed, sheltered, and well rested.
- b. Second, God was present with Elijah. Elijah fled to the wil-

derness, wanting to hide and God gave him the space to be alone without leaving him alone. God was quiet and spoke enough for Elijah to know He was there but gave him space when he needed it.

c. Third, God was attentive to Elijah's feelings. Elijah was scared and depressed and while God *could* have pointed out that He was meeting his needs, God provided space for him to experience these emotions. He also wasn't affirming of what wasn't true but patiently asked good questions that eventually led Elijah to see what was true.

d. Finally, when the time was right, God gave Elijah a job to do. God understood that having a task to focus on, outside of one's internal struggles can be vital for someone's mental health and was exactly what Elijah needed.

3. Powerful faith comes through quiet obedience. As He had done with Moses, God commanded Elijah to stand before Him on the mountain. While hiding in the same rocky crevice where Moses had concealed himself, God displayed His miraculous power, showing Himself as the master of all the elements that Baal was thought to control. However, God was not in the wind, earthquake, or fire, but above all of them. Like the people Elijah was ministering to, he did not seem moved by the powerful display of God's might; instead, he was most impacted by hearing God's still, small voice.

Elijah should have recognized that there was "no difference between his heart and that of the nation; and, that as coercion failed to make him leave his cave, so it failed, and must fail, to compel men to leave their sins."²⁸ He failed to recognize that while God uses miracles to make way for faith, faith can only come from hearing the word of God (Rom. 19:17). Elijah had been God's vessel for miraculous signs and wonders, now he needed to follow God's example and move people through His still small voice. Commentator Matthew Henry eloquently put it, "Gracious souls are more affected by the tender mercies of the Lord than by his terrors."²⁹

Elijah ended up in a situation he didn't have the mental, emotional, or physical capacity to handle. Isolated and feeling abandoned, he had reached emotional rock bottom. His only option was to cling

to God and trust His provision to get him through. We often end up in situations we can't handle; feeling burnt out, isolated, and like we're the only ones who can understand what we're going through. Just as God walked patiently with Elijah, He is walking alongside us, meeting our needs and encouraging us to press on with the work He has set before us.

Point to Ponder

“Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you.”
1 Peter 5:7

From Learning to Living

Elijah provides a great example for how hard it is to see things clearly when we're tired, stressed, burnout, or angry. Proverbs 12:18 tells us: “There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” This verse reminds us that speaking or acting without thinking can be as dangerous as swinging a weapon without thought. So, next time you need to make a big decision, take a step back. Follow the example God gave Elijah and sleep on the situation and make sure you're seeing the details clearly.

Prayer Point

Gracious Heavenly Father, You are our creator, who has given us the ability to feel complex emotions. We thank You that You can empathize with our struggles even when we feel no one could possibly understand what we're going through. Lord, help us to see Your care and provision and know Your love and care for us despite what we may feel. When life feels overwhelming and we're in situations we can't handle, help us to rely on You to sustain us. Amen

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The purpose of the Small Group Ministry is to be a vessel, through community, for discipleship. Small Groups are meant to reinforce the four scriptural principles set forth as the purpose of New Hope Church:

“The purpose of this church is to glorify God by producing maturing followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ through the four scriptural principles of Learning, Loving, Worship and Prayer.”

Small Groups will seek to accomplish this through creating a safe and supportive atmosphere for people to wrestle with the truths of God as they mature in their faith.

As Pastor Mark says, “What you believe about **GOD** determines what you **DO** next.” Based on this week’s Scripture, sermon, and devotional reading, please consider the following questions placed within these two categories:

GOD

1. What do you believe about God? What do you learn about God’s character from this week’s Scripture passage, message, and devotional?
2. What stirs up praise, love, or thankfulness to God? During prayer time, PRAISE HIM for who He is, His character, His attributes, or THANK HIM for what He has done/is doing.

DO

1. What do you learn about humanity or yourself specifically from this week’s Scripture passage, message, and devotional?
2. Is there something God is asking you to do? What do you believe you are to do next? How will you seek to be obedient to what you are learning?
3. What is the tension/challenge in obeying God? Can you identify what you are feeling or what’s causing a reaction?
4. How can your small group support you in yielding to what God wants you to do?
5. How can you pray for yourself or others according to these verses?

PRAYER TIME

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HOPE

A NEW HOPE BIBLE STUDY
BOOK 8

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