

The background of the cover features a dense field of grey, rounded ceramic jars. In the center, a single, vibrant red ceramic jar stands out prominently, drawing the viewer's eye. The jars are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and repetition.

# *Set Apart*

Holy Habits of Prophets and Kings

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Jessica LaGrone

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A Bible Study on 1 and 2 Kings

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ABINGDON PRESS

Nashville

# SET APART: HOLY HABITS OF PROPHETS AND KINGS

A BIBLE STUDY OF 1 AND 2 KINGS

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# *Introduction*

We often look to the New Testament to learn about spiritual disciplines—those spiritual practices that set us apart for God and draw us closer to Him. But there is much we can learn from the Old Testament about timeless practices of faith. In this study of First and Second Kings, we will examine the holy habits of the prophets and kings who were set apart by their close walk with God. Each week we will explore the central story of one of these intriguing men of God and the specific practice he observed, as well as what the Bible teaches about this practice. As we journey together, we will discover what we can learn from

Solomon's experience of being consecrated,  
Elijah's practice of listening to God,  
Elijah and Elisha's practice of mentoring,  
Elisha and Naaman's example of practicing humility,  
Hezekiah's practice of worshiping God alone, and  
Josiah's practice of discovering God's Word.

Each of these men was trying to follow God while carrying out his calling on earth. As we consider their examples, we will discover that even prophets and kings struggled and grew in their faith through spiritual practices, and we will learn how these same practices can help us to draw closer to God and follow His unique purposes for us in His kingdom. We'll see that being set apart is not only for our own good but also for the good of others, as they come to see God in and through us.



## Getting Started

For each week of our study there are five readings. Each of these readings includes the following elements:

- Read God's Word** A portion of the Bible story for the week, occasionally with other Scripture readings.
- Reflect and Respond** A guided reflection and study of the Scripture with space for recording your responses.
- Talk with God** A sample prayer to guide you into a personal time of prayer.
- Act on It** Ideas to help you act on what you have read.
- Extra Insight** Additional "bonus" insights or facts to enhance your study.

You will be able to complete each reading in about 20–30 minutes. (Be sure to have a pen or pencil and your Bible ready.) Completing these readings each week will help to prepare you for the discussion and activities of the group session.

Once a week you will gather with your group to watch a video in which I share additional insights into the stories and their application for our lives. I encourage you to discuss what you're learning and to share how God is working in your own life. You will find that sharing with one another will enable you to recognize God's activity in your life even more clearly and help you to encourage and pray for one another.

Before you begin this journey, give God permission to work in your heart and life. Offer yourself to Him and express your desire to be set apart as chosen, royal, and holy for the sake of His kingdom. May God richly bless you as you study His Word and discover how to become more like Him.

Blessings,

*Jessica*



## Week 1

### Solomon

#### Set Apart by Consecration

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Apart from fairy-tale movies and occasional stories of British royalty, our experience of coronation is limited. That moment when an existing king or queen passes on the crown to the appointed successor—the pomp and circumstance and ceremony—is tied to a fairy-tale image in most of our minds. Kings and queens are established as named leaders of a monarchy—that’s coronation. But it’s not consecration.

Consecration is two-way set-apartness. We are set apart *by* God for His purposes and His glory. But we also *set ourselves* apart, handing over all the parts of our lives to God—all surrendered to God for God’s purposes. The word *consecration* is related to the word *sacred*. Being set apart or consecrated is a sacred and holy act.

King Solomon doesn’t just have the fairy-tale coronation ceremony, one in which his father, King David, passes down the crown and they live happily ever after. He is consecrated, set apart for a holy and sacred purpose. But he will not thrive as king by relying only on his earthly crown. It is his consecration, his set-apart-by-God-ness, that makes him a great king. When he follows God’s wisdom and leads by surrendering to God, he thrives. When he seeks God’s wisdom first and lives a life different from the culture of idolatry around him, he finds success. But when he becomes overly enamored with the power of the crown, his story takes a turn.

I hope that you have experienced a consecration in your life—a time when another person dedicated you to God, prayed over you, and spoke words of faith into your life. But at some point, we have to consecrate ourselves to God—to hand over all the parts of our lives to God. We have to say to God, “I want to live a set apart life that glorifies you.”

This week we’re jumping right into Solomon’s consecration story to discover more about what it means to be set apart by God and to set ourselves apart to be used by God.



## Day 1: Set Apart as King

### *Read God's Word*

<sup>1</sup> When King David was very old, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. <sup>2</sup> So his attendants said to him, "Let us look for a young virgin to serve the king and take care of him. She can lie beside him so that our lord the king may keep warm."

<sup>3</sup> Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful young woman and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. <sup>4</sup> The woman was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no sexual relations with her.

<sup>5</sup> Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him. <sup>6</sup> (His father had never rebuked him by asking, "Why do you behave as you do?" He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom.)

...

<sup>28</sup> Then King David said, "Call in Bathsheba." So she came into the king's presence and stood before him.

<sup>29</sup> The king then took an oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, <sup>30</sup> I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place."

<sup>31</sup> Then Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground, prostrating herself before the king, and said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

<sup>32</sup> King David said, "Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada." When they came before the king, <sup>33</sup> he said to them: "Take your lord's servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule and take him down to Gihon. <sup>34</sup> There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' <sup>35</sup> Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah."

...

<sup>38</sup> So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the Kerethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon mount King David's mule, and they escorted him to Gihon. <sup>39</sup> Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the sacred tent and anointed Solomon. Then they sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" <sup>40</sup> And all the people went up after him, playing pipes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound.

1 Kings 1:1-6; 28-35, 38-40

## *Reflect and Respond*

If you have spent any time at all in the checkout line at the grocery store, then most likely you have noticed that our culture has a fascination with royalty. If you are old enough to remember Princess Diana, you'll remember the coverage of her life from the moment she came on the scene until her tragic death. And just a few years ago we became enamored with Catherine (Kate) Middleton, who married Diana's son Prince William. For some reason, the concept of royalty captures our attention and keeps us coming back for more. The idea that a human being was at some point in his or her lineage set apart and called "royal" is fairytale-like and stirs our imagination.

Early in the Scriptures we read that God would rather not introduce the pattern of kings. Instead, God would lead His people and speak through judges and prophets. But the people wanted a king. Other nations had kings and palaces and courts; it was all so fascinating! Even God's people were consumed with the idea of royalty—so much so that they begged God to give them a king. They couldn't be satisfied with the Creator of the Universe leading through chosen prophets and judges. They wanted something more—more ornate, more official, more royal. They wanted a king. Finally, God relented and gave them their king, but He alone would determine the first king. God would set apart a chosen man to become the first king and, for better or worse, the history of God's people would be made by the actions and leadership of a line of kings.

As the book of First Kings begins, you can sense the excitement about who will be the next king after the great King David dies. If you've ever wondered how a king became a king, you'll get an idea here in Chapter 1.

King David, widely held as the greatest king ever to rule Israel, was in his last days. Once known as a great and strong ruler, David's heyday was clearly behind him. He was so frail and chilled that his advisors brought him a young girl to serve as a human space heater (1 Kings 1:1-2). While he was still technically king, David was so out of the loop on the happenings in his own country (and his own family) that his key advisor Nathan and wife Bathsheba had to cook up a scheme to inform him that Adonijah, his oldest living son, had seized the throne, declaring himself king without his father's blessing (1 Kings 1:11-27).

If David hadn't realized it before, it became clear to him that his days on this earth as king of Israel were coming to an end. And if he wanted to have any input into who would succeed him as king, he would need to act now. The future of the nation was no longer in his hands but in the hands of its forthcoming leaders, and the decision about who would be the next king was one that would forever shape the nation that David loved.

The Books of First and Second Kings are particularly interested in leadership. You don't need to look much further than the books' titles to find that they will reveal the important place that kings play in the history of God's people.

### **Extra Insight**

*First and Second Kings were originally written as one book, on one scroll, in Hebrew. When the text was translated into Greek, which made it longer, it was separated into two books.<sup>1</sup>*

A good king meant good days ahead for the people of Israel. “As goes the leader, so goes the nation,” according to the old saying. For Israel, the leaders were prophets and kings, powerful people whose own personal lives paved the way to a good or bad future for their followers.

The Books of First and Second Kings are primarily interested in whether a leader chose to follow and worship the One True God or fall into the temptation of allowing the worship of false gods and idols. The integrity of the king was ultimately connected to the fate of the people, and First and Second Kings are explicit about the fact that the leader’s relationship to God is the most important thing about him.

Whatever they accomplish in their reign—whatever cities they build, wars they fight, civic accomplishments they have—these are of no consequence if the leader in question compromises his faith in God. A judgment of his reign is summarized in the first few sentences about each king.

**Read the introductions to a handful of the kings in First and Second Kings. Next to each name, write how this king measured up in the Bible’s judgment of his reign:**

**2 Kings 8:16-18 – Jehoram:**

**1 Kings 15:1-3 – Abijah:**

**1 Kings 15:9-11 – Asa:**

**2 Kings 18:1-3 – Hezekiah:**

**2 Kings 22:1-2 – Josiah:**

As you can see from just a few examples, full devotion to God was the first and most important qualification for being a good ruler of God’s people. Because of this, the takeover of the throne by David’s oldest surviving son, Adonijah, sent a clear message about what kind of king he would be. Here was a leader who grabbed power for himself without concern for his father’s will—or even for the fact that his father, the king, was still alive when he named himself king.

A wise mentor in ministry once gave me instructions about meeting new people in the first days and weeks as pastor of a church: “Watch out for the people who walk into your office and declare to you, ‘I’m a leader. I’m important. I’m in charge of things here.’ But look for the people who have their sleeves rolled up and are serving, making ministry happen. Those are your leaders.”

**Who are the leaders in your world who quietly make ministry happen?**

In contrast to his older brother Adonijah's selfish takeover, Solomon received the throne because he was chosen by his father. Leadership is a gift. The roles we have that allow us to influence others are always a gift—both from the leaders who have influenced us and for the people over whom we have charge.

Consider the immediate transformation that Solomon went through in that moment when his father named him king. While he was already royalty by virtue of being born the son of a king, he went from being just one of many royal sons (1 Chronicles 3:9 lists nineteen sons and one daughter born to David) to ruler of the nation.

To drive home the impact of Solomon's royal conversion, the book of First Kings mentions him ten times before David's instructions to make him the next king, and every single time he is mentioned only in relationship to someone else:

1. his brother Solomon (1:10)
2. Solomon's mother (1:11)
3. your son Solomon (1:12)
4. your son Solomon (1:13)
5. your son Solomon (1:17)
6. your servant Solomon (1:19)
7. my son Solomon (1:21)
8. your servant Solomon (1:26)
9. your son Solomon (1:30)
10. my son Solomon (1:33)

It's as if no one even recognizes Solomon's name except in relationship to someone who was already important. He is a royal nobody.

But when David gives instructions for Solomon to be named king over Israel, there is no name attached to give Solomon status. He now carries the rank of royal leadership.

**Write below the words David instructs to be declared over Solomon when he is named king in 1 Kings 1:34.**

This is the stuff fairy tales are made of. Cinderella finds herself transformed from maid to princess. The frog prince goes from the swamp to the throne with just a kiss. If the number of fairy-tale books and movies sold is any indication, rising to the rank of royalty is something that many people fantasize about.

Being set apart as king meant that Solomon would have incredible privilege, wealth, and power. Who wouldn't want to live in a palace with servants and robes and food fit for a king? But along with royal privilege comes the royal responsibility for the nation that he would serve.

#### **Extra Insight**

*After her mention in the first chapter of First Kings, the next time Bathsheba is named in the book she is given status only in relationship to her son and is called "Solomon's mother" (see 1 Kings 2:13). This signifies the elevation of Solomon's status.<sup>1</sup>*

## Set Apart

The Book of First Peter tells us that the same thing has happened to you and to me. We were nobodies, with no status. And then God chose us to become royalty, with great privilege and great responsibility.

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

1 Peter 2:9-10

Being set apart is something that happens in us for others.

*Chosen. Royal. Holy.* These words go together. They could have been written about Solomon, but they weren't. They are about you. They are declarations of who you are in Christ.

**Below, write your name three times in the blanks on the left. Then in the blanks on the right, write the words *chosen*, *royal*, and *holy*. Read each statement out loud, taking in the impact of its meaning.**

\_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

When we read it in connection to ourselves, *holy* is possibly the hardest word on this list to swallow. We tend to identify this word either with those who are so good that they seem to live on a different spiritual plane or with those who act "holier than thou."

Being set apart is not something that means we see ourselves as better than others. On the contrary, it is only God's Spirit living in us that marks us and makes us different from those around us, and it is our brokenness and sinfulness that drive us to seek a new way, a new life in Christ. In his book *Called to Be Holy*, John Oswalt writes, "When the holy character of God is seen in broken, fallible people it is apparent that something supernatural has taken place in them. And this becomes a sign of hope to the world that their sinful condition can be addressed as well."<sup>2</sup> The prophet Ezekiel talks about this when he says, "Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes" (Ezekiel 36:23).

The king was set apart to rule, not for his own sake but for the sake of his followers and his kingdom. Likewise, being set apart is something that happens in us for others. When we display the character of God, people around us are drawn to know Him.

In the coming weeks, we will explore what it means for God to set us apart as chosen, royal, and holy, and how this draws others to God. For now, let it begin to sink in: God chose you. He loves you. Once you were nobody, but now you are His. This privilege is greater than any earthly palace can provide.

### *Talk with God*

*Almighty God, thank You for giving me the interest and desire to study Your Word. Please reveal Yourself and Your love for me through this study. Help me to understand, beginning today, that I am chosen by You, that I am royalty because of You, that I am holy and precious in Your eyes. Set me apart, Lord, for Your kingdom purposes, not only in my life but also in the lives of others. Amen.*

### *Act on It*

Solomon was “chosen” to be king by his father. In your life, who has noticed special gifts and abilities in you and called them out? Has someone told you through words or actions that you are special and can do something worthwhile with your life? Say a prayer of thanks for the faith these persons had in you. You may want to write each one a note of thanks or tell someone about them and the positive influence they had on you.

## Day 2: Marked

### *Read God's Word*

<sup>32</sup> King David said, “Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.” When they came before the king, <sup>33</sup> he said to them: “Take your lord’s servants with you and have Solomon my son mount my own mule and take him down to Gihon. <sup>34</sup> There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ <sup>35</sup> Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah.”

1 Kings 1:32-35



We are a people who are set apart, called to be different than the world around us, marked for a purpose greater than we could dream of.

<sup>22</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>23</sup> "Take the following fine spices: 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, 250 shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant calamus, <sup>24</sup> 500 shekels of cassia—all according to the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil. <sup>25</sup> Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. <sup>26</sup> Then use it to anoint the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant law, <sup>27</sup> the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, <sup>28</sup> the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. <sup>29</sup> You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy.

<sup>30</sup> "Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. <sup>31</sup> Say to the Israelites, 'This is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. <sup>32</sup> Do not pour it on anyone else's body and do not make any other oil using the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. <sup>33</sup> Whoever makes perfume like it and puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from their people.'"

Exodus 30:22-33

### *Reflect and Respond*

When I was nine years old, I went away to summer camp for the first time. Judging from the whirlwind of preparation that overtook our household in the weeks before I left, you would have thought I was going to another continent. In the midst of all the piles of supplies gathered in our living room, one indispensable piece of the camp-readiness equipment was the black permanent marker we used to mark my things. According to my mom's instructions, everything to be packed for camp was immediately marked with permanent marker. T-shirts, sandals, bug spray, even toothpaste—all were inscribed with my name.

I thought this ritual of marking things a little silly at first (*Even the bottle of sunscreen?*) and then a bit embarrassing (*Really? Even my underwear?*). But then I arrived in a cabin of twelve girls and two counselors and saw just how necessary this practice had been. From day one the cabin was in utter chaos: our trunks and suitcases spilling out into the middle of the room, and all the clothes our mothers had neatly packed and folded now strewn about. With multiple identical Rainbow Brite T-shirts thrown over various bunk beds, how were we to know whose was whose? I found myself relieved that I could always spot mine—the black permanent marker on the tag had done its job.

Marked. Set apart from the others. Ownership declared.

These are actions meant not only for camping supplies but for people as well. Again and again in Scripture, God declares that we are a people who are set apart, called to be different than the world around us, marked for a purpose greater than we could dream of.

This is the kind of legacy David longs to give his son Solomon. David's intentions for Solomon to be set apart from those around him go beyond the role of kingship; they involve David's longing for his son to be fully devoted to God.

As part of Solomon's coronation, David commands that Solomon be anointed by both a priest and a prophet. These men, Zadok and Nathan, are two of David's most important spiritual leaders. We tend to think of kings as having the ultimate authority over their subjects, but even kings need spiritual leaders. Perhaps David was communicating to his son that he would need guidance from these men and those who would follow them in their roles. Take note of which prophet David chooses to anoint his son—his old friend Nathan.

David himself was appointed as king (since he was not born into a royal family) and then anointed by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13). David was a stranger to the prophet Samuel at the time, having been selected with specific guidance from God. In contrast, the prophet Nathan has known Solomon all his life, even since before he was born.

The history of the relationship between Solomon's mother and father, David and Bathsheba, is infamous, and Nathan played a part in the scandalous story. David committed adultery with Bathsheba, and when she became pregnant, David had her husband murdered to cover up David's sins.

**Read Nathan's scathing rebuke of David for adultery and murder in 2 Samuel 12:1-15.**

**Who has the authority in this conversation? The king or the prophet?**

As Nathan confronted David with the error of his ways, this conversation must have been deeply emotional and difficult for David. Proverbs 27:6 says, "Wounds from a friend can be trusted." Sometimes it takes someone very close to us to tell us a difficult truth.

**When has someone close to you spoken difficult words of truth, enabling you to hear them from a trusted source?**

We can tell that David and Nathan maintained an especially close relationship, not only because David chose Nathan to anoint his son Solomon as king but also because David and Bathsheba even named one of their sons born after the scandal "Nathan"—probably as an homage to the truth-telling prophet (1 Chronicles 3:5). So, when he anointed Solomon as the new king, Nathan was



acting as both a prophet and a deeply trusted advisor and friend of Solomon's father, one who had been part of their family history—both good and bad—since before Solomon's birth.

We see the practice of anointing throughout the Scriptures. Anointing is a deep and ancient symbol of being set apart, marked by God as a sign of His grace for a special act.

**Read 1 Kings 19:15-16. Who are the three people God calls Elijah to anoint in this passage, and for what roles?**

Anointing was used to mark prophets, priests, and kings as set apart for a special calling. Once they had been anointed, they would be recognized by those around them as being different from their peers. The sheen of oil would wear off, but their lives and identities were altered forever by that experience.

Having grown up in a nation that prides itself on the principle of the separation of church and state, it's hard for me to picture a king, the leader of a nation, being given authority and permission to lead by a priest and a prophet. When I struggle with that picture, it makes me realize again how different our own culture is from that of ancient Israel. The king was not just a political leader or figurehead. Solomon's spiritual lineage and his continued dedication to worship God alone was just as important as any civil or military role he played as the nation's leader. In fact, the success or failure of his reign would rise and fall not on his military victories or financial gain but on his commitment to remaining set apart—marked to be different in the purity of his dedication to God.

**Reread Exodus 30:22-33 (page 14). What objects and people are being anointed in this passage?**

**What explicit instructions and prohibitions are given about the scent of the oil used?**

Our sense of smell can evoke powerful emotions and memories. You may be able to recall a scent that immediately brings to mind a specific person from your past, an era of your history, or an event. Over the years, I've attended or served churches that are always filled with lilies on Easter morning. Those lilies are so connected to my Easter tradition that now I can practically smell them as I prepare for Easter services. And if I'm around lilies at any other time of year, I automatically think of Easter and the resurrection of Christ.

God's instructions about the use of this scent in the Tabernacle meant the place of worship and the people who led worship there would carry with them a scent that set them apart as different from anyone else. I'm sure that the scent used evoked images and memories of the Tabernacle in those who smelled it. These objects of worship and the people who led worship in that special place would always carry that scent—one that became known as the fragrance of God's presence. The scent rubbed off on people and gave others a clue that they had been with God. But it also wore off eventually. Worshipers needed to return again and again to experience and receive that special scent of the presence of God.

Being anointed means being set apart. It means walking in an aroma of God's presence. It means being marked as one who belongs to the Almighty. And it's not only for prophets, priests, and kings; it's also for you. You are anointed in Christ:

*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

The first time I read this passage after learning more about anointing, I got chills. The idea that God has anointed me and placed a seal of ownership on me brings such a feeling of belonging and having a special part in the Kingdom. It also reminds me that, like the worshipers in the Tabernacle, I need to return again and again to the means of God's grace—things such as prayer, reading of Scripture, and gathering to worship with other believers—so that the scent of God's presence saturates my being and rubs off on those I come into contact with.

**What are some practices that saturate you with the presence of God?**

**When you encounter someone who exudes God's presence, what do you notice about this person?**

The name *Messiah*, the precious title of our Lord Jesus, literally means "Anointed One." He is the One who exudes mercy and grace. Take time to be with Him today, to rest in His presence, and to let Him know you love Him. Remember that you are anointed and sealed. He has put His deposit down on your life by giving His own life. You are His.

### **Extra Insight**

Anointing comes from the root *chrisas*, which is where we get our word for Christ—meaning the Anointed One. When we give our lives to Christ and he abides in us, we become one with the Anointed One. We are "christed." Anointing also sets us apart for something. In Jesus' first sermon, He proclaimed that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him because [the Spirit] anointed him to proclaim good news to the poor (Luke 4). Followers of Jesus are anointed for that same work as well.<sup>3</sup>

## *Talk with God*

*Holy Anointed One, Messiah, remind us again that You have anointed us for a purpose. Make us hungry to spend time in Your presence. And when we come into contact with other people, may they notice that the aroma of grace is all around us. Amen.*

## *Act on It*

Invite a small group of spiritual friends to join in a prayer of anointing over one other. You can buy special bottles of anointing oil, or you can set aside a small dish with olive oil in it. Friends can take turns anointing one another, or have a designated leader anoint each person in the group. Dip your finger in the oil, mark the symbol of a cross on your friend's forehead, and say the words, "I anoint you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You are marked. You are His." Follow with specific prayers for that person's needs and for blessings.

## Day 3: The Wisdom of Solomon

### *Read God's Word*

<sup>3</sup> Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

<sup>4</sup> The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. <sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

<sup>6</sup> Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

<sup>7</sup> "Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. <sup>8</sup> Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. <sup>9</sup> So give your servant a discerning heart to

*govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"*

*<sup>10</sup>The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. <sup>11</sup>So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, <sup>12</sup>I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. <sup>13</sup>Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. <sup>14</sup>And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." <sup>15</sup>Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.*

*He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.*

1 Kings 3:3-15

## *Reflect and Respond*

In most of the churches I've attended since childhood, it seems there is one beloved pastor or staff person from the past that people talk about with particular fondness. Even if it has been years since that leader has been gone and many others have served the church since then, people continue to reminisce about the glory days when that person was there.

Of all the kings of Israel, everyone agreed that David was the best. He was the king that people talked about for generations after his reign, the king who was the standard by which all other kings would be measured. They probably said, "Those were the good days back when David was in charge." And of the current king they whispered, "Why can't he be more like David?" Even Jesus himself couldn't escape being compared to David! (see Luke 1:32 and Mark 12:35-37).

If the echoes of David's reign were still being felt for centuries to come, how intimidating must it have been to be the king who immediately followed him!

David's son Solomon was his immediate successor. Solomon had to start his reign while his father was still alive, looking over his shoulder, and all of Israel was wondering how he would measure up to his dad. Is it any wonder that Solomon begged God for wisdom to rule?

**When have you felt that you were in over your head and asked God for wisdom?**



If anyone ever needed to grow in wisdom, it was Solomon, the new king. In 1 Kings 3 we find Solomon still wet behind the ears and newly crowned king by his father's authority, and already he is wrongly worshiping and offering sacrifices at the high place at Gibeon.

**Read Deuteronomy 12:2-4 in the margin. What does God say here about the high places? Is God vague about whether it's okay to worship at the high places?**

*Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills and under every spreading tree, where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.*

*You must not worship the LORD your God in their way.*  
Deuteronomy 12:2-4

The high places were altars at local places of worship—shrines to idols and false gods. The Books of First and Second Kings take time to deliberately spell out how each individual king dealt with the high places. A king's practice toward these places of idol worship (and thus their obedience or disobedience to God) is the biggest predictor of the success or failure of his reign.

It's possible that Solomon was sacrificing at the altars at Gibeon to worship the One True God and not the idols. However, 1 Kings 3:3 exposes Solomon's divided heart by describing his love for God and his disobedience in the same sentence. It says that Solomon loved the Lord and walked according to His commands, *except that* he sacrificed at the high places, deliberately breaking God's commands.

Most of us have an "except that" in our own lives. We love and worship God. Our lives are marked by obedience, *except that* there is one area we have not surrendered to God. It might be a habit, a wrong belief, the way we look at certain people, or the way we talk to ourselves. As a mom of young children, I sometimes compare myself with other moms who seem to be doing it way better than me. In those moments I forget that relying on God is all I need to do—that God will fully equip me for the task of motherhood. I know to do this and yet, sometimes I allow comparison to steal my joy or, even worse, to take my eyes off of God and God's good work in the life of my family. I totally trust God, "except that" I sometimes listen to that voice playing in my head instead of relying on the truth of God's sufficiency in my life.

Solomon's "except that" was his downfall, pulling him into idolatry and causing his reign and his family to fall apart.

**Reread 1 Kings 3:4 (page 18). How many sacrifices do we learn Solomon has offered here at Gibeon, the most important high place?**

Remarkably, it's here in Gibeon, the site of Solomon's repeated disobedience, that God appears to him in a dream and tells Solomon to ask God for anything he wants.

In 1 Kings 3:6-9 we learn how Solomon is feeling since he has been made king. He refers to himself as “a little child” and admits that he doesn’t know how to govern. Out of humility and a desire to govern rightly and follow in his father David’s footsteps, he asks for wisdom, not just for his own benefit but for the benefit of God’s great people that he has been appointed to rule.

God’s response to Solomon’s request, right at the site of Solomon’s disobedience, reveals something remarkable about the character of God: He doesn’t wait for us to become perfect before stepping into our lives. He doesn’t hold back His love, His help, or His blessings because we are holding back parts of our lives.

I’m so grateful God doesn’t wait for me to get it together in order to love me, help me, or bless me. Even when I feel less than or compare myself to others, He meets me where I am with love and grace. If you ever feel unworthy of God’s love, question whether God hears your prayers and wants to help you with your struggles, or are hesitant to pray because you feel you don’t deserve to have your prayers answered, then the story of Solomon’s request and God’s response has a message for you.

Even though Solomon was deliberately disobeying God, God loved him and wanted to help him become a better man and a better king, so He granted Solomon’s request.

**If God told you to ask Him for anything you wanted, as He did to Solomon, what would ask Him for?**

**Read Philippians 4:6-7 in the margin. How do we know that God wants us to tell Him our deepest desires?**

**What does He promise in as an outcome?**

The result of Solomon’s prayer was that he received great wisdom. David may be remembered for the glory days of Israel, but Solomon is often remembered for his wisdom.

People sometimes use the word *wisdom* to mean different things: IQ, knowledge, street smarts, the insight to deal with problems that arise or relationships that are difficult. So, what kind of wisdom are we talking about here in regards to Solomon? To answer this question, let’s consider several different kinds of wisdom.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.  
Philippians 4:6-7*

## 1. Wisdom from Acquired Knowledge or Life Experience

When the Bible speaks of true wisdom, it isn't talking about knowledge that can be gained from years of study or even life experience. This isn't knowledge from the school of the Ivy League or the school of hard knocks. The kind of wisdom Solomon was granted was a gift from God, granted because of a prayer.

Knowledge and wisdom sometimes go hand in hand, but sometimes they do not. There is more information available to us today than our ancestors just a few generations ago ever could have dreamed of. But is the world any kinder, more peaceful, or more mature? Knowledge is a wonderful thing, but wisdom is something different. It is not acquired through patience, age, experience, or study; it is something acquired from the Lord.

**Read James 3:13-17. Write some of the words used to describe true wisdom:**

## 2. Wisdom for Political Savvy

In the story that immediately precedes Solomon's dream-prayer at Gibeon, his father, David, gave him some last instructions before his death about how to run the kingdom.

Besides David's instructions to remain faithful to God, the speech sounds less like a God-fearing king and a little more like something out of the classic mob movie *The Godfather*, as David gives instructions about how to deal with enemies who have wronged their family after he passes away. "You are a man of *wisdom*," David instructs Solomon about one such situation. "You will know what to do with him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood" (1 Kings 2:9, emphasis added). About another situation, he advises Solomon, "Deal with him according to your *wisdom*, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace" (1 Kings 2:6, emphasis added).

The wisdom to know how to deal with those who have wronged you—enemies both within and outside of your kingdom—is one kind of wisdom it takes to be king. No wonder it is immediately after this speech that Solomon begs the Lord for wisdom. But is this the kind of wisdom God grants?

God's response to Solomon's request for wisdom notes both what he asked for and what he didn't ask for.

**Reread 1 Kings 3:11-14 (pages 18-19) and complete the following:**

Solomon asks for \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 11)

And God grants him \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 12)

Solomon doesn't ask for these things, but God gives them to him anyway:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 13)

2. \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 13)

3. \_\_\_\_\_ (v. 14)

God grants Solomon everything he might have asked for (but didn't) *except* the death of his enemies. In such close proximity in the text to David's reference to "wisdom" as something that enlightens one about taking revenge, God's point is not lost here. Wisdom for revenge is not what God is granting.

### 3. Wisdom That's Passed to the Next Generation

We might wonder if the kind of wisdom given to Solomon is the kind a father passes along to a son. Solomon is certainly famous for the many proverbs attributed to his pen, many of them addressed as wisdom from a father to a son. Is the kind of wisdom he is granted the kind that helps one raise up a child in the way he or she should go?

As Solomon's story demonstrates, wisdom isn't necessarily hereditary. Solomon's son and successor, Rehoboam, does not follow God as closely as his grandfather David did, or even as closely as his father, Solomon, did with his divided heart. Instead of following the wisdom of his elders or the example of his father, Rehoboam instead follows the advice of his peers who say: "These people have said to you, 'Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but make our yoke lighter.' Now tell them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions'" (1 Kings 12:10-11).

Not the best way to start his reign as a new king. The kingdom so artfully united by his grandfather David was divided under Rehoboam. Solomon's wisdom is not necessarily the kind that translates to the next generation.

### 4. Wisdom for Accumulating Wealth

Besides wisdom, Solomon is famous for the ostentatious display of wealth and luxury that he amassed, which we read about in the Old Testament. Is his wealth a result of God-given wisdom? The New Testament also mentions Solomon's great wealth and riches. But is it in a positive light?

**Read Luke 12:27-28 in the margin. Is Solomon's splendor something that we are to aspire to?**

*"Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!"*  
 Luke 12:27-28

Even with all of his rich robes, Solomon's wealth is on the losing side of a comparison to a simple wildflower. God's creation is adorned more beautifully than all the wealth Solomon could produce. Wisdom to produce economic prosperity is obviously not something high on God's list of priorities.

## 5. Godly Wisdom— The Discernment to Rule Yourself before Ruling Others

Solomon did become a wise ruler who made wise judgments. In fact, the first story of his kingship is the legendary story of 1 Kings 3:16-28, in which Solomon makes a judgment on which of two women is the true mother of a baby. However, his true wisdom came from the discernment to rule himself before ruling others. In other words, Solomon knew that he needed to follow God before others could follow him.

Even before Solomon applied his new-found wisdom to his subjects, he applied it to himself. The first thing he did upon waking from his dream was to worship God:

*Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.*

1 Kings 3:15 NRSV

Instead of continuing to make sacrifices at the high places (something God had specifically forbidden), Solomon awoke and worshiped as God wanted—in Jerusalem before the ark of the Lord. Then he went and provided a feast for his servants.

First he worshiped. Then he served. His answered prayer led immediately to right worship and then to benevolent action. Solomon's encounter with God changed him *first* before it changed the way he governed.

The wisdom he received from God was the kind that helped him to distinguish and choose right from wrong before he ever set about making decisions for others as king. When Solomon was at his best, he remembered to control his own behavior, being obedient to God before his desires got the best of him. When he was at his worst, he forgot that before ruling others he needed to place himself under the rule of the King of kings.

**Describe a time when you received wisdom from God that helped you to choose obedience before your desires got the best of you.**

True wisdom is wisdom that changes us before it changes the way we minister to others. It is wisdom to let God rule us before we set out to make decisions that affect others.

Place yourself in God's hands today the way that Solomon did, coming to Him as "a little child" who needs His help and wisdom. God will honor that kind of prayer, and in your dependence on Him you will find peace.

### *Talk with God*

*Lord, grant me wisdom to place You as ruler over every area of my life. Help me to deal with the situations, relationships, and people around me with wisdom and grace. Amen.*

### *Act on It*

Think of the things in your life that require more wisdom than you possess. In the margin, list some areas or relationships in which you feel you are over your head and need wisdom from God. Below each item write the words "God, grant me wisdom." Each time one of those situations comes up this week, repeat the words "God, grant me wisdom." Listen for God's guidance throughout the week.

## Day 4: A House for God

### *Read God's Word*

David's words as he hands off the responsibility for building the Temple to Solomon:

<sup>2</sup> *King David rose to his feet and said: "Listen to me, my fellow Israelites, my people. I had it in my heart to build a house as a place of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God, and I made plans to build it.*

<sup>3</sup> *But God said to me, 'You are not to build a house for my Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood.'*

<sup>4</sup> *"Yet the LORD, the God of Israel, chose me from my whole family to be king over Israel forever. He chose Judah as leader, and from the tribe of Judah he chose my family, and from my father's sons he was pleased to make me king over all Israel. <sup>5</sup> Of all my sons—and the LORD has given me many—he has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel. <sup>6</sup> He said to me: 'Solomon your son is the one who will build my house and my courts,*

True wisdom is wisdom that changes us before it changes the way we minister to others.

*for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. <sup>7</sup> I will establish his kingdom forever if he is unswerving in carrying out my commands and laws, as is being done at this time.'*

*<sup>8</sup> "So now I charge you in the sight of all Israel and of the assembly of the LORD, and in the hearing of our God: Be careful to follow all the commands of the LORD your God, that you may possess this good land and pass it on as an inheritance to your descendants forever.*

*<sup>9</sup> "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. <sup>10</sup> Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work."*

1 Chronicles 28:1-10

Solomon's words at the dedication of the finished Temple:

*<sup>54</sup> When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven. <sup>55</sup> He stood and blessed the whole assembly of Israel in a loud voice, saying:*

*<sup>56</sup> "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. <sup>57</sup> May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. <sup>58</sup> May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. <sup>59</sup> And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need, <sup>60</sup> so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other. <sup>61</sup> And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time."*

1 Kings 8:54-61

### *Reflect and Respond*

I grew up in church. I mean that almost literally, since one activity or another had us at the church building at least three or four times a week. On days that we had children's activities, my friends and I would run through the halls as if they were our playground, whooping and hollering and having all kinds of fun. But when we approached the sanctuary, the rowdiness stopped. When we pulled

open the heavy door leading from the education building into the sanctuary, it was as if we were entering another world, one with rich wood pews and high ceilings. On one wall was a huge stained glass depiction of the nativity, with each person dressed in a different bright color. Over the altar was a stained glass window depicting Jesus kneeling at a rock in the garden of Gethsemane. My earliest memories of God are of experiences in that room; our preschool director was standing in front of my class—a group of wiggly, wide-eyed preschoolers—as she bent down to our level and told us with a gentle, hushed voice, “This is God’s house.” I sensed that there. Even as a four-year-old, I could tell there was something different about that place. And when I entered there, I was different too.

**What is your earliest memory of a church building or other place that seemed holy to you?**

With all of his politics, wisdom, and personal ups and downs, Solomon’s life-long achievement was building a house for God. His father, David, had originally set out to build the Temple, but God stopped him and gave the job to Solomon instead. Envisioning and building a Temple as a house for God was a task that spanned two generations, and it was a unique role for these two kings, father and son. It was a job that no king had done before and none would undertake after.

Unlike other buildings or monuments in the empire, the Temple was never intended to bring glory to the king. It was built entirely for the glory of God.

David delivers his instructions to Solomon with utmost urgency about the importance of his task. Solomon is to undertake the building of the Temple not only with attention to the detailed plans (and there are many details in the plans) but also with attention to his own relationship with God: “And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion” (1 Chronicles 28:9). Of all the tools and plans used to build the Temple, the most important tool will be the leader himself, and the most important plan will be the plan for his own wholehearted devotion to God.

David is very direct about the fact that Solomon should follow God with his whole heart, and that if he does not it will mean his downfall: “If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever” (1 Chronicles 28:9). Unfortunately, this statement comes true in Solomon’s life in ways that we will talk about tomorrow.

Solomon shows us that our relationship with God is a gift, but it is dependent on our continual acceptance of that gift and our consecration of ourselves to Him. God offers us unconditional grace, but we must continually receive that offer and not reject God.



**In what ways do we sometimes reject God, whether knowingly or unknowingly?**

**What can we do to continually accept God's offer of grace and relationship? How can we continually consecrate ourselves to Him?**

While the speech in 1 Chronicles 28 is from one king to another, from one builder to another, it also is a speech from father to son.

**Write the instructions David gives Solomon in 1 Chronicles 28:10 and the first sentence of 1 Chronicles 28:20.**

Doesn't that sound just like a father talking to a son? Be strong and courageous, and *do the work*. David wants Solomon to be sure this job gets done without the many distractions of leading a kingdom—without letting his own sins or failures get in the way.

The instructions given for building the Temple are very detailed and specific.

**Read 1 Chronicles 28:11-18 and write below just a few of the items related to the building of the Temple for which David passes on instructions to Solomon.**

That's a lot of detailed plans! The rules and detailed plans for worship in the Old Testament show that God wants His people to take worship seriously, not lightly. It is a holy privilege to approach God in worship, and Solomon's task of building God's house is serious business. God wants hearts fully consecrated and devoted to Him, and the purpose of building a Temple is to create a place where that happens.

Consider the weight of this responsibility: being in charge of building the house of God—its formation, its care, the people who perform the roles of worship. This is the place where God's Spirit will dwell, where His people will meet with Him to receive forgiveness and enter into fellowship with Him.

Solomon certainly feels the weight of the job God has entrusted to him. When the Temple is completed, Solomon spends a day consecrating it with prayer,

making the first sacrifices for which the Temple is constructed, and giving a speech to his people. This day, which must be an incredible celebration, is described in 1 Kings 8. Listen to Solomon's words as he explains to his people just why this Temple is so important, not only for their nation but also for the world:

*And may these words of mine, which I have prayed before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel according to each day's need, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God and that there is no other.*

1 Kings 8:59-60

While the Temple may be a place of worship for God's people, its true purpose is even bigger than that. The transformation of God's people that will happen there will mean that the whole world will witness how they are different from the rest of the world and will come to know that God is real.

John Oswalt puts it in a very compelling way: "It will not be the splendor of some earthly building that draws people to God. Rather it will be the glory of his own person as it is depicted in the lives of his worshipers. Solomon recognizes that unless the people of God are completely submitted to God in unreserved obedience, manifesting the life of God in their daily walk, the Temple will accomplish nothing."<sup>4</sup> There is nothing magical about a building that can make people know God. Instead, it is the lives of the people who are changed there that will impact the world in a very powerful way.

Is this hitting home for *you*? It should!

**Read the Scriptures in the margin. What do you think it means that you are God's temple, a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit?**

**What do you think people notice about you that is different from the world around you?**

The same kind of encounter with the holy that God's people had in the Temple is the kind of encounter that others are to have with you. You are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Think again about the places you've felt God's presence. Remember the peace, the forgiveness, the stillness, the joy, the feeling that just being there makes you feel closer to Him, and different. You are a mobile temple carrying all of this around with you, offering it to others.

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?*

1 Corinthians 3:16  
NRSV

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price.*

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

You are a sanctuary for the people God places in your life.

You can be that place of peace for people. You are a sanctuary for the people God places in your life. You are filled with God's Spirit. You are God's house.

### *Talk with God*

*Holy Spirit, fill me today with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Help me to grow this fruit in a way that is clearly visible to other people so that when they encounter me, they will encounter a place of safety and sanctuary. Make me Your house today. Amen.*

### *Act on It*

How can you carry the peace and love of Christ with you? What spiritual practices can you engage in today that will fill you with peace so that you can be a walking sanctuary for others? If you like, make some notes in the margin.

## Day 5: The Foolishness of the Wise Man

### *Read God's Word*

<sup>23</sup> King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. <sup>24</sup> The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. <sup>25</sup> Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.

<sup>26</sup> Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. <sup>27</sup> The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. <sup>28</sup> Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue at the current price. <sup>29</sup> They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the kings of the Hittites and of the Arameans.

<sup>11</sup> <sup>1</sup> King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. <sup>2</sup> They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods."

Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. <sup>4</sup> As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. <sup>5</sup> He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.

<sup>7</sup> On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. <sup>8</sup> He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

1 Kings 10:23-29; 11:1-8

## *Reflect and Respond*

Conversation was abundant around a table at the local coffee shop. The gathered friends hooted with laughter as they talked over their lattes and caught up on the things going on in one another's lives. But when the door opened and they turned to see the new customer walking in, they became silent.

"Can you believe she'll even show her face in here?" one whispered. "I hear the affair started at work. Now people are saying she is leaving her husband for him."

"Well," said another, "I would never—I mean never in a million years—do something like that."

Perhaps the most dangerous point in our spiritual lives is when we begin to consider ourselves immune to sin. The idea that we are invulnerable to temptation or spiritually superior to those whose sin is made public can gradually lead us to neglect our connection to God and let our spiritual lives atrophy.

Among the warnings for Israel's king in Deuteronomy 17, which we will look at today, is the warning that he is not supposed to "consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or the left" (Deuteronomy 17:20). This means the king is not above the law. The king is to be an obedient subject of the King of kings, just as everyone else. His power does not make him immune to the temptation or consequences of sin.

As a pastor, it can be easy to fill up my time doing "God's work" without really spending time with God. My schedule looks like I am doing lots of spiritual things, but unless I'm paying attention, I can do a lot of talking *about* God and working *for* God without having prayer time and conversation *with* God. Each of us, no matter how long we've walked with God or what our position of leadership or influence may be, must always keep a vigilant watch over our relationship with

Perhaps the most dangerous point in our spiritual lives is when we begin to consider ourselves immune to sin.



God and the spiritual practices that keep us close to Him. Otherwise we will slip into doing life in our own strength and following our own temptations, and both of these things always lead to sin.

The root of Solomon's fatal flaw is the temptation to love power, privilege, and women more than he loves God. A verse in First Kings points to what would be Solomon's fatal flaw: "Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter" (1 Kings 3:1). That one bride, that one alliance, turned into an obsession for Solomon and became the destruction of his reign.

God's people had been slaves in Egypt, and the Lord had instructed them not to go back (Deuteronomy 17:16). Solomon's alliance with Egypt—both for a bride and then for horses and chariots—directly violates God's careful instructions about the behavior of the king.

**Read Deuteronomy 17:16-17 and fill in the blanks:**

**"The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of \_\_\_\_\_ for himself or make the people return to \_\_\_\_\_ to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to \_\_\_\_\_ that way again." He must not take many \_\_\_\_\_, or his heart will be \_\_\_\_\_. He must not accumulate large amounts of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_."**

The decrees of this law were to be written by the king's own hand on a scroll and kept with him. He was supposed to read it all the days of his life (vv. 18-19).

Reread today's Scripture passage from 1 Kings 10-11 (pages 30-31), and then mark an X next to the commands from Deuteronomy 17:16-17 (above) that Solomon directly disobeyed.

Solomon's sinful appetite for women begins with just one wife from Egypt and escalates to the accumulation of hundreds of wives and concubines. Many of these begin as political alliances, but Scripture is clear that Solomon "clung to them in love" (1 Kings 11:2 NRSV). His love for his wives competes directly with his love for the Lord, just as his practice of burning incense on the high places does (1 Kings 3:3). In fact, Solomon's appetite for new wives reaches addictive proportions, blinding him to the spiritual idolatry that they bring into his household and his kingdom.

Remember that you can tell a good king of Israel by how he deals with the "high places" dedicated to idol worship, because this reveals how purely he is connected to God. Good kings pull down or destroy the altars at the high places, while bad kings passively leave them standing, allowing idol worship to spread

and pollute God's people. Solomon's love of his many foreign wives pulls his heart so strongly away from God that he drifts away—at first slowly and then dramatically.

**Solomon doesn't just leave the high places of idol worship standing. What dramatic step does he take in 1 Kings 11:7-8?**

As Christians we are called to give love and grace to all people, but we also must remember that those we spend the most time with *will* have an influence over us. The views of those in your closest circles are likely to impact your beliefs and actions. Offer friendship and love to everyone you meet, but be sure that you are staying grounded in the study of God's Word and have a close group of Christian friends to inspire you "as iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17).

**Who are the Christian friends that inspire you "as iron sharpens iron"?**

Solomon has another love besides women. His love for horses and chariots means that he is relying not on God to protect the kingdom but on the strength of his armies. The passage from Deuteronomy 17 is explicit that the king should not acquire too many horses, especially not from Egypt. The Egyptians are war-mongers, and God doesn't want His people to associate with them or become like them. Not only does Solomon violate this command and return to Egypt to buy horses, but he also becomes like them when he begins selling to other rulers and countries (1 Kings 10:29).

Solomon is famous for offering wisdom to other people, but he could use some of his own advice.

**Read the following passages often attributed to Solomon, plus one from the psalms written by his father, David. Beside each, write a phrase containing advice that he should have taken himself.**

**Ecclesiastes 5:10**

**Proverbs 16:18**

**Proverbs 12:4**

**Psalm 20:7-9**



As one Proverb attributed to Solomon says, “A person’s own folly leads to their ruin” (Proverbs 19:3a). We may know what is best, but unless we practice it ourselves, our knowledge is nothing.

We later learn in 1 Kings 5:13 and 9:23 that Solomon oppresses his own people and uses them for forced labor. Dr. Claude Mariottini makes an interesting comparison of the workers forced to labor under Solomon to the Israelites forced to labor under the Egyptians. He writes,

The Hebrew word for “forced labor” is *mas*, the same word that appears in Exodus 1:11. The word was used to describe the way the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites. . . . The overseers of the forced work in Egypt were ruthless and made the Israelites work hard, without mercy.<sup>5</sup>

Hundreds of years earlier, Egypt had enslaved and oppressed the Israelites, forcing them into harsh labor. Egypt was a cesspool of idol worship and false gods. Egypt also was an arms dealer, buying and selling horses and chariots as the machines of war upon which they relied for security and strength.

The Israelites had broken free of Egypt, but under Solomon’s rule, they had become just like them. Twice the Lord appears to Solomon (1 Kings 3:5 and 9:2) to remind him of the terms of the covenant between God and David’s royal family (1 Samuel 7), but Solomon fails again and again to uphold his part of the deal.

**Read about God’s response in 1 Kings 11:9-13.**

**What emotion is attributed to God? (v. 9)**

**What will happen to Solomon’s kingdom as a result? (v. 11)**

Solomon’s downward spiral is sad to watch, as he slips from a king who loves God and is filled with God’s imparted wisdom to a man who is captive to his own desires.

God calls us to consecrate ourselves and act differently than our desires might dictate so that we can live truly free from slavery to those desires. We must let go of certain things so that we can grab hold of God with open hands. Holiness is both about letting go and grabbing hold, and the relationship we have with God as a result of wholehearted devotion is always worth it.

**What have you needed to let go of in order to answer God’s call to be holy or set apart?**

We must let go of certain things so that we can grab hold of God with open hands.

## What have you grabbed hold of in answer to this call?

Any failure to recognize that we are vulnerable to temptation and sin—“Well, I would never in a million years . . .”—means that we are letting our guard down and no longer relying on God for His help and guidance. Solomon relied on horses and chariots as the strength and security of his kingdom. Similarly, sometimes we forget God and rely on our own abilities or the things that we possess to be our strength and security—and these things are never adequate.

Being set apart by God means that we are different in our practices, in our faith, and in what we love and worship. It means being marked by the same holiness that characterizes God Himself.

This transformation of becoming more like Christ isn't something we do in our own strength. God alone gives us the strength and grace necessary for this process. *The Message* translation of Romans 12:2 describes in a very interesting way what happens when we are set apart:

*Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.*

## What does it look like when we become so well-adjusted to our culture that we fit in without even thinking?

## Where are you tempted to do this?

## In what ways have you seen God bring out the best in those who follow Him? In you?

As God's people, we are called to be set apart from practices that drag us down so that we don't drift away from God but, instead, grow in well-formed maturity into the best that God has created us to be. We also are called to be set apart by participating in holy habits such as worshiping God, mentoring and being mentored by other Christians, and drawing close to God through the reading of





His Word and prayer. These are practices that teach us about the character of God and help us to absorb that character as our own.

As we journey through First and Second Kings together, we will look at each of these holy habits and how it was practiced in the lives of key leaders of Israel—both kings and prophets. As we do, remember that you are loved. You are chosen. You are set apart for a relationship with God and a purpose in His kingdom. May these truths bring joy and confidence to your heart!

### *Talk with God*

*Lord, I want to be wholeheartedly Yours. Don't let me become so well-adjusted to the culture around me, like Solomon, that I fit into it without even thinking. Help me to let go of things that are not of You so that I can grab hold of You with everything I am. Amen.*

### *Act on It*

Earlier you reflected on those things that you have let go of and those things you have grabbed hold of in order to be set apart for God. Spend some moments now in prayer, asking God to reveal any areas that need renewed focus as well as any new things He might be calling you to let go or take hold of at this point in your faith journey. What specific actions do you feel led to take this week? If you like, make some notes below.

# Week 1

## Video Viewer Guide

*“Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. There let the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ You shall go up following him. Let him enter and sit on my throne; he shall be king in my place; for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah.”*

1 Kings 1:33-35 NRSV

**consecrate** – to set apart for \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ purposes

We realize that Solomon is in trouble when we learn that he’s not keeping

\_\_\_\_\_.

Solomon seemed to have the misconception that he could separate his

\_\_\_\_\_ life from his \_\_\_\_\_ life.

high places – the locations for \_\_\_\_\_

God never \_\_\_\_\_ us.





Through every bad ending, God makes a way for a \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Solomon prays for wisdom. (1 Kings 3:7-9)

*Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. He offered up burnt \_\_\_\_\_ and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his \_\_\_\_\_.*

1 Kings 3:15 NRSV

What did Solomon do with the wisdom God gave him?

He \_\_\_\_\_.

He \_\_\_\_\_.

Consecration is an act you have to \_\_\_\_\_ in.