

Bible Study Guide on the Life of King Solomon

10-week study guide
designed for small group discussions

CARE GROUP MINISTRY, ISLAND ECC

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Written by Carrie Lo (Care Group Ministry & Shift Ministry, Island ECC)
October 2026

Introduction

King Solomon – son and heir to King David – was known to be one of the wisest kings in the Old Testament. He reigned as the king of Israel from around 971 BC to 930 BC, and much can be learned from his wisdom and experience in leadership, faith, relationship and life vision.

King Solomon's life stories can be found in **2 Samuel, 1 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles**, while his writings can be found in **Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes** and some of the Psalms. In this 10-week study guide, we will go through the relevant Bible passages from his birth, to his reign, to his final days, and learn to seek and apply godly wisdom in our everyday life.

There are a few important reminders before we start our study:

- Although we are doing a character study of Solomon, he is by no means a perfect man. As with all human beings, he also made many mistakes and committed many sins. Our aim is not to learn to be like him, but to learn from him – what he did well and what he did wrongly.
- Learning from Solomon's success and failure is only our secondary goal. Our primary goal is to learn about God, reflect on our relationship with God, and seek godly wisdom through studying Solomon's life.
- All Scripture points to Jesus Christ. Even though Solomon's life stories and writings are all in the Old Testament, we believe that they all play a part in laying the foundation for or pointing to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Indeed, Jesus Christ was born of the kingship bloodline of David and Solomon, as promised in the Old Testament. As we study the life of Solomon, let's also pay attention to how the Bible passages may guide us to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.



Week 1: The Promise (2 Samuel 7)

After David became king of Israel, he thought of building **a temple for God**, but God, through the prophet Nathan, revealed to David that David would not be the one building the temple; instead, David's son (Solomon) would be the one doing so (2 Sam 7:1-7, 12-13).

God also made a covenant to David (known as the **Davidic covenant**), promising David that not only will he have an offspring whom God would love (**Solomon**), but that **the Messiah** would come from the lineage of David/Solomon, establishing a kingdom that would endure forever (2 Sam 7:9-16). God made this promise solely out of His faithfulness, grace and love for His people; it was an unconditional covenant that points people ultimately to **the hope of the Messiah, Jesus Christ**.

Warm-up question

Who is your most trusted person in your life? Why can you trust him/her that much?

Read 2 Samuel 7:1-7 and 7:12-13 (Optional: 1 Chronicles 17:1-6; 28:2-7)

1. Why did David want to build a temple for God, and what was God's response through Nathan? What does that tell you about God's way v.s. man's way?

Read 2 Samuel 7:8-17 (Optional: 1 Chronicles 17:7-15)

2. This passage is also known as the "Davidic Covenant". Identify 3 major promises that God made to David, then describe the character of God based on these promises.

- Identify God's promises in 3 levels: individual (about David or Solomon), national (about Israel), eternal (about the Kingdom of God).

Read 2 Samuel 7:18-29 (Optional: 1 Chronicles 17:16-27)

3. How did David respond? Why could David be so confident in God?

4. Have you been in a situation where you were stopped by God or redirected by God? Are you able to surrender to God's way?

5. Jesus Christ the Messiah is the ultimate fulfilment of God's promises to David/Solomon. God is faithful and always keeps His promises. How does that help you in trusting and surrendering to God's way/promises? What are some major challenges in trusting Him, and what are some ways that can help you trust Him more?

Prayer prompt

Remember God's faithfulness, pray about the challenges that you identified above, and pray for your faith to be strengthened.

Bible passage: 2 Samuel 7

God's Promise to David

1 After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given
him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 he said to Nathan
the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark
of God remains in a tent."
3 Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go
ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."
4 But that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:
5 "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are
you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in
a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to
this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as
my dwelling.
7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to
any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people
Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'

8 "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord
Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the
flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have
been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all
your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great,
like the names of the greatest men on earth. 10 And I will provide
a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can
have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked
people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the
beginning 11 and have done ever since the time I appointed
leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all
your enemies.
"'The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a
house for you: 12 When your days are over and you rest with your
ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own
flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one
who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the
throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will
be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod
wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. 15 But
my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from
Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your
kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be
established forever.'"

17 Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire
revelation.

David's Prayer

18 Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said:
"Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have
brought me this far? 19 And as if this were not enough in your
sight, Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of
the house of your servant—and this decree, Sovereign Lord, is
for a mere human!
20 "What more can David say to you? For you know your servant,
Sovereign Lord. 21 For the sake of your word and according to
your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to
your servant.
22 "How great you are, Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you,
and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears.
23 And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth
that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to
make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome
wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your
people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? 24 You have
established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you,
Lord, have become their God.
25 "And now, Lord God, keep forever the promise you have made
concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, 26
so that your name will be great forever. Then people will say,
'The Lord Almighty is God over Israel!' And the house of your
servant David will be established in your sight.
27 "Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your
servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has
found courage to pray this prayer to you. 28 Sovereign Lord, you
are God! Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised
these good things to your servant. 29 Now be pleased to bless
the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your
sight; for you, Sovereign Lord, have spoken, and with your
blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."



Week 2: The Birth & Redemption (2 Sam 11–12)

Last week, we learned about how God promised King David of an offspring (Solomon) who would build the Temple, and the ultimate offspring (Jesus) whose throne and kingdom would endure forever. God is faithful and He always keeps His promises. Things went downhill when David committed adultery with Bathsheba, but he repented to God. Eventually David and Bathsheba gave birth to Solomon, whom God loved (2 Sam 12:24). We see David's repentant heart. We see God's mercy, forgiveness and redemption.

Warm-up question

If you could delete one embarrassing moment in your life, what would it be?

Read 2 Samuel 11:2-17 and 11:26-27

1a. Identify the mistakes/crimes that David made, and how he tried to cover up or fix his mistakes using his own means.

1b. David was known to be a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), and had received abundant blessings. In your opinion, why did he still make such mistakes? How could he have avoided them?

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-12

2. What were the resemblances between Nathan's parable and David's sins? What were the consequences to David's sins according to Nathan?

- The judgment (12:10-12) was fulfilled through multiple generations, including the rebellion of David's sons (e.g. 2 Sam 16:21-22), the kingdom's split after Solomon's death, and various conflicts and battles within or against Israel.

Read 2 Samuel 12:13-23

3. What was David's response to Nathan's parable and warning? How would you describe his attitude and posture before God?

- Additional reading: Psalm 51 was written by David in this context as he expressed his remorse and repentance to God.
- David recognised that he sinned against not just Uriah but also against God (12:13,16).
- David's act of worship (12:20) showed that he accepted God's judgment, submitted to God's will, and moved on with a new heart without feeling bitter about God's decision.

Read 2 Samuel 12:24-25 and 1 Chronicles 22:9-10

David already had several children before Solomon was born; but Solomon was his first child with Bathsheba. The name "Solomon" might be derived from the Hebrew word for "peace", and Solomon was regarded as "a man of peace and rest" (1 Chronicles 22:9). God also named him "Jedidiah" (2 Samuel 12:25) which means "loved by the LORD".

4. Why did God still bless David with Solomon? In light of the name(s) of Solomon, what kind of king do you expect him to be?

- "Peace" and "rest" could mean not only physical safety from enemies, but also spiritual peace through making right with God.
- God is willing to forgive when we repent (1 John 1:9; 2 Peter 3:9).

Notwithstanding the serious sin that David committed and the distorted start of the marriage between David and Bathsheba, their son, Solomon, eventually became one of the most powerful and wisest kings in the Old Testament. God is powerful enough to redeem, and loving enough to forgive and bless, all according to His will and by His grace.

5. Are there any wrongs, regrets or guilt that you wish to bring forward to God today? How much do you trust that God will bring redemption and forgiveness?

Prayer prompts

- Read **Psalm 51** and focus on how David confessed and repented to God.
- **Confess** (admit the wrongs) and **repent** (turn back to God) for anything that you identified in Q5 above.
- Remember the **hope** that God has given us through Jesus Christ who died for our sin and resurrected, so through our faith in Jesus, we are **forgiven** and **declared righteous** before God.
- Pray for stronger faith in Him who is powerful enough to bring **redemption** and **transformation**.

Bible passages

2 Samuel 11:2-17, 26–27

David and Bathsheba

2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on
the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing.
The woman was very beautiful, 3 and David sent someone to find
out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of
Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." 4 Then David sent
messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her.
(Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.)
Then she went back home. 5 The woman conceived and sent
word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

6 So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite."
And Joab sent him to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David
asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war
was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house
and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the
king was sent after him. 9 But Uriah slept at the entrance to the
palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his
house. 10 David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked
Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why
didn't you go home?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel
and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my
lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my
house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as
you live, I will not do such a thing!"

12 Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and
tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem
that day and the next. 13 At David's invitation, he ate and drank
with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah
went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did
not go home.

14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with
Uriah. 15 In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting
is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down
and die." 16 So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah
at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. 17 When
the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of
the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

...

26 When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she
mourned for him. 27 After the time of mourning was over, David
had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore
him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

2 Samuel 12:1-25

Nathan Rebukes David

1 The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said,
"There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other
poor.
2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3
but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had
bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It
shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It
was like a daughter to him.
4 "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man
refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a
meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the
ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the
one who had come to him."
5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan,
"As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He
must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a
thing and had no pity."
7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the
Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I
delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master's house
to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you all
Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have
given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the Lord
by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the
Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You
killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore,
the sword will never depart from your house, because you
despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your
own.'
11 "This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am
going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take
your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will
sleep with your wives in broad daylight. 12 You did it in secret,
but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"

13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."
Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not
going to die. 14 But because by doing this you have shown utter
contempt for the Lord, the son born to you will die."
15 After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that
Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. 16 David
pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights
lying in sackcloth on the ground. 17 The elders of his household
stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused,
and he would not eat any food with them.
18 On the seventh day the child died. David's attendants were
afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While
the child was still living, he wouldn't listen to us when we spoke
to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do
something desperate."
19 David noticed that his attendants were whispering among
themselves, and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child
dead?" he asked. "Yes," they replied, "he is dead." 20 Then David
got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and
changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and
worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request
they served him food, and he ate. 21 His attendants asked him,
"Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you
fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and
eat!" 22 He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and
wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me
and let the child live.' 23 But now that he is dead, why should I go
on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will
not return to me."

24 Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her
and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named
him Solomon. The Lord loved him; 25 and because the Lord loved
him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him
Jedidiah.

1 Chronicles 22:9-10

9 But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest,
and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His
name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet
during his reign. 10 He is the one who will build a house for my
Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will
establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'

Psalm 51

For the director of music. A psalm of David.
When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.
5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
9 Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
15 Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
17 My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.

18 May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.



Week 3: The Throne (1 Kings 1–2)

Last week, we studied the circumstances through which Solomon was born – a story that began with sins and greed but ended with repentance and redemption (2 Samuel 11-12) – witnessing God's love and mercy toward those who were repentant and faithful.

This week, we will see how Solomon ascended to the throne and became king of Israel. However, this was not without challenges, as his brother, Adonijah, had tried to make himself king. As the story unfolds, we get to learn what God calls for in a true king/leader.

Warm-up question

What was the most rebellious thing you did in your childhood?

Read 1 Kings 1:5-31 (selected verses)

1. What was Adonijah's motive, and what wrongs did he commit? Who did he sin against?

- Adonijah was David's fourth son and the oldest one who was alive at that time. Adonijah might see himself as the suitable successor because he was the eldest son, but this was against God's revelation and will. Before Solomon was born, God already identified Solomon as David's successor (1 Chronicles 22:9-10), and this must have been known to the entire royal family including Adonijah. So Adonijah's revolt was primarily against the revealed will of God, secondarily against David, and also against Solomon.
- Adonijah's revolt mirrored his older brother, Absalom (David's third son), who also tried to seize the throne of David and was killed (1 Samuel 15–18).

2. (Optional) What were the grounds of Nathan and Bathsheba in making their request to King David? What did King David's decision in 1 Kings 1:29-30 tell you about his attitude toward God?

- David did not rebuke Adonijah in the past (1 Kings 1:6), but he did not endorse Adonijah's revolt either. He remembered God's will and promises (2 Samuel 7:8-16; 1 Chronicles 22:9-10).

Read 1 Kings 1:38-53 (selected verses)

3. What was Adonijah's reaction when he realised Solomon was anointed king? How did Solomon treat Adonijah, and why?

- Zadok's anointment of Solomon in 1 Kings 1:38-40 symbolised Solomon's endowment with God's Spirit for service. By anointing Solomon, the high priest identified him as David's successor as the king.
- Solomon, like David, showed mercy. Solomon required Adonijah to prove himself "worthy" – the Hebrew word *hayil* refers to a member of the nobility. Solomon expected Adonijah to act in a noble manner in order to preserve his life.

Read 1 Kings 2:1-4, 1 Chronicles 22:11-13 and 28:9-10

4. What stood out to you in David's charge to Solomon? What made a good king / leader in God's eyes?

- "Fulfilling one's duty to Yahweh is the measure of one's manhood... Since God made man in the image of God, man can realize his manhood only by placing himself under God's authority." (Dr. Thomas Constable, Bible scholar)

Read 1 Kings 2:10-25 (selected verses)

5. Why did Adonijah make such a request? Why was Solomon justified to execute him?

- Adonijah's request was not a simple romantic desire but a calculated political maneuver to claim the throne. In ancient Near Eastern royal culture, possession of a deceased king's concubine symbolised transfer of royal authority and legitimised claims to succession. By asking to marry Abishag, Adonijah revealed his unrepentant ambition to rebel against both God and Solomon.

6. There were sharp contrasts between Adonijah and Solomon:

- **self-seeking v.s. God-seeking**
- **greed v.s. mercy**
- **rebellion v.s. obedience**

What are some difficulties in being God-seeking, merciful, and obedient to God? What lessons can you learn from their stories and apply to your daily life?

7. Jesus is the ultimate example of extending mercy to sinners, always seeking the Father, and obeying the Father's will. How can Jesus' example encourage you when you are tempted to follow your own ways rather than God's way?

Prayer prompts

- **A doration:** Praise God for He is the God who always keeps His promises.
- **C onfession:** Confess to God for any tendencies of self-seeking, greed, or rebellion.
- **T hanksgiving:** Thank God for how He has already shown His presence in your life.
- **S upplication:** Present your requests - strengthen your faith in God's promises, experience peace through obedience to God.
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Bible passages

1 Kings 1:5-31 (selected verses)

5 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. 6 (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.) ... 9 Adonijah then sacrificed sheep, cattle and fattened calves at the Stone of Zoheleth near En Rogel. He invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and all the royal officials of Judah, 10 but he did not invite Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the special guard or his brother Solomon.

11 Then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king, and our lord David knows nothing about it? 12 Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. 13 Go in to King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: "Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' 14 While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and add my word to what you have said."

15 So Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. 16 Bathsheba bowed down, prostrating herself before the king. "What is it you want?" the king asked. 17 She said to him, "My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the Lord your God: 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.' 18 But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it.

...

29 The king then took an oath: "As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, 30 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." 31 Then Bathsheba bowed down with her face to the ground, prostrating herself before the king, and said, "May my lord King David live forever!"

1 Kings 1:38-53 (selected verses)

38 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. 39 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!" 40 And all the people went up after him, playing pipes and rejoicing greatly, so that the ground shook with the sound.

41 Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they were finishing their feast. On hearing the sound of the trumpet, Joab asked, "What's the meaning of all the noise in the city?" 42 Even as he was speaking, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest arrived. Adonijah said, "Come in. A worthy man like you must be bringing good news."

43 "Not at all!" Jonathan answered. "Our lord King David has made Solomon king.

...

49 At this, all Adonijah's guests rose in alarm and dispersed. 50 But Adonijah, in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. 51 Then Solomon was told, "Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and is clinging to the horns of the altar. He says, 'Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.'"

52 Solomon replied, "If he shows himself to be worthy, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die." 53 Then King Solomon sent men, and they brought him down from the altar. And Adonijah came and bowed down to King Solomon, and Solomon said, "Go to your home."

1 Kings 2:1-4

1 When the time drew near for David to die, he gave a charge to Solomon his son. 2 "I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, act like a man, 3 and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go 4 and that the Lord may keep his promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a successor on the throne of Israel.'

1 Chronicles 22:11-13

11 "Now, my son, the Lord be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the Lord your God, as he said you would. 12 May the Lord give you discretion and understanding when he puts you in command over Israel, so that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. 13 Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the Lord gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged.

1 Chronicles 28:9-10

9 "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. 10 Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work."

1 Kings 2:10-25 (selected verses)

10 Then David rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. 11 He had reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. 12 So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

13 Now Adonijah, the son of Haggith, went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. Bathsheba asked him, "Do you come peacefully?"

He answered, "Yes, peacefully." 14 Then he added, "I have something to say to you."

"You may say it," she replied.

15 "As you know," he said, "the kingdom was mine. All Israel looked to me as their king. But things changed, and the kingdom has gone to my brother; for it has come to him from the Lord. 16 Now I have one request to make of you. Do not refuse me."

"You may make it," she said.

17 So he continued, "Please ask King Solomon—he will not refuse you—to give me Abishag the Shunammite as my wife."

18 "Very well," Bathsheba replied, "I will speak to the king for you."

19 When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat down at his right hand.

20 "I have one small request to make of you," she said. "Do not refuse me."

The king replied, "Make it, my mother; I will not refuse you."

21 So she said, "Let Abishag the Shunammite be given in marriage to your brother Adonijah."

22 King Solomon answered his mother, "Why do you request Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? You might as well request the kingdom for him—after all, he is my older brother—yes, for him and for Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah!"

23 Then King Solomon swore by the Lord: "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if Adonijah does not pay with his life for this request! 24 And now, as surely as the Lord lives—he who has established me securely on the throne of my father David and has founded a dynasty for me as he promised—Adonijah shall be put to death today!"

25 So King Solomon gave orders to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he struck down Adonijah and he died.



Week 4: The Godly Wisdom (1 Kings 3–4)

Last week, we looked at how Solomon, despite the rebellions of his brother Adonijah, stayed humble and showed mercy, and finally became the king of Israel.

This week we will start to see the great wisdom given by God to King Solomon. In fact "wisdom" or "discernment" was the first thing Solomon asked from God right after he became king. We will learn what godly wisdom truly entails, and how we can petition to God and seek wisdom from God in our everyday life.

Warm-up question

Share an experience when you have done or said something that people regarded as wise.

Read 1 Kings 3:5-15 (Optional: 2 Chronicles 1:1-13)

1. What was Solomon asking for, and how did he present his request to God? Why did he ask for that, and not something else?

- Solomon's request in 1 Kings 3:7-9 showed **his humility and dependence on God**, addressing himself as "a little child" (the Hebrew word means an immature person) and "servant" of God, regarding the citizens as God's people and not his own people. His request was **for God's glory, not for his own glory**.
- A more word-to-word translation of 1 Kings 3:7 is "I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in" (ESV). The phrase "go out or come in" refers to life beyond the doors of one's household and the city gate in the discharge of one's duties. This is an idiom that refers to the skills of leadership. In NIV it is translated as "carry out my duties".
- Solomon requested for **a "discerning heart"** (1 Kings 3:9), which also means an understanding / listening / obedient heart. In Hebrew, the words for "hearing" and "obeying" come from the same root word. Who was Solomon seeking to obey?

2. What did God grant King Solomon in response? Why was God willing to do so?

- 1 Kings 3:3 mentioned that "Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions". His love for God was not only a feeling but **a commitment to God** that manifested in **obedience to His Word**. Although Solomon's commitment to God accounted for much blessings from God, our relationship with God is **never transactional.** God loves us and yearns for us to seek Him; in response we seek Him and love Him, and our commitment and obedience naturally flows from our love for Him.
- God was pleased that Solomon put God's interest before his own (1 Kings 3:10-11), and blessed Solomon with even more (1 Kings 3:13). God already knows what we need before we ask (Matthew 6:8) and He yearns for us to seek Him and His Kingdom first (Matthew 6:33). **God looks at our heart** and not just our words:

"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." – 1 Chronicles 28:9

Read 1 Kings 3:16-28

3. How did King Solomon resolve the conflict between the two mothers? Do you find his method wise or not, and why?

- The two mothers appeared before Solomon in order to receive justice. King Solomon's verdict became well known throughout the nation, recognized as **an act of justice and wisdom from God** (1 Kings 3:28).
- Solomon's solution was founded on maternal instincts – no mothers would want her child to die. It is an aspect of wisdom given by God to understand human nature, envisage human behaviors and reactions, thereby developing a plan to attain justice.
- "Wisdom in Israel and the ancient Near East was not synonymous with knowledge or education. It involved the ability to live life in a skillful way.... To the Israelites this was possible only if a person knew and responded appropriately to (i.e., feared) Yahweh."
  – Dr. Thomas Constable, Bible scholar

Read 1 Kings 4:20-34 (selected verses) (Optional: 2 Chronicles 1:14-17)

4. What aspects of the godly wisdom given to King Solomon stood out to you? In your opinion, what are some possible good uses and bad uses of such wisdom?

- The wisdom given to Solomon was demonstrated through his political influence and success (1 Kings 4:20-21, 24-28), literary and linguistic talents (1 Kings 4:32 – which also provides support that Solomon was the author of Proverbs and Song of Songs), even knowledge in biology and God's creation (1 Kings 4:33). His wisdom was universally recognised and sought after (1 Kings 4:34).
- His wisdom from God brought blessings to the people of Israel – living under one's vine and fig tree is a metaphor for living a safe and contented life (1 Kings 4:25).

Read 1 Kings 3:6-9 again and note the pattern: Solomon acknowledged God's past action, asked for His continuing favour, expressed humility, and requested discernment and ability to carry out his duties given by God.

5. After reading King Solomon's request for wisdom and discernment, as well as God's response, how does that influence your way to pray and petition to God?

6. In what areas of your life do you want to seek wisdom and discernment from God?

Prayer prompts

Based on your answers to Q5 or Q6 above, pray to God for wisdom and discernment, in light of Solomon's petition:

(1) Acknowledge what God did in your life;

(2) Reflect on your limitations, be humble and ask for His continuing favour;

(3) Ask for wisdom and discernment to live out the calling from Him and carry out the work that God is giving you.

Bible passages

1 Kings 3:5-15

5 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."
6 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.
7 "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. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 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?"
10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11 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, 12 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.
13 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. 14 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."
15 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 3:16-28

16 Now two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him.
17 One of them said, "Pardon me, my lord. This woman and I live in the same house, and I had a baby while she was there with me.
18 The third day after my child was born, this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there was no one in the house but the two of us.
19 "During the night this woman's son died because she lay on him. 20 So she got up in the middle of the night and took my son from my side while I your servant was asleep. She put him by her breast and put her dead son by my breast. 21 The next morning, I got up to nurse my son—and he was dead! But when I looked at him closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't the son I had borne."
22 The other woman said, "No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours."
But the first one insisted, "No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine." And so they argued before the king.
23 The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.'"
24 Then the king said, "Bring me a sword." So they brought a sword for the king. 25 He then gave an order: "Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other."
26 The woman whose son was alive was deeply moved out of love for her son and said to the king, "Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don't kill him!" But the other said, "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!"
27 Then the king gave his ruling: "Give the living baby to the first woman. Do not kill him; she is his mother." 28 When all Israel heard the verdict the king had given, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice.

1 Kings 4:20-34 (selected verses)

20 The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. 21 And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life.

... 24 For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphsah to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. 25 During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree... 27 The district governors, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking...

29 God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. 30 Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. 32 He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. 33 He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. 34 From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

Notes / Prayers


The Temple

Week 5A: The Temple (1 Kings 5:1–8:30)

Previously, we learned what Solomon requested from God – not for his own welfare, but for wisdom to administer justice for God's people. Because of his humility, God granted him wisdom, and even wealth and honor, and Solomon made a wise ruling between two mothers. This week we will look at the construction of the Temple led by Solomon – a task that was promised to him by God even before his birth (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 22, 28, 29). We will explore some key elements in the Temple, its significance as the place for God to dwell among His people, and God's heart for His relationship with His people through His conversations with Solomon.

Warm-up question

What was the most memorable celebration that you hosted or joined? What made it so special?

Read 1 Chronicles 22:5-13 and 1 Kings 5:1-5

1. Why did Solomon decide to build a Temple for God? What promise was being fulfilled here? *(Recall 2 Samuel 7 in Week 1)* What did David ask of Solomon, and why?

Read 1 Kings 6 and 7:15-22, 51 (selected verses)

2. Read through the description of the Temple and the details of the special elements below. What features of the Temple stood out to you? What do these features/elements tell you about God's character and His heart for His people?

Ark of the Covenant (1 Kings 6:19-22)

- The "inner sanctuary" of the Temple (1 Kings 6:19), also known as "the Holy of Holies", was where the "Ark of the Covenant" was placed. The "Ark of the Covenant" could be traced back to the Israelites' exodus from Egypt – it was a sacred gold-covered chest created by Moses under God's instructions, which contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 25). In Exodus 25:21-22, God commanded Moses to put the mercy seat on the top of the Ark, where God would meet and speak with Moses. The Ark was placed in "the Most Holy Place" of the Tabernacle (Exodus 26) where only high priests could enter once a year (Leviticus 16). The Israelites carried the Ark and marched around Jericho seven times leading to the city's fall and their entry into the Promised Land (Joshua 6). Those who touched or looked into the Ark in breach of God's laws could be struck dead by God (e.g., 1 Samuel 6; 2 Samuel 6). Therefore, the Ark represented God's presence and holiness (1 Kings 6:13).

Cherubim, palm trees, opened flowers (1 Kings 6:23-35)

- These interior decorations are symbols pointing back to the garden of Eden – the place where God dwelt with Adam and Eve in the beginning of the creation account in Genesis 2 before sin entered into the world. They were designed to remind the Israelites that the once broken relationship between God and mankind is to be restored as they return to God and seek Him.

The two pillars (1 Kings 7:15-22)

- The two pillars in the Temple were named 'Jachin' which means 'He shall establish', and 'Boaz' which means 'in Him is strength'. They served as a reminder for the religious and political leaders that they ruled by God's appointment and by God's strength. The pillars were also meant to remind the Israelites of the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud (Exodus 13:21-22), which were constant reminders of the presence, protection, and guidance of God as God led them out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land.

Read 1 Kings 8:6-21 (selected verses)

Solomon described the Temple as the place for God to "dwell forever" (1 Kings 8:12). **"Dwell"** in Hebrew (*shakan*) means to reside, abide or settle, so **the Temple was the place with God's presence** – the meeting place of God and humanity.

In the New Testament era, Jesus Himself became that "meeting place" between God and humanity. Jesus, Son of God, became flesh and dwelt among people (John 1:14). Jesus spoke of His body being the "temple" (John 2:19-21), and the only way to the Father is through Him (John 14:6), not through an earthly building. Jesus died for our sin and resurrected, and when we put our faith in Him, we are saved from our sin and the Holy Spirit dwells in us (Ephesians 1:13). As believers united to Jesus, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19) and the church is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16), so **God dwells in us and among us**.

3. In light of the above description, how do you perceive the "dwelling" or presence of God in believers and among believers? What does God's presence mean to you, or is there any obstacle that prevents you from experiencing God's presence?

Read 1 Kings 8:22-30 (selected verses)

Even though Solomon led the building of the Temple for God, Solomon himself recognised that **no physical structure could ever contain God** (1 Kings 8:27). God is omnipresent (present everywhere) and omnipotent (all powerful).

4. If someone says, "I don't need to go to church because God is present everywhere", how would you respond?

- Scripture recorded early church gatherings (e.g. Acts 2:44-47) and called for believers to gather together (e.g. Hebrews 10:24-25). The omnipresence of God does not negate the need for corporate worship and fellowship in church.

Prayer prompts

Pray about your relationship with God: Are you satisfied with your current relationship with Him? Are you able to experience His dwelling/presence with you and in you? Do you yearn to return to Him or be drawn closer to Him?

Additional note #1

Comparisons are often made between the Temple (1 Kings 6 and 8:13-51) and Solomon's palace (1 Kings 7:1-12). In modern measurements, the size of the Temple (1 Kings 6:2) would be 27 meters long, 9 meters wide and 14 meters high, which took 7 years to build (1 Kings 6:37-38). The size of Solomon's palace (1 Kings 7:2) would be 45 meters long, 23 meters wide and 14 meters high, which took 13 years to build (1 Kings 7:1).

Some argued that Solomon prioritised the Temple because he built it first. Some argued that Solomon prioritised his palace because it was much bigger, and came with a grand space for Pharaoh's daughter whom he married (1 Kings 7:8), which arguably sowed the seeds of Solomon's future downfall (1 Kings 11). We will study his downfall in the later weeks.

Additional note #2

While archaeologists could not pinpoint the exact location of Solomon's Temple, it was generally agreed among believers that it was on Mount Moriah / Temple Mount – the location where Abraham offered his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19).

Solomon's Temple (around 959 BC) was destroyed by the Babylonians in around 586 BC, and subsequently rebuilt in around 515 BC (see Ezra and Nehemiah), which was the Temple that stood during Jesus' ministry (Matthew 21:12-16), but was destroyed again by the Romans in AD70. Currently this site is where the Dome of the Rock (Mosque of Omar) is located.

Bible passages

1 Chronicles 22:5-13

5 David said, "My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it." So David made extensive preparations before his death.

6 Then he called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the Lord, the God of Israel. 7 David said to Solomon: "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God. 8 But this word of the Lord came to me: 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. 9 But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quiet during his reign. 10 He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever.'

11 "Now, my son, the Lord be with you, and may you have success and build the house of the Lord your God, as he said you would. 12 May the Lord give you discretion and understanding when he puts you in command over Israel, so that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. 13 Then you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the Lord gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged.

1 Kings 5:1-5

1 When Hiram king of Tyre heard that Solomon had been anointed king to succeed his father David, he sent his envoys to Solomon, because he had always been on friendly terms with David. 2 Solomon sent back this message to Hiram:

3 "You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the Lord his God until the Lord put his enemies under his feet. 4 But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster. 5 I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God, as the Lord told my father David, when he said, 'Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name.'

1 Kings 6 (selected verses)

1 In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord. 2 The temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, twenty wide and thirty high... 11 The word of the Lord came to Solomon: 12 "As for this temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, observe my laws and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. 13 And I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon my people Israel." 14 So Solomon built the temple and completed it... 16 He partitioned off twenty cubits at the rear of the temple with cedar boards from floor to ceiling to form within the temple an inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place... 19 He prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set **the ark of the covenant** of the Lord there. 20 The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar of cedar. 21 Solomon covered the inside of the temple with pure gold... 23 For the inner sanctuary he made **a pair of cherubim** out of olive wood, each ten cubits high... 27 He placed the cherubim inside the innermost room of the temple, with their wings spread out. The wing of one cherub touched one wall, while the wing of the other touched the other wall, and their wings touched each other in the middle of the room. 28 He overlaid the cherubim with gold. 29 On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and outer rooms, he carved **cherubim, palm trees and open flowers**. 30 He also covered the floors of both the inner and outer rooms of the temple with gold. 31 For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors out of olive wood that were one fifth of the width of the sanctuary. 32 And on the two olive-wood doors he carved **cherubim, palm trees and open flowers**, and overlaid the cherubim and palm trees with hammered gold. 33 In the same way, for the entrance to the main hall he made doorframes out of olive wood that were one fourth of the width of the hall. 34 He also made two doors out of juniper wood, each having two leaves that turned in sockets. 35 He carved **cherubim, palm trees and open flowers** on them and overlaid them with gold hammered evenly over the carvings. 36 And he built the inner courtyard of three courses of dressed stone and one course of trimmed cedar beams.

37 The foundation of the temple of the Lord was laid in the fourth year, in the month of Ziv. 38 In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it.

1 Kings 7:15-22, 51 (selected verses)

15 He cast **two bronze pillars**, each eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference. 16 He also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars; each capital was five cubits high. 17 A network of interwoven chains adorned the capitals on top of the pillars, seven for each capital... 21 He erected the pillars at the portico of the temple. The pillar to the south he named **Jakin** and the one to the north **Boaz**. 22 The capitals on top were in the shape of lilies. And so the work on the pillars was completed...

51 When all the work King Solomon had done for the temple of the Lord was finished, he brought in the things his father David had dedicated—the silver and gold and the furnishings—and he placed them in the treasuries of the Lord's temple.

1 Kings 8:6-21 (selected verses)

6 The priests then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim... 9 There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

10 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. 11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.

12 Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; 13 I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to **dwell** forever." ... 20 "The Lord has kept the promise he made: I have succeeded David my father and now I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the Lord promised, and I have built the temple for the Name of the Lord, the God of Israel. 21 I have provided a place there for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord that he made with our ancestors when he brought them out of Egypt."

1 Kings 8:22-30

22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven 23 and said:

"Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. 24 You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.

25 "Now Lord, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.' 26 And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true.

27 "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! 28 Yet give attention to your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that your servant is praying in your presence this day. 29 May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place. 30 Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.



Week 5B: The Temple (1 Kings 8:31–9:9)
Group Prayer Exercise

Previously, we studied passages from 1 Kings 5 to 8, learning about the details and significance of the Temple built by King Solomon.

From 1 Kings 8:31 onwards, Solomon made extensive prayers for the people of Israel and foreigners. Then in 1 Kings 9:1-9, God responded to him. These passages can be used for a group prayer exercise (which can be done either in the same week as you go through Week 5A, or in a separate session).

Part 1

(a) Read: **1 Kings 8:31-61** (Optional: 2 Chronicles 7:1-10).

(b) Discuss: What is the repeated pattern in Solomon's prayer of dedication? ("When... And when... Then...")
What does that teach you about facing sufferings and challenges in life, and bringing them to God?

(c) Pray: Write down a prayer of your own using a similar format:
- When... [describe a difficult circumstance],
- And when... [make a confession / praise to God],
- Then... [present a plea/petition to God].

(d) Each person may take turn to read out his/her prayer, and the group may respond with an "Amen" after each prayer.

Part 2

(a) Read: **1 Kings 9:1-9** and **2 Chronicles 7:13-16** (Optional: 2 Chronicles 7:11-12, 17-22)

(b) Discuss: How did God respond to Solomon's prayer of dedication? What requirements did God impose, and what promises did He make? What does that tell you about God's desired relationship with His people?

- Note: As we studied previously, although Solomon's obedience to God accounted for much of the blessings from God, our relationship with God is should not be transactional. God loves us and yearns for us to seek Him; as we do so, our commitment and obedience naturally flows from our love for Him.

(c) Pray: Pray on your own, or pray with a partner, for your relationship with God to be deepened through obedience, commitment and faithfulness toward God.

Bible Passages

1 Kings 8:31-61

31 "When anyone wrongs their neighbor and is required to take an
oath and they come and swear the oath before your altar in this
temple, 32 then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your
servants, condemning the guilty by bringing down on their heads
what they have done, and vindicating the innocent by treating
them in accordance with their innocence.

33 "When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy
because they have sinned against you, and when they turn back to
you and give praise to you name, praying and making supplication
to you in this temple, 34 then hear from heaven and forgive the sin
of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to
their ancestors.

35 "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because
your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward
this place and give praise to your name and turn from their sin
because you have afflicted them, 36 then hear from heaven and
forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the
right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for
an inheritance.

37 "When famine or plague comes to the land, or blight or mildew,
locusts or grasshoppers, or when an enemy besieges them in any
of their cities, whatever disaster or disease may come, 38 and
when a prayer or plea is made by anyone among your people Israel
—being aware of the afflictions of their own hearts, and spreading
out their hands toward this temple— 39 then hear from heaven,
your dwelling place. Forgive and act; deal with everyone according
to all they do, since you know their hearts (for you alone know
every human heart), 40 so that they will fear you all the time they
live in the land you gave our ancestors. 41 "As for the foreigner who
does not belong to your people Israel but has come from a distant
land because of your name— 42 for they will hear of your great
name and your mighty hand and your outstretched arm—when
they come and pray toward this temple, 43 then hear from heaven,
your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that
all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as
do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have
built bears your Name.

44 "When your people go to war against their enemies, wherever
you send them, and when they pray to the Lord toward the city you
have chosen and the temple I have built for your Name, 45 then
hear from heaven their prayer and their plea, and uphold their
cause.

46 "When they sin against you—for there is no one who does
not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over
to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands, far
away or near; 47 and if they have a change of heart in the land
where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in
the land of their captors and say, 'We have sinned, we have
done wrong, we have acted wickedly'; 48 and if they turn back
to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their enemies
who took them captive, and pray to you toward the land you
gave their ancestors, toward the city you have chosen and the
temple I have built for your Name; 49 then from heaven, your
dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea, and uphold
their cause. 50 And forgive your people, who have sinned
against you; forgive all the offenses they have committed
against you, and cause their captors to show them mercy; 51
for they are your people and your inheritance, whom you
brought out of Egypt, out of that iron-smelting furnace.

52 "May your eyes be open to your servant's plea and to the
plea of your people Israel, and may you listen to them
whenever they cry out to you. 53 For you singled them out from
all the nations of the world to be your own inheritance, just as
you declared through your servant Moses when you, Sovereign
Lord, brought our ancestors out of Egypt."

54 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. 55 He stood and blessed the whole assembly
of Israel in a loud voice, saying: 56 "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. 57 May the Lord our God be with us as he was
with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. 58
May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and
keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors.
59 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, 60 so that all the
peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that
there is no other. 61 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 9:1-9

1 When Solomon had finished building the temple of the Lord
and the royal palace, and had achieved all he had desired to do,
2 the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared
to him at Gibeon. 3 The Lord said to him:

"I have heard the prayer and plea you have made before me; I
have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting
my Name there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be
there.

4 "As for you, if you walk before me faithfully with integrity of
heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I
command and observe my decrees and laws, 5 I will establish
your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your
father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor on
the throne of Israel.'

6 "But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do
not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and
go off to serve other gods and worship them, 7 then I will cut
off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this
temple I have consecrated for my Name. Israel will then
become a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples.
8 This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will
be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the Lord done such
a thing to this land and to this temple?' 9 People will answer,
'Because they have forsaken the Lord their God, who brought
their ancestors out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods,
worshiping and serving them—that is why the Lord brought all
this disaster on them.'"

2 Chronicles 7:13-16

13 "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or
command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among
my people, 14 if my people, who are called by my name, will
humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from
their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will
forgive their sin and will heal their land. 15 Now my eyes will be
open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.
16 I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name
may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be
there.

Notes / Prayers



Week 6: The Prosperity & Fear (1 Kings 10; Proverbs)

Preivously, we looked at how King Solomon led the building of the Temple and some interesting details of the Temple, which vividly shows how God yearns for His people to return to Him and to be in His presence, as He dwells in us and among us.

This week, we will see King Solomon at his peak as he enjoyed prosperity and fame even among foreign nations. We will also study King Solomon's own view of "wisdom" – he famously wrote "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). We will explore what "fear of the LORD" has to do with "wisdom" and "prosperity", and how we should approach work/wealth/fame with godly wisdom and caution.

Warm-up question

Is there a person in your life whom you respect and fear at the same time? What makes you respect and fear him/her?

Recap question (optional)

Re-read 1 Kings 3:5-14, 4:29-34 and 9:1-9 from previous weeks. What kind of "wisdom" did Solomon request from God, and why did he request so? In return, what was God expecting Solomon to do?

Read 1 Kings 10:1-10

1. What was the reaction of the queen of Sheba after she had met with King Solomon? What impact had Solomon's wisdom brought to other people?

- The location of Sheba was about 1900 km southeast of Israel (approximately the distance between Hong Kong and Bangkok).
- This event echoed what was mentioned about Solomon's wisdom in earlier chapters (e.g. 1 Kings 3:12, 4:34). Solomon's reign was so glorious that even rulers from all over the world came to meet him.
- The queen of Sheba noted that God had given Solomon wisdom which brought blessings to those around him (1 Kings 10:8). As a Gentile, she even praised God (1 Kings 10:9). It was a great testimony that believers who faithfully seek and exercise godly wisdom (like Solomon) can draw other people to God.
- This event was also quoted by Jesus when He challenged His hearers to listen to God's wisdom through someone who was greater than Solomon, namely, Jesus (Matthew 12:42).

Read the selected Proverbs and Psalms written by King Solomon

As one of the wisest kings in OT history, King Solomon had written thousands of proverbs and songs (1 Kings 4:32), and he wrote a lot about "wisdom". One of the most quoted Proverbs is: **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom"** (Proverbs 9:10). Indeed the phrase "the fear of the LORD" appeared at least 14 times in the Book of Proverbs. This "fear" is not our usual, negative perception of feeling scared or frightened. The Hebrew word for "fear" (yirah) means not just fear but also **reverence or piety**. "The fear of the LORD" encompasses our attitude, posture and will, which shapes our behavior towards God, leading us to godly wisdom.

Let's study some of the Proverbs that dealt with "fear of the LORD" and "wisdom" below as we continue to learn how to attain godly wisdom.

2a. Based on the following Proverbs and Psalms, what does "the fear of the LORD" mean? What outcomes or impact does "the fear of the LORD" bring?

2b. How can we cultivate "the fear of the LORD" in our everyday life? (E.g., in work, relationships, spiritual walk with God, etc.)

Elements of "the fear of the LORD": Proverbs 1:1-7, 8:13, 22:4; Psalms 72:1-9, 127:1

- The entire Book of Proverbs began with the premise that there were "instructions", "words of insight" and "guidance" to be conferred (Proverbs 1:1-6). By following these things and fearing the LORD, one would gain knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).
- "The fear of the LORD" in the Proverbs is often associated with keywords like obedience, submission, humility, reverence, awe, hating evil, etc. Try to identify and elaborate on these elements from the selected Proverbs and Psalms.

Outcomes of "the fear of the LORD": Proverbs 1:7, 1:29-33, 9:10-11, 10:27, 14:26-27, 15:16, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17-18

- Further question: Why would "the fear of the LORD" lead to outcomes like wisdom and prosperity?
- Further note: Proverbs 16:6 and 23:17-18 spoke of the atonement of sin, the overcoming of evil, and the future hope. So "the fear of the LORD" is also connected to the ultimate judgment and salvation — such fear will prompt a person to turn away from sin and repent before the ultimate judgment comes, believe in God, and be renewed by the everlasting hope through Christ.

The "reciprocal" relationship between "the fear of the LORD" and "wisdom": Proverbs 9:10, 15:33, 2:1-6

- While fearing the LORD brings wisdom, wisdom will also lead a person to fear the LORD.

Read 2 Samuel 23:1-5 and 1 Kings 10:21-29, 11:1-2

3a. If you were one of the advisers to King Solomon, after seeing all the wealth and fame that King Solomon was enjoying, what advice would you give him / what risks would you warn him of?

3b. What is your current perception of your work / wealth / fame? What advice would you give your future self / what risks would you warn your future self of?

- 1 Kings 10:14-29 was the fulfilment of God's promise to Solomon in 1 Kings 3:13 – wealth and honor that no other kings could compare. This was possibly the "peak" moment of Solomon's reign, but from 1 Kings 11 onwards, we will see the beginning of Solomon's downfall (to be covered in the coming weeks).

Prayer prompts

Choose one of the Proverbs in Q2 above, and use it as the basis of your prayer, as you pray about your burdens or perceptions about work / wealth / fame in Q3 and seeking wisdom from God.

Bible passages

1 Kings 10:1-10

1 When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she came to test Solomon with hard questions.
2 Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.
3 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. 4 When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, 5 the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.

6 She said to the king, "The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. 7 But I did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard. 8 How happy your people must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! 9 Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel. Because of the Lord's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king to maintain justice and righteousness." 10 And she gave the king 120 talents of gold, large quantities of spices, and precious stones. Never again were so many spices brought in as those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

Selected Proverbs & Psalms

Elements of "the fear of the LORD"

Proverbs 1:1-7

1 The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
2 for gaining wisdom and instruction;
for understanding words of insight;
3 for receiving instruction in prudent behavior,
doing what is right and just and fair;
4 for giving prudence to those who are simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young—
5 let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance—
6 for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.
7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 8:13

To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance,
evil behavior and perverse speech.

Proverbs 22:4

Humility is the fear of the LORD; its wages are riches and honor and life.

Psalm 72:1-9

1 Endow the king with your justice, O God,
the royal son with your righteousness.
2 May he judge your people in righteousness,
your afflicted ones with justice.
3 May the mountains bring prosperity to the people,
the hills the fruit of righteousness.
4 May he defend the afflicted among the people
and save the children of the needy;
may he crush the oppressor.
5 May he endure as long as the sun,
as long as the moon, through all generations.
6 May he be like rain falling on a mown field,
like showers watering the earth.
7 In his days may the righteous flourish
and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.
8 May he rule from sea to sea
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
9 May the desert tribes bow before him
and his enemies lick the dust.

Psalm 127:1

Unless the LORD builds the house,
the builders labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.

Outcomes of "the fear of the LORD"

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:29-33

29 since they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the LORD.
30 Since they would not accept my advice
and spurned my rebuke,
31 they will eat the fruit of their ways
and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.
32 For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety
and be at ease, without fear of harm."

Proverbs 9:10-11

10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
11 For through wisdom your days will be many,
and years will be added to your life.

Proverbs 10:27
The fear of the LORD adds length to life,
but the years of the wicked are cut short.

Proverbs 14:26-27
26 Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress,
and for their children it will be a refuge.
27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
turning a person from the snares of death.

Proverbs 15:16
Better a little with the fear of the LORD
than great wealth with turmoil.

Proverbs 16:6
Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for;
through the fear of the LORD evil is avoided.

Proverbs 19:23
The fear of the LORD leads to life;
then one rests content, untouched by trouble.

Proverbs 22:4
Humility is the fear of the LORD;
its wages are riches and honor and life.

Proverbs 23:17-18
17 Do not let your heart envy sinners,
but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD.
18 There is surely a future hope for you,
and your hope will not be cut off.

"Reciprocal" relationship of "fear of the LORD" and "wisdom"

Proverbs 9:10
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Proverbs 15:33
Wisdom's instruction is to fear the LORD,
and humility comes before honor.

Proverbs 2:1-6
1 My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, 2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—3 indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, 4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

2 Samuel 23:1-5
1 These are the last words of David: ...
3 The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me [David]:
'When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, 4 he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth.' 5 "If my house were not right with God, surely he would not have made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part; surely he would not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire.

1 Kings 10:21-29
21 All King Solomon's goblets were gold, and all the household articles in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. Nothing was made of silver, because silver was considered of little value in Solomon's days. 22 The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons.
23 King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. 24 The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart. 25 Year after year, everyone who came brought a gift—articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules.

26 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. 27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. 28 Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from Kue—the royal merchants purchased them from Kue at the current price. 29 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.

1 Kings 11:1-2
1 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter — Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. 2 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.



Week 7: The Passion & Love (Song of Songs; 1 Kings 11:1-6)

Last week, we saw King Solomon's prosperity and fame to the extent that even the queen of Sheba came all the way to listen to him and offered huge amounts of gifts. We also studied the Proverbs written by King Solomon and learned what "the fear of the LORD" entails and how this leads us to godly wisdom.

This week, we turn our attention to "love relationship" – a significant life topic that requires much wisdom, of which King Solomon had also written extensively on. We will study another wisdom literature, a love poem, written by King Solomon – the Song of Songs, and learn how to nurture and maintain a godly relationship. We will also briefly look at King Solomon's own relationships and issues.

Warm-up question

What is one thing that you really love (e.g. hobby, food, person, etc.) to the extent that you would keep telling others about it?

Read Song of Songs 1:1–2:7 (selected verses)

1. How would you describe the relationship and expressions between the man and the woman? Do you find it easy or hard to express your love towards another person (e.g. in a romantic relationship, family relationship, or friends), and why?

2. In this passage, their passion built up all the way till 2:6, then suddenly "dropped" at 2:7 with a warning/charge to not arouse love prematurely. Is this a wise move, and why? In practice, how can we ensure that we are moving at the right pace in a romantic relationship?

Read Song of Songs 6:4-9

The structure in 6:4-7 is known as a "wasf" which was a popular genre in traditional Syrian wedding ceremonies. The writer would describe his/her lover from head to toe, using multiple senses (sight, smell, taste) and comparing bodily features with plants and animals, focusing less on the actual look but more on the passion and emotions evoked. For instance, "your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead" was describing the beauty and movement of a lady's hair, just like the rippling motion of goats walking down the hill.

The content in 6:8-9 would remind readers of King Solomon who had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). Yet the man in Song of Songs still regarded the woman as the perfect and unique one, and even queens and concubines would praise her.

3. In your upbringing, has it been easy or difficult for you to accept that you are the "perfect and unique one" in the eyes of someone who loves you? Now is it easy or difficult for you to accept that you are uniquely and perfectly loved by God?

Read Song of Songs 8:6-12

The **"seal"** in 8:6 referred to an engraved stone used for authenticating a document or possession at that time. It could also be a "seal ring" worn on the hand by the owner. It signified **a public commitment** to comply with a treaty or promise, and also **a symbol of identity** of the owner, making **a promise to be inseparable** from another person. So "a seal over your heart" (8:6) is a sign of commitment – the couple is willing to commit to each other in a serious, exclusive, love relationship.

Commitment protects and empowers a relationship. Commitment creates a safe space for both persons to be vulnerable and love each other unconditionally, which allows the relationship to deepen and flourish. The result can be a relationship that is so strong that "many waters cannot quench" and "rivers cannot sweep away" (8:7). While initial passion and romance may ignite a relationship, what sustains and deepens it is **mutual commitment and unconditional love** mirrored after God's love. This is in line with how marriage was designed by God: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24); "so they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6).

8:10-12 brings out another important point – **chastity and sanctity** of a love relationship. The metaphor of a "wall" refers to the woman's chastity, which enabled her to find peace and contentment (8:10). The comparison with Solomon's vineyard highlighted that love should not be a commodity bought with payments; true love is sacred and priceless (8:11-12).

4a. What makes it challenging for a person to commit to a love relationship? Nowadays many people advocate for "flexible", "open" relationships with no commitment or exclusivity required. What are some potential problems with that?

4b. Why is commitment and exclusivity important for a love relationship?

Read 1 Kings 11:1-6 and Deuteronomy 7:1-4

5a. What rules did King Solomon break / What mistakes did he make?

5b. Most commentators think that Solomon wrote Song of Songs when he was relatively young, whereas the record in 1 Kings 11 was when he grew old (11:4). In your opinion, why wasn't Solomon able to live out what he wrote? What contributed to his change and mistakes?

Prayer prompts

The Song of Songs has given us great insights and wisdom on pursuing and nurturing a godly relationship. The love that "many waters cannot quench" portrayed in Song of Songs reminds us of the "love" that was originally designed by God (no guilt or shame – Genesis 2:25, 1 John 4:18) and the "love" that truly satisfies our deepest yearning – God's love through Christ.

Go through the following 5 elements of a godly relationship illustrated in Song of Songs. Which one(s) do you find most challenging? Pray to God and allow Him to guide you and lead you in the pursuit of a love relationship.

(1) The expressiveness of love (Song 1:2-16)
(2) The exclusivity of love (Song 2:1-3; 6:8-9)
(3) The wait of love (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4)
(4) The commitment of love (Song 8:6-7)
(5) The sacredness of love (Song 3:7-10; 8:11-12)

Bible passages

Song of Songs 1:1–2:7 (selected verses)

1 Solomon's Song of Songs.

She

2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
for your love is more delightful than wine.
3 Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes;
your name is like perfume poured out.
No wonder the young women love you!
4 Take me away with you—let us hurry!
Let the king bring me into his chambers.

Friends

We rejoice and delight in you;
we will praise your love more than wine.
...

He

15 How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes are doves.

She

16 How handsome you are, my beloved!
Oh, how charming!
And our bed is verdant.

[Ch.2]

She

1 I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.

He

2 Like a lily among thorns
is my darling among the young women.

She

3 Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest
is my beloved among the young men.
I delight to sit in his shade,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
4 Let him lead me to the banquet hall,
and let his banner over me be love.
5 Strengthen me with raisins,
refresh me with apples,
for I am faint with love.
6 His left arm is under my head,
and his right arm embraces me.

7 Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you
by the gazelles and by the does of the field:
Do not arouse or awaken love
until it so desires.

Song of Songs 6:4-9

He

4 You are as beautiful as Tirzah, my darling,
as lovely as Jerusalem, as majestic as troops with banners.
5 Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me.
Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead.
6 Your teeth are like a flock of sheep coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin, not one of them is missing.
7 Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.

8 Sixty queens there may be,
and eighty concubines,
and virgins beyond number;
9 but my dove, my perfect one, is unique,
the only daughter of her mother,
the favorite of the one who bore her.
The young women saw her and called her blessed;
the queens and concubines praised her.

Song of Songs 8:6-12

She

6 Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.
7 Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of one's house for love,
it would be utterly scorned.

Friends

8 We have a little sister, and her breasts are not yet grown.
What shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?
9 If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her.
If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.

She

10 I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers.
Thus I have become in his eyes
like one bringing contentment.
11 Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon;
he let out his vineyard to tenants.
Each was to bring for its fruit
a thousand shekels of silver.
12 But my own vineyard is mine to give;
the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon,
and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit.

1 Kings 11:1-6

1 King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. 2 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. 3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray.

4 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. 5 He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.

Deuteronomy 7:1-4

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you— 2 and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. 3 Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, 4 for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.



Week 8: The Downfall (1 Kings 11:1–12:24)

Previously we looked into King Solomon's story and insights on the topic of "love". The godly relationship portrayed in the Song of Songs encompasses: expressiveness, exclusivity, wait/patience, commitment, and sacredness. This love points us to the love originally designed by God and to our deepest yearning for love that only God can truly satisfy. However, King Solomon himself might not have lived out the sanctified love that he wrote about – he himself had multiple foreign wives who led him astray.

This marked the beginning of King Solomon's downfall, and this week we are studying the details of it as we approach his final days. We will see how idol-worship and disobedience, though started small, could worsen over time, leading to serious consequences and future judgment. God desires our full (not just partial) devotion and affection, and He longs for His people to turn back to Him.

Warm-up question

What is your "guilty pleasure"? (i.e. something that you secretly enjoy but don't want to admit because it may be unhealthy or embarrassing, e.g. a particular movie, hobby, food item, etc.)

Read 1 Kings 11:1-10 (Optional: Deuteronomy 7:1-4 and 17:16-17)

1. What King Solomon did was against the laws in Deuteronomy 7:1-4 and 17:14-17. What were the underlying sins and consequences that these laws were addressing?

- The laws in Deuteronomy were given to the Israelites after God had freed them from slavery in Egypt. The Israelites were prohibited from intermarrying with foreign women, and a king was prohibited from having many wives. This is the reason – otherwise his heart will be led astray (Deut 17:17b). The seed of idol-worship was already planted when one began to selectively obey/disobey God's rule and divert his focus and commitment from following God to something/someone else.

2a. King Solomon's heart "was not *fully* devoted to the LORD" (1 Kgs 11:4) and "he did not follow the LORD *completely*" (1 Kgs 11:6). Why did God desire our *full and complete* devotion and affection? Can we love multiple things/people while also loving God?

2b. Anything that competes for your affection and loyalty to God can be an idol (e.g. your job, wealth, social status/networks, etc.) **Think about your own daily life – what are the major things/people that distract you from loving and following God fully and completely? What are some "idols" that you are going after?**

- "Heart" in 1 Kings 11:4 meant affections. In these verses, technically speaking, King Solomon did not completely run away from God, but his affections gradually went after false gods *in addition to God*. God no longer had his full attention and affection. From then on, it was a slippery slope and his idol-worship practices only got worse and worse.
- Additional info: "Ashtoreth" was the Canaanite fertility goddess whose worship involved sexual rites and the worship of the stars. "Molek" and "Chemosh" were foreign astral (stars) deities, whose worship involved the sacrifice of live humans (even children). The verses did not specify whether King Solomon himself had participated in such forms of worship, but at least he allowed or even supported it because he wanted to please his foreign wives and secure his political alliances.

An idol is usually a good thing that we make ultimate. We say, "Unless I have that, I am nothing." – Tim Keller

Read 1 Kings 11:11-43 (selected verses) **and 12:20-24**

3a. What was God's punishment for King Solomon's sin? You may look at this from two perspectives:
- What did God promise to give Jeroboam (Solomon's official)? (E.g. 11:30-31, 35, 37-39)
- What did God promise to remove from / retain for Rehoboam (Solomon's son)? (E.g. 11:11-13, 31-33, 36)

3b. In light of the above, what did God truly desire from His people? How would you describe God's character? (E.g. 11:33, 37-39)

- King Solomon's divided heart had led to a divided kingdom starting from his next generation onwards. Yet God had not forsaken his promise to David – do you remember what that promise was? (Recall 2 Samuel 7:8-16 in Week 1)
- This marked the beginning of the divided kingdom – **the Northern Kingdom of Israel** consisting of 10 tribes (ruled by Jeroboam) and **the Southern Kingdom of Judah** consisting of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (ruled by Rehoboam, son of Solomon).
- God raised up Jeroboam to be the adversary and made him king over 10 tribes of Israel, with the command to obey God (1 Kings 11:35-38). But God also said "I will humble David's descendants because of this, but not forever" (1 Kings 11:39). The division of the kingdom was not only a punishment for Solomon's sin, but also **an opportunity given to God's people to humble themselves before God and repent to God**. Afterall, God is full of grace and is faithful to His promises.

4. Recall how Solomon began his reign (e.g. his initial prayer for godly wisdom in 1 Kings 3; his dedication to build the temple for God in 1 Kings 8), and contrast with his behaviors in his old age. What lessons can you learn from him? (E.g. his relationship with God; his pursuit and exercise of wisdom; how he handled success and wealth; how he dealt with temptations and idols, etc.)

The man best qualified to live life successfully, Solomon, chose not to do so. Success in life from God's viewpoint does not come automatically with the gift of wisdom, but when one applies wisdom to one's life. Spiritual success depends on choices as well as understanding. Solomon's life teaches us to avoid syncretism and to guard our hearts. – Dr. T. Constable (Bible scholar)

Additional info: What happened in the next generation? (1 Kings 12–14)

Rehoboam (Solomon's son) treated his people harshly, so the northern tribes rebelled and made Jeroboam (Solomon's official) to be king over the 10 tribes, forming the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Rehoboam gathered an army but God stopped the civil war through prophet Shemaiah. Rehoboam remained as a king over the 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin, being the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

There was continual warfare between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Both Kingdoms continued to sin against God. Jeroboam set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan and led Israel further into idolatry. Rehoboam allowed the creation of high places and poles for idol-worship. During Rehoboam's reign, Egypt attacked Jerusalem and took away all treasures from the temple that Solomon built. Eventually, the Northern Kingdom of Israel lasted for about 200 years and was conquered by Assyria. The Southern Kingdom of Judah lasted for about 350 years and was conquered by Babylon. Israelites from both kingdoms went into exile.

Prayer prompts

God desires our full devotion and affection – not partially, not discounted, not compromised. This is how we are wired by Him – to love Him wholeheartedly and to be loved by Him unconditionally. However, worldly matters would constantly compete for our attention and priority – e.g. "let me focus on ___ first and I will come back to God later" – and before we know it, we may have drifted far away.

Thankfully, as we accepted Christ and are reconciled to the Father, the Holy Spirit started to indwell us and help us in overcoming worldly temptations and becoming more like Christ. Prayer is the best tool to strengthen us and align our hearts with His heart.

In light of Question 2b above:
(a) Identify things/people that are distracting you from loving and following God fully and completely, and confess to God for when you may have "worshipped" these things and prioritised them over God.

(b) Pray for wisdom, protection and strength for withstanding temptations and handling challenges that may pull you away from God. Remember that even Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11) and went through every hardship that we could ever imagine (Heb 4:15), yet He persevered and overcame them, and He is with us.

Bible passages

1 Kings 11:1-10

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. 2 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. 3 He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. 4 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. 5 He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. 6 So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done.

7 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. 8 He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. 9 The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. 10 Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command.

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 (selected verses)

When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations... then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. 3 Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, 4 for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.

Deuteronomy 17:16-17

16 The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, "You are not to go back that way again." 17 He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

1 Kings 11:11-43 (selected verses)

11 So the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. 12 Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. 13 Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

14 Then the Lord raised up against Solomon an adversary, Hadad the Edomite, from the royal line of Edom... 23 And God raised up against Solomon another adversary, Rezon son of Eliada... 25 Rezon was Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived...

26 Also, Jeroboam son of Nebat rebelled against the king. He was one of Solomon's officials... 28 Now Jeroboam was a man of standing, and when Solomon saw how well the young man did his work, he put him in charge of the whole labor force of the tribes of Joseph. 29 About that time Jeroboam was going out of Jerusalem, and Ahijah the prophet of Shiloh met him on the way, wearing a new cloak. The two of them were alone out in the country, 30 and Ahijah took hold of the new cloak he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. 31 Then he said to Jeroboam, "Take ten pieces for yourself, for this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes. 32 But for the sake of my servant David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, he will have one tribe. 33 I will do this because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Molek the god of the Ammonites, and have not walked in obedience to me, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my decrees and laws as David, Solomon's father, did.

34 "'But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon's hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who obeyed my commands and decrees. 35 I will take the kingdom from his son's hands and give you ten tribes. 36 I will give one tribe to his son so that David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name. 37 However, as for you, I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. 38 If you do whatever I command you and walk in obedience to me and do what is right in my eyes by obeying my decrees and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you. 39 I will humble David's descendants because of this, but not forever.'"

40 Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt, to Shishak the king, and stayed there until Solomon's death.

41 As for the other events of Solomon's reign—all he did and the wisdom he displayed—are they not written in the book of the annals of Solomon? 42 Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. 43 Then he rested with his ancestors and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king.

1 Kings 12:20-24

20 When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David.

21 When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he mustered all Judah and the tribe of Benjamin—a hundred and eighty thousand able young men—to go to war against Israel and to regain the kingdom for Rehoboam son of Solomon.

22 But this word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: 23 "Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon king of Judah, to all Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, 24 'This is what the Lord says: Do not go up to fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Go home, every one of you, for this is my doing.'"



Week 9: The Last Words (Ecclesiastes)

Last week, we looked at the spiritual downfall of King Solomon due to idol-worship. His heart was no longer *fully* devoted to God. This is an important reminder for us that God is not asking for just *more* of our devotion and attention, but *all* of our devotion and attention. Anything that competes for our affection and loyalty to God can be an idol that gradually pulls us away from Him.

King Solomon's death was recorded in 1 Kings 11:41-43. One question remained: Did Solomon repent before he died? **The Book of Ecclesiastes** was generally believed to be written by King Solomon at his old age, expressing his perspective of life as he looked back on his own ups and downs. While realising that the pursuit of earthly things is just a chase after the wind, his final conclusion is: "Fear God" (Eccl 12:13). So what can we learn from Solomon's final insights? What is "the meaning of life" afterall?

Warm-up question

What was one thing that you used to spend much time/effort/money on, but you eventually moved on? (e.g. comic series, Lego set, collectibles, etc.)

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

1. Why did the writer think "everything is meaningless (*hevel*)"? What are some things in your life that also feel like "*hevel*"?

- The original Hebrew word for "meaningless" is *"hevel"* which means vapour or breath. It refers to something intangible, temporary and fleeting, which cannot be grasped or controlled. ESV gives a more accurate translation: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." (1:2)

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:23 (selected verses)

2. What were the writer's views on "wisdom", "pleasure" and "work"? Should we pursue them, why or why not?

- The verse "I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me" (1:16) is one of the verses that supports the authorship of King Solomon. Yet even the wisest king considered "wisdom" as "hevel" and grieved about it (1:18). "Wisdom" in these verses was likely referring to the use of human intelligence to find truth and meaning, instead of seeking and relying on God.
- The writer went through an extensive thinking process and proved every route unfruitful:
  - If everything is hevel, then shall I seek to be wiser than others? No, it is *hevel.* (1:12-18)
  - If human wisdom is not the answer, then shall I go for pleasure? No, it is *hevel.* (2:1-16)
  - If pleasure is not the answer, then shall I work harder for the future? No, it is *hevel*, and restless too. (2:17-23)

  This points us to the advice from 2:24 onwards.

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24–3:22 and 12:13-14

3. When everything is "*hevel*", what was the writer's advice in 2:24-26 and 12:13-14? What should be the heart behind "eat and drink and find satisfaction"? Is this easy or hard for you?

- The advice to "eat and drink…" appeared 4 times in Ecclesiastes. It was not a reckless "YOLO" (you-only-live-once) lifestyle, but a humble posture:
  - To embrace the reality as it is (things will always be "hevel", beyond our control)
  - To acknowledge that all things are from God (2:24-25)
  - To please God, and stay away from sins (2:26)
- The advice of "fear God" is the theme of the entire Book of Ecclesiastes (which we will study further next week). Recall our study of Proverbs in Week 6, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10) which entails:
  - Humble submission and obedience to God;
  - Pursuing goodness and hating evil; and
  - Reverence and awe to God's magnificence.

4. As you read through the illustrations in 3:1-22, how do you feel? Pick one of the following and share with your group:

(i) If you struggle with "letting go": Is there something that God is calling you to let go? How can this passage help you with surrendering and trusting God?

(ii) If you struggle with "waiting": What are you currently waiting for, and how long have you been waiting? How can this passage help you with trusting and accepting God's timing and decision?

(iii) If you struggle with "uncertainties": In what aspects do you yearn for certainty? How can this passage help you embrace the "*hevel*" in life and appreciate the "unknown" that is only known by God?

(iv) If you struggle with "embracing the present": What makes you think you cannot stop striving? How can this passage help you appreciate your "lot" from God and find security in Him?

- In presenting 14 pairs of contrasts (e.g., life/death, create/destroy, laugh/weep) that humans live in-between (all of which are beyond human control), the writer emphasised that it is God who knows and reigns over the full picture. This echoes Ch.1 which said "everything is *hevel*" but also "there is nothing new under the sun".
- In 3:11a, the Hebrew word for **"beautiful"** (*yapheh*) means beautifully fitting and appropriate – it refers to how God makes everything happen in His appropriate timing (instead of making things "pretty" as we subjectively perceive).
- In 3:11b, God has placed within the heart of every person a sense of something **"eternal"** and a desire to know the eternal significance of what we do, which points us to God. The Hebrew word for "eternity" (*'olam*) also means forever, enduring and everlasting, which encompasses the whole of what God has done, is doing, and will do, and points to 3:14 – "I know that everything God does will endure forever… God does it so that people will fear him". Again, this contrasts with "hevel", and sets the stage for the writer's ultimate advice at the end of Ecclesiastes – **"fear God"** (12:13).

Prayer prompts

Identify an area that you are currently struggling, then reflect and pray for one another:

- Prayer on "priority": Which aspects of life do you put the most time and effort in? Are they "hevel"?
- Prayer on "identity": How would you define yourself? Are those definitions "hevel"?
- Prayer on "reliance": What do you rely on for a sense of security? Are they "hevel"?
- Prayer on "contentment": How much do you recognise, appreciate and embrace your "lot" from God and thank God for it? Things are "hevel", but the Creator is not.

Bible passages

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:
2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."
3 What do people gain from all their labors
at which they toil under the sun?
4 Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.
5 The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.
6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north;
round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.
7 All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.
To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.
8 All things are wearisome,
more than one can say.
The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing.
9 What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.
10 Is there anything of which one can say,
"Look! This is something new"?
It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.
11 No one remembers the former generations,
and even those yet to come will not be remembered
by those who follow them.

Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:23 (selected verses)

Wisdom Is Meaningless

12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! 14 I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.
15 What is crooked cannot be straightened;
what is lacking cannot be counted.
16 I said to myself, "Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." 17 Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.
18 For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;
the more knowledge, the more grief.

Pleasures Are Meaningless

[Ch.2] 1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. 2 "Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?" 3 I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.
4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards... I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces... 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. 10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil.
11 Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

Wisdom and Folly Are Meaningless

12 Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? 13 I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. 14 The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.
15 Then I said to myself, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?"
I said to myself, "This too is meaningless."
16 For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered;
the days have already come when both have been forgotten.
Like the fool, the wise too must die!

Toil Is Meaningless

17 So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. 18 I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. 19 And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. 20 So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. 21 For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. 22 What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? 23 All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 2:24–3:22

24 A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, 25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? 26 To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

A Time for Everything

[Ch.3] 1 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

9 What do workers gain from their toil? 10 I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. 13 That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. 14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

15 Whatever is has already been,
and what will be has been before;
and God will call the past to account.

16 And I saw something else under the sun:
In the place of judgment—wickedness was there,
in the place of justice—wickedness was there.
17 I said to myself,
"God will bring into judgment
both the righteous and the wicked,
for there will be a time for every activity,
a time to judge every deed."

18 I also said to myself, "As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. 19 Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. 20 All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. 21 Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"

22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

13 Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the duty of all mankind.
14 For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.



Week 10: From Solomon to Us (Ecclesiastes)

Last week, we began our study of the Book of Ecclesiastes which was likely written by King Solomon at his old age, expressing his perspective of life: "Everything is like a vapor (*hevel*)", and finding the meaning of life in *hevel* would prove futile.

This week, we will continue to explore the second half of the Book of Ecclesiastes with particular focus on "wealth" and "wisdom". King Solomon is regarded as one of the wisest and wealthiest kings in Old Testament history, so what was his view and advice for people who also seek to pursue wealth and wisdom?

As we wrap up the entire series of "the life of King Solomon", let's also take some time to reflect on how his life stories and lessons can guide us in living a life that is pleasing to God and draw us closer to God.

Warm-up question

What is the most luxurious item you have ever owned? What is its condition now?

Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-6:2

1a. According to the writer, what are the problems caused by / associated with "wealth"? Why would "abundance" make the rich unable to sleep and cause all the frustration mentioned?

1b. What would be a wise and biblical way to perceive and handle "wealth" and "abundance"?

- As mentioned last week, the Hebrew word for "meaningless" (5:10) is "*hevel*" which means vapour or breath. It is to describe something as temporary and fleeting, rather than having no meaning.
- The Bible did not say that money itself is evil, but "*the love of money* is a root of all kinds of evil." (1 Timothy 6:10), which echoed Ecclesiastes 5:1-2.
- The word "appropriate" (*yapheh*) in 5:18 is the same Hebrew word for "beautiful" (*yapheh*) in 3:11 ("He has made everything *beautiful* in its time.") In both instances, the writer was emphasising how God makes or allows things to happen in His appropriate timing.
- The word "lot" (*cheleq*) in 5:18-19 means "portion" – an inheritance that we receive from God, not a prize that we earn by our own effort. The heart behind eating, drinking and finding satisfaction in our toil is to embrace the reality of *hevel* and acknowledge that all things are from God.

Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-25

2a. What are your thoughts on the comparisons in 7:1-7:8? Why did the writer seem to prefer "bad things" over "good things"?

2b. What are the benefits v.s. limitations of "wisdom"? How does that guide you in your pursuit of wisdom?

- The comparisons in 7:1-7:8 were to bring out that it is wise to recognise the limited duration of life as one lives, and focus on things that truly matter, e.g. going to a house of mourning (funeral) is more meaningful than going to a house of feasting (party) because it prompts a person to think about the meaning of life.
- A wise approach to life is to fear God and avoid all extremes (7:18). The writer was not calling us to be righteous and wicked at the same time; what he advocated was to live a righteous life in light of God's judgment, but recognising that this does not always protect us from all adversity as we are still living in a fallen world.

"Avoiding all extremes" is similar to looking for a "middle ground":
- **Don't over-rely on your wisdom, but also don't forgo wisdom.**
- **Pursuit of wisdom is good, but remember that God is sovereign.**
- **Wisdom can be a *light* for life, but does not give you *control* of life.**

A wise person:
- **(1) understands human limitations and embraces the reality.**
- **(2) lives a righteous life, while recognising the fallenness of the world.**
- **(3) surrenders to God and fears God.**

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

3a. Having read King Solomon's teachings on "wealth" and "wisdom" in Ecclesiastes and his final conclusion to "fear God", and having gone through his life stories in the past weeks, what areas do you think King Solomon had (or had not) lived out his own teachings? Here are a few milestones to help you remember:

- Week 4 – Seeking godly wisdom at the start of his reign
- Week 5 – Building and dedicating the Temple for God
- Week 6 – Demonstrating his wisdom and prosperity to Queen of Sheba
- Week 8 – Worshipping idols and leading to downfall

3b. What would "fearing God" look like in your pursuit of wealth and wisdom? What's your view on "godly wisdom" now?

- The "goads" in 12:11 were staffs embedded with sharp nails for driving cattle, which was a metaphor for how the writer's words of wisdom could pierce into people's foolishness. Such words of wisdom were given by "one shepherd", our one and only God.
- After exploring the various topics on "wisdom", the writer's final conclusion is to "fear God" (12:13) because:
  - Everything is "*hevel*"; only God is constant (3:14).
  - Fearing God brings protection and wisdom (7:18).
  - Fearing God brings contentment and joy (3:11; 5:18-19).
  - God will bring every deed into judgment (12:14).

Recall: The fear of God entails –
- **(1) humble submission and obedience to God;**
- **(2) pursuing goodness and hating evil; and**
- **(3) reverence and awe to God's magnificence.**

Prayer prompts

As we conclude this 10-week journey, reflect and share in your group about how King Solomon's life stories and lessons have guided you in living a life that is pleasing to God and drawing you closer to God. Pray for each other for the continual pursuit of godly wisdom and humble submission to God.

Bible passages

Ecclesiastes 5:10-6:2

[Ch.5] 10 Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.
This too is meaningless.
11 As goods increase,
so do those who consume them.
And what benefit are they to the owners
except to feast their eyes on them?
12 The sleep of a laborer is sweet,
whether they eat little or much,
but as for the rich, their abundance
permits them no sleep.

13 I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:
wealth hoarded to the harm of its owners,
14 or wealth lost through some misfortune,
so that when they have children
there is nothing left for them to inherit.
15 Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb,
and as everyone comes, so they depart.
They take nothing from their toil
that they can carry in their hands.
16 This too is a grievous evil:
As everyone comes, so they depart,
and what do they gain,
since they toil for the wind?
17 All their days they eat in darkness,
with great frustration, affliction and anger.

18 This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. 19 Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. 20 They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

[Ch.6] 1 I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: 2 God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God does not grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-25

1 A good name is better than fine perfume,
and the day of death better than the day of birth.
2 It is better to go to a house of mourning
than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of everyone;
the living should take this to heart.
3 Frustration is better than laughter,
because a sad face is good for the heart.
4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.
5 It is better to heed the rebuke of a wise person
than to listen to the song of fools.
6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot,
so is the laughter of fools.
This too is meaningless.

7 Extortion turns a wise person into a fool,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.
8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning,
and patience is better than pride.
9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit,
for anger resides in the lap of fools.

10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?"
For it is not wise to ask such questions.
11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing
and benefits those who see the sun.
12 Wisdom is a shelter
as money is a shelter,
but the advantage of knowledge is this:
Wisdom preserves those who have it.

13 Consider what God has done:
Who can straighten what he has made crooked?
14 When times are good, be happy;
but when times are bad, consider this:
God has made the one as well as the other.
Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future.

15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these:
the righteous perishing in their righteousness,
and the wicked living long in their wickedness.
16 Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—
why destroy yourself?
17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—
why die before your time?
18 It is good to grasp the one
and not let go of the other.
Whoever fears God will avoid all extremes.

19 Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful
than ten rulers in a city.
20 Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous,
no one who does what is right and never sins.

21 Do not pay attention to every word people say,
or you may hear your servant cursing you—
22 for you know in your heart
that many times you yourself have cursed others.

23 All this I tested by wisdom and I said,
"I am determined to be wise"—
but this was beyond me.
24 Whatever exists is far off and most profound—
who can discover it?
25 So I turned my mind to understand,
to investigate and to search out wisdom
and the scheme of things
and to understand the stupidity of wickedness
and the madness of folly.

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

9 Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. 10 The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

11 The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. 12 Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.
Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

13 Now all has been heard;
here is the conclusion of the matter:
Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the duty of all mankind.
14 For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.

Notes / Prayers

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