

BROKEN KINGDOMS

Daily Study

INTRODUCTION - 1 Samuel 8:19-20

"We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

Every sibling remembers wanting what their brother or sister had. It was a Christmas gift, a bigger piece of cake, the front seat in the car, or a pair of shoes. Honestly, it might not have been any better than what you already had. But they had it, and you didn't. Now you need it.

We carry that same mentality into our interactions with adults. While we don't throw a childhood tantrum, wailing on the floor, it can come close. We look at the neighbor's house, their car, or their children's accomplishments with longing. Our coworker has a nicer office, better hours, or higher pay, and we covet. We box up contentment and store it on a high shelf as we wonder, "How did they get that? They are no better than me." In the end, we adopt their strategies and behavior, counting on a better life.

Have you ever experienced the thrill of getting what you hoped for, only to realize it wasn't as great as you imagined, or at least, not for long? Approximately 1000 years before the coming of Christ, the tribes of Israel asked for a king. Badgered and beaten by the armies of the Ammonites and the Philistines, the Israelites' memories of deliverance from Egyptian slavery and the felled walls of Jericho faded. Disenchanted with God and His prophets, the children of Israel looked enviously at the neighboring nations. They ignored Samuel's warning and insisted, "Give us a king like other nations have."

In the years following this demand, king after king demonstrated the disaster of trading God's leadership for the patterns of unbelieving nations. Tempted by this same proposition today, we have much to learn by studying the Old Testament stories and noting the pitfalls of placing our faith in the kingdoms of man.

Thank you for joining us on this journey through the pages of scripture over the next few weeks as we explore a handful of kings and their kingdoms. Pastor Dave will lead a study of King Saul and King Solomon in the first two weeks of the series. Then Pastor Paddy will guide us through King Ahab and King Hezekiah. Finally, Pastor Andreas will introduce us to King Josiah.

Over the next five weeks, as we absorb the lessons from these Broken Kingdoms, we will take every opportunity to compare and contrast our flawed subjects with the King of Kings. At every turn, we will find hope, encouragement, and direction as this study shifts from human failing to the invitation of Jesus to follow Him.

**Lovewell,
Pastor Dave Ferguson, Pastor Paddy McCoy, and Pastor Andreas Beccai.**

BROKEN KINGDOMS

Daily Study Week 1 - King Saul

WEEK 1: MONDAY - The Kingdoms of Man - 1 Samuel 8:4-5, 9-18

... all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel. "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

... the LORD replied... Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them."

So Samuel passed on the LORD's warning to the people who were asking him for a king. "This is how a king will reign over you," Samuel said. "The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the LORD will not help you."

In the days leading up to the selection of Saul as Israel's first king, the aging prophet Samuel installed his sons as the next generation of spiritual leaders over Israel. However, their reputation for greed and ulterior motives filled the elders with suspicion and eroded the people's confidence. Rather than going to Yahweh for a solution to their concerns, the people came forward with a plan, fueled by jealousy and fear of the surrounding nations. "Let's do what they are doing. Give us a king to lead us."

Remarkably, God seems quick to grant the people what they ask for. "Give them what they want. But also, tell them what they are getting." The implication? "I want them to hear what they are trading."

God predicts conscription and indenture of their sons and daughters, the slow dripping leak of freedoms, and a state-led takeover of their property. For a nation so recently freed from slavery in Egypt, He uses the strongest language possible, "you will be his slaves." The warning is dire. But it doesn't matter. Like a child coveting a friend's toy, their minds are set. They must have a king like other nations.

What follows is the tragic history of one broken kingdom after another. It will begin with Saul and include Ahab, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Some will have good or even great moments, but most will be a complete disaster. Solomon will build a glorious temple to Yahweh only to struggle with agnosticism. Even David, the best of them all, will vividly fulfill God's warnings about what a king will do.

As I studied this passage in the early morning hours, a new thought struck me. I had always read this warning as specifically predicting the problems of King Saul and, by extension, those of the other kings

who followed. But then it dawned on me that God gives this warning before Saul is selected. He says, "Warn them about the way a king will rule over them." "A king... any king."

God isn't describing a specific person. He is defining humanity's sinful condition. He suggests that the kingdoms of man will never be marked by selfless sacrifice or the salvation of the lost. They may have moments of bending toward the good of a neighbor. But the kings of this earth, by definition, consolidate power, absorb resources, demand adulation, and insist on privilege. They kill suspected rivals, take their neighbors' wives, and amass wealth.

No wonder Jesus was so confusing to those who thought He might become king. They wanted to wave palm branches and shout Hosannas while He assembled armies to overthrow the Romans. Instead, He said things like, "My kingdom is not of this world. Here, I will suffer, be rejected, and be murdered on a cross. This will all happen, not because my life is taken from me, but rather, I will lay my life down as a sacrifice." (Mark 8:31; John 10:18)

Today, you are invited into the Kingdom of Heaven, in stark contrast to the broken kingdoms of this world. Jesus invites you to take up your cross and follow Him.

1. **What is something you desperately wanted as a child that didn't turn out to be what you had hoped? Was there a toy or gift you didn't play with or use once you had it? What was it?**
2. **Was there someone in your life who exerted power over you that you didn't appreciate? What did you do about it?**
3. **What part of your life do you find yourself grasping for more of in a self-seeking way that you need to surrender to Jesus? What do you want to say to Him about it?**

WEEK 2: TUESDAY - Rejecting the King of Kings - 1 Samuel 8:4-9

Finally, all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel. "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the LORD for guidance. "Do everything they say to you," the LORD replied, "for they are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer. Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them."

I find Samuel's reaction in these verses eerily relatable. Looking beneath the surface, we see Samuel's frustration and displeasure at being rejected by the people in their appeal for a king. He isn't upset because God's leadership is set aside. The prophet is doing what I sometimes do — he's taking more ownership of God's movement than he has the right to.

The people's request is both a criticism and a complaint. They used to be satisfied with Samuel's leadership, but now that he's aging and the next generation is disappointing, they are unhappy. However, what both the elders and the prophet seem to forget is that Samuel was never the main leader or the one in control — Israel has always been led by Yahweh Himself. The people are asking to replace **God** with a human king.

Every now and then, the words I've spoken echo in my mind, prompting reflection. How casually I insert "my" where "our" or "your" might be more appropriate. Slowly, subtly, I assume ownership, control, and possession. I refer to "my church" as a pastor. I will say "my ministry." "My plan" can so easily interfere with submission to Jesus. In the end, am I tempted to stop following Jesus and start dragging Him around by my strategies?

Don't misunderstand. It is powerful to identify with a faith community and call it mine. This is the difference between staying a visitor and becoming family. Owning our responsibilities and accepting accountability, specifically mine as a pastor, is deeply important. However, our language can signal a shift from serving Jesus to a focus on personal self-interest.

How do you fight this predictable drift? There are two suggestions to consider. First, do as Samuel did. Talk directly to God about these challenges. Read the Word of God, listening for connections with your life. It is amazing how often He uses old stories, like this one, to remind us of our need for repentance and recalibration. Put yourself in the same place and time as Jesus. He will speak to you through His Spirit.

Secondly, actively work on adjusting your language during prayer. Don't wait until you realize you've been trying to take control that isn't yours. Start including words of submission in your thoughts and prayers today.

As an example, let me share one of my prayers: "Our Father, thank you for inviting me into what You are doing in our community today. I am stunned at the risks you take by including me. As I serve your people, help me remember that this ministry is Yours, shared with me. Please help me honor You. Amen."

1. **What is a team you've enjoyed being part of? What role did you play?**
2. **Do you tend to naturally hold back and let others take the lead, or do you often end up seen as the leader? Does the environment influence this? Explain.**
3. **Is there a part of your life where you need to consider recalibrating and let someone else take the lead? Allowing God to lead? What part is that? What would you like to say to God about it?**

WEEK 1: WEDNESDAY - Kingdoms of Celebrity - 1 Samuel 9:1-2; 10:24

There was a wealthy, influential man named Kish from the tribe of Benjamin. He was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, of the tribe of Benjamin. His son Saul was the most handsome man in Israel—head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land.

Then Samuel said to all the people, "This is the man the LORD has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him!" And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

In his 2005 book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, Malcolm Gladwell introduces the concept of the "Warren Harding Error" by recounting the story of the 29th president of the United States.

After providing evidence that Harding was one of the worst presidents in American history, he explores why he was elected despite data suggesting he would be a disaster.

Warren Harding looked presidential, unlike his competitors. He was tall, handsome, and commanding. Onlookers often commented on his “broad-shouldered presence,” as if it directly signaled capability and competence. While his shoulders appeared strong, he was notoriously passive in moments that called for decisiveness. Harding’s administration was filled with corruption, unchecked by his poor personal leadership. Harding himself once said, “I am not fit for this office and should never have been here.” False humility and self-deprecation? No. Most historians agree that Warren Harding was a terrible president.

You might be thinking that it’s too bad there wasn’t evidence to warn voters about this outcome. But there was plenty. Take Harding’s senatorial voting record. He wasn’t even present to vote in two-thirds of the votes held during his time in Congress, including the vote on women’s suffrage.

So, how does this happen? It’s simple. We humans are captivated by shallow, superficial issues while ignoring character flaws, signs of corruption, and poor judgment. Meanwhile, just a few years after today’s passage, when God decides to replace Saul as king, He explains to His prophet, *“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”* (1 Samuel 16:7)

You might be thinking, “That kind of decision-making never happens to me.” And maybe you’re right. Maybe you’ve never confused charisma for kindness, beauty for competence, or stature for intelligence. It’s possible you’ve never given undue influence to a person of wealth, someone of fame, or a graduate of the best universities. But I doubt it. You are probably like me, and like the Israelites of old. We naturally fall prey to evaluations based on outward appearance.

Today, may God give us new eyes to evaluate the heart of things. May we value character over reputation, and substance over style.

- 1. If you could spend a day with anyone from history, past or present, who would it be? Why would you choose that person?**
- 2. Do you believe people ever give you too much or too little credit based on your appearance or how you carry yourself? Why do you think that is?**
- 3. When you consider God’s way of judging a person’s heart rather than their outward appearance, who comes to mind as someone you should include in your life? What makes them a good choice?**

WEEK 1: THURSDAY - Kingdoms of Compromise - 1 Samuel 13:5-11

The Philistines mustered a mighty army of 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and as many warriors as the grains of sand on the seashore! They camped at Micmash east of Beth-aven. The men of Israel saw what a tight spot they were in; and because they were hard pressed by the enemy, they tried to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, holes, and cisterns. Some of them crossed the Jordan River and escaped into the land of Gad and Gilead.

Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear. Saul waited there seven days for Samuel, as Samuel had instructed him earlier, but Samuel still didn't come. Saul realized that his troops were rapidly slipping away. So he demanded, "Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!" And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself.

Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and welcome him, but Samuel said, "What is this you have done?"

Over the course of his reign as king, Saul transformed from a fearful, self-doubting novice into an impulsive, power-hungry leader, and eventually into an arrogant, self-interested ruler. Along the way, he embraced his life of privilege and began cutting corners on what he knew was right. God's patience eventually ran out, and Yahweh chose a replacement.

During the late 1800s, British historian Lord Acton famously stated, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Often, this corruption in a leader starts with small, seemingly insignificant compromises. However, even a moral compass that is one degree off from true north will eventually lead you thousands of miles astray.

1 Samuel 13 recounts one of the early stories of Saul's reign. The Philistines have assembled a large army determined to defeat the Israelites. While many of his fellow Israelites fled in fear, the new king of Israel gathered a small force and waited, as instructed, for the prophet Samuel to arrive with a message from God about their next move.

Waiting is tough. Delays can be difficult for us today. It was torturous for Saul in 1 Samuel 13. The prophet had promised to arrive by the seventh day of waiting. On that day, Saul was overwhelmed with frustrated fear. In a moment of impatience, he chose to lead the religious service, seeking guidance from God without the prophet. After all, he was the king. Surely, he should be considered an appropriate substitute for the prophet. Every moment of delay means more of his countrymen slipping away in fear to hide. He had waited seven days as instructed. More specifically, he had waited most of the seventh day without the prophet showing up.

Wouldn't you know it, at the last minute, as Saul led the sacrifices meant for the prophet, Samuel shows up. "What have you done?" he asks. Saul deflects, "I waited, and you didn't come." Ah, but he had come, just not on the timeline convenient to Saul. If the king had answered honestly, Saul might have said, "I got scared that the people were going to leave, and I'd be fighting the Philistines alone. I didn't believe God would rescue us. I grew resentful that you hadn't shown up. I panicked. I tried to rescue the situation by doing things my way. I decided to compromise."

On that day, Saul adjusted his compass by a degree. One compromise led to another, as the King of Israel gradually steered the nation further off course. He saw these compromises as a privilege owed to his position. In doing so, God became a nuisance rather than his leader or partner. Yahweh had been removed from His throne.

- 1. What types of compromises do you see people regularly making in our society or communities today?**
- 2. What differentiates negotiating a fair compromise with a friend or family member from making a moral compromise?**

3. What kinds of compromises have tempted you recently? How did you respond? Is there a compromise you should reconsider or “walk back”?

Friday: Kingdoms of Dust - 1 Samuel 18:6-15

When the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. This was their song:

*“Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!”*

This made Saul very angry. “What’s this?” he said. “They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they’ll be making him their king!” So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

The very next day a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave in his house like a madman. David was playing the harp, as he did each day. But Saul had a spear in his hand, and he suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David escaped him twice.

Saul was then afraid of David, for the LORD was with David and had turned away from Saul. Finally, Saul sent him away and appointed him commander over 1,000 men, and David faithfully led his troops into battle.

David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the LORD was with him. When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him.

1 Samuel 31:3, 6

The fighting grew very fierce around Saul, and the Philistine archers caught up with him and wounded him severely.

So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and his troops all died together that same day.

Jealousy transforms productive partnerships into destructive competition. What could be more predictable than a person in power resenting praise given to an equal or someone under their leadership?

Goliath’s body has barely hit the ground, and people are singing David’s praises. The underdog quickly becomes the hero. By rights, Saul should have faced the giant. Does this make the cheering hit harder? Is there extra spice because it’s the women singing of David’s feats? Would Saul have reacted differently if the numbers hadn’t directly compared his accomplishments to the boy wonder? In any case, a rift begins, quickly spiraling out of control. Almost immediately, Saul becomes murderous with rage. He turns an ally into a lifelong enemy.

You don’t have to be the king, top dog, or the one in charge to feel jealousy this way. It can happen at any level in the pecking order.

I grew up in a household filled with love as the middle child, with my little sister Karyl and an older brother Lowell. My father was a pastor, and we moved frequently. But life was full of joy, thanks to the constant presence of my sibling companions as best friends.

Our family moved once again as I started my sophomore year of high school, Lowell's senior year. Through no fault of my older brother, students at our new school often called us by nicknames—"Big Fergie" for him and "Little Fergie" for me—a label I took as an insult to my skinny frame, whether it was intentional or not. Lowell was an outstanding athlete, well-built, and handsome. My small size had always made me feel inadequate and unattractive, especially when compared to him. It didn't help that I often received his hand-me-down clothes, which didn't fit because of the differences in our proportions.

Jealousy and borrowed hurt fueled my insecurities, causing me to react out of envy. During that school year, when fellow students called me "Little Fergie" in Lowell's presence, I would jump in to cut them off before they could compare and call him "Big Fergie." I would grab my spear and hurl it, blurting out that he was "Ugly Fergie." It was absurd to suggest that he was ugly. He clearly was not. Lowell would simply chuckle, which I took to mean he wasn't offended.

Over the years, I've become more aware of how easily words can hurt and influence us. While Lowell never fought back or returned insults, I am ashamed and saddened that I let jealousy cause me to lash out at him. Fortunately, his maturity prevented us from losing our relationship.

Often, rifts between allies arise from actions by those outside the core relationship. This was true with Saul, David, and the cheering crowds. As jealousy grew, javelins were thrown, plots were devised, furious anger escalated, and armies were sent into battle. So much energy was diverted from God's calling to petty infighting that, ultimately, Israel's first king became unremarkable. Once anointed by God, Saul was rejected for his selfishness. Instead of leaving a lasting legacy, his story ends in loss on a dusty Philistine battlefield.

- 1. What nicknames have you been called? How do you feel about them? Why do you feel that way?**
 - 2. Describe a time in your life when you reacted out of jealousy. Why did you respond that way? What was the outcome?**
 - 3. What is happening in your life right now that tempts you to react with jealousy? How can you prevent that reaction? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**
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BROKEN KINGDOMS

Daily Study Week 2 - King Solomon

WEEK 2: MONDAY - Kingdoms of Envy - Matthew 19:23-30

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked.

Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible."

Then Peter said to him, "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.

The ascent to a throne is often marked by envy and the violent removal of anyone who might have a valid claim to power. History is filled with stories of kingdoms built on the bloodshed of rivals and family members who could challenge a king's right to rule.

The Ottoman Empire famously implemented a policy called "The Order of the World," which legalized the brutal elimination of family members to prevent civil wars. For example, Sultan Mehmed III (1595-1603) ordered the strangulation of 19 brothers, some still infants, upon his accession to the throne. Additionally, Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-1566) executed his own son in 1553 over fears of a potential revolt.

Sadly, God's people are not much better when it comes to climbing the ladder to power. King David's family suffered brutal violence as a spillover from his selfish past. His eldest son, Amnon, who rapes his sister Tamar, is then murdered by David's third son, Absalom. Absalom will later die in battle while trying to take the throne from his father.

By the time we reach the story of Solomon, David's fourth son, Adonijah, is positioning himself for the throne. The king has grown old enough to be replaced. But years earlier, driven by guilt over his sins against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, David had promised the throne to Solomon, and now it's time for the coronation. However, Adonijah has gathered various officials, priests, and generals to assert his authority and push his way to the throne, proclaiming, "I will make myself king" (1 Kings 1:5). Quick action by Bathsheba intervenes, and her son Solomon is placed on the throne.

As king, Solomon confines Adonijah to Jerusalem, preventing the threat of a rebellion. Eventually, the king learns that his brother has broken these orders and left the city to find runaway slaves. So, Solomon has Adonijah killed.

Yeah, these people are a mess. Privilege, power, and the right to elevate oneself at any cost define the kingdoms of this world. The throne exists to serve the person sitting on it, not the other way around. When they are willing to do these things to their own family, just imagine how they might treat their subjects.

Then, like nails on a chalkboard, Jesus enters our story to flip things upside down. He proclaims that His kingdom is defined by sacrifice and service, not accumulation, manipulation, or force. He declares, *“In my kingdom, the first will be last, and the last will be first”* (Matthew 20:16).

1. **What is an item you wish you could have? On a scale of 1-10, how strong is this desire?**
 2. **Have you ever wanted something so badly that you compromised your values to get it? How did you feel about it once you achieved it?**
 3. **Have you ever missed out on a position or opportunity to someone who didn’t deserve it as much as you? How did that feel? How did you respond?**
 4. **What current situation in your life provides an opportunity to serve or sacrifice, where you might otherwise seek power and require the service of others? What would you like to say to Jesus about this?**
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WEEK 2: TUESDAY - Kingdoms of Wisdom - 1 Kngs 3:5-15

... the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!”

Solomon replied, “You showed great and faithful love to your servant my father, David, because he was honest and true and faithful to you. And you have continued to show this great and faithful love to him today by giving him a son to sit on his throne.

“Now, O LORD my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn’t know his way around. And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous they cannot be counted! Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?”

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. So God replied, “Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies—I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! And if you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a long life.”

Historians believe Solomon was between 15 and 20 years old when he suddenly inherited the throne. His father, David, had been a long shot to become king. Fueled by his underdog battle with Goliath, this

outdoorsman spent many challenging years oscillating between fame and infamy as a fugitive on the run from the government he would eventually lead.

Solomon's journey to the throne was much easier, less eventful, and unchallenged. Surrounded by luxury and privilege, this teenager hadn't experienced struggle, hardship, or contempt. From the start, the prince was honored. He could have easily become arrogant and unteachable, but instead, when given a blank check to ask for anything from God, he requested a heart of discernment.

The third king of Israel's reign begins with surprising humility for such a young man in this position. Finding wisdom always starts with recognizing you don't have it yet. God asks, "What do you want?" Solomon responds, "I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around." How refreshing.

I vividly remember the early days of my pastoral ministry when I was trying to build credibility. I felt pressure to always have the answers, hide any doubts, and "fake it until I make it." This attitude can silence helpful questions and block others' insights with bluster and hot air. Recognizing the need for meaningful input is essential for good leadership. Sadly, this realization sometimes comes after many years of solitary thinking and missed opportunities. It is impressive that Solomon thought to ask for insight and vision at such an early stage.

It might seem tempting to think that Solomon's request is a waste of a wish. But, like many genie-in-a-bottle jokes, in this one wish, he gains access to the fulfillment of almost unlimited future wishes. Solomon's story reminds us of Matthew 6:33, where Jesus says, "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*"

1. **Would you prefer to be wealthy or famous in a way that leaves a legacy for future generations? Why?**
 2. **Who has contributed uncommon wisdom to your life? Share an example.**
 3. **If you heard Jesus' voice say, "What do you want? Ask and I will give it to you," today, how would you respond?**
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WEEK 2: WEDNESDAY - Kingdoms of The Sword - 1 Kings 3:16-27

Some time later two prostitutes came to the king to have an argument settled. "Please, my lord," one of them began, "this woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a baby while she was with me in the house. Three days later this woman also had a baby. We were alone; there were only two of us in the house.

"But her baby died during the night when she rolled over on it. Then she got up in the night and took my son from beside me while I was asleep. She laid her dead child in my arms and took mine to sleep beside her. And in the morning when I tried to nurse my son, he was dead! But when I looked more closely in the morning light, I saw that it wasn't my son at all."

Then the other woman interrupted, "It certainly was your son, and the living child is mine." "No," the first woman said, "the living child is mine, and the dead one is yours." And so they argued back and forth before the king.

Then the king said, "Let's get the facts straight. Both of you claim the living child is yours, and each says that the dead one belongs to the other. All right, bring me a sword." So a sword was brought to the king.

Then he said, "Cut the living child in two, and give half to one woman and half to the other!"

Then the woman who was the real mother of the living child, and who loved him very much, cried out, "Oh no, my lord! Give her the child—please do not kill him!" But the other woman said, "All right, he will be neither yours nor mine; divide him between us!"

Then the king said, "Do not kill the child, but give him to the woman who wants him to live, for she is his mother!"

Today's story demonstrates that God has done what He promised. Solomon is wise beyond his age. However, there are two principles in this interaction that we could overlook if we rush through it.

First, notice the parties involved in this case. They are roommates with a conflict. Both are new mothers, one of whom has experienced the tragic loss of her newborn due to accidentally suffocating it in her sleep. Overcome with grief, the offending mother creates a plan, swaps the infants, and acts as if nothing happened, hoping the other mother remains unaware. However, luck is not on her side. A heated disagreement ensues and eventually comes before the king for resolution.

Did you notice the detail I left out? These women are **prostitutes**, not courtiers or noblewomen. They don't come from wealth or noble lineage. They have the lowest reputations, and yet, they end up in the king's court. It was unheard of for a sovereign to be in the company of women like these in public, let alone give them time and attention to hear their quarrel.

Take note: leaders in the Kingdom of Christ pay attention to the problems of prostitutes. They may be beneath the proper and the proud, but Jesus always makes time for the lowly, the oppressed, and the despised. He spends energy on both the guilty and the innocent. While the world around us models leadership based on favoritism, mutual back-scratching, and what you can do for me, Jesus shows us a different way. Solomon demonstrates the wisdom of our Savior by stooping to meet the needs of "the least of these." (Matthew 25:31-46)

A second principle stands out. At the crucial moment, Solomon calls for his sword. We are left to wonder what thoughts crossed these two women's minds. Was he about to kill them both for wasting his time with this she said, she said argument? No. Solomon had no intention of using his sword to harm or divide. He used it to discern. The threat of ending the remaining child's life was enough to reveal the true mother.

Many Christians today use their sword (the Bible) to shame, divide, and push people away. But God's kingdom practices the kind of discernment that heals, reaches out to the distant, and shows deep, forgiving love. I wonder how often Jesus can be heard muttering, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Be careful how you swing that thing around."

- 1. Would you rather accidentally arrive at an event overdressed or underdressed? Why?**
- 2. Describe a situation or occasion where you felt out of place. Why did you feel that way? What actions did you take?**

3. Which verse or verses of Scripture remind you to show mercy and kindness to others? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?

WEEK 2: THURSDAY - Kingdoms of Accumulation - Deuteronomy 17:14-17

"You are about to enter the land the LORD your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, you may think, 'We should select a king to rule over us like the other nations around us.' If this happens, be sure to select as king the man the LORD your God chooses. You must appoint a fellow Israelite; he may not be a foreigner.

"The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the LORD has told you, 'You must never return to Egypt.' The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the LORD. And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself.

Many years before the people asked for a king in 1 Samuel 8, God warned the Israelites that monarchs tend to pursue selfish interests, accumulate wealth, and surround themselves with many women. Even as Moses guided the Hebrews during their desert exodus, Yahweh expressed concerns that perfectly described the time of King Solomon.

1 Kings 4 describes, *"God gave Solomon very great wisdom and understanding, and knowledge as vast as the sands of the seashore. In fact, his wisdom exceeded that of all the wise men of the East and the wise men of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else..."* (v.29-31). But there are different forms of wisdom, aren't there? Clearly, Solomon had unique judicial insight and organizational cleverness. He possessed the communication skills to forge powerful alliances and negotiate trade deals. The king had the charisma, power, and credibility to command the respect and allegiance of his people. Still, something important was missing. Solomon spent his life searching for answers that eluded him.

Given familiarity with the Torah, it is surprising to consider that Solomon couldn't see himself in the warnings God gave before crossing the Jordan River into Canaan. The book of 1 Kings describes the outlandish wealth he accumulated. Chapter 4 lists the vast resources required to feed the king's household (4:22-23). He owned 12,000 horses (4:26) and conscripted 30,000 men to build the temple, his palace, Jerusalem's walls, and several cities under forced labor (5:13; 9:15-28). His taxation yielded over 25 tons of gold per year, along with other wealth (10:14-15). In fact, Solomon possessed so much gold that nothing of importance in Israel was made of silver, as 1 Kings 10:21 says, *"... silver was considered worthless in Solomon's day!"* He speaks from personal experience when he says, *"Even the king milks the land for his own profit!"* (Ecclesiastes 5:9).

God counseled against the king taking "many wives." So what does Solomon do? His story reads like someone who has turned God's warnings into his playbook. *"He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the LORD."* (1 Kings 11:3)

You probably know a scholar at the top of their field who can't seem to navigate everyday situations. Physicians and lawyers, business leaders and investment managers are just as prone to poor relationships as anyone. It turns out that emotional, moral, and spiritual wisdom is different from running the world, amassing wealth, or gaining popularity. Though his life is described as an unmitigated

success, Solomon grows increasingly despondent. All the things he originally considered worthwhile prove futile. He admits, *“How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!”* (Ecclesiastes 10:10).

Whether you are experiencing incredible success or struggling today, whether the sun is shining or clouds have surrounded you, remember the words of Jesus, *“... what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?”* (Mark 8:36) and *“... seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* (Matthew 6:33).

1. **If you received an unexpected amount of money and all your bills and ongoing expenses were already taken care of, what would you spend it on? Why would you choose that?**
 2. **If you were famous, what would you want to be known for?**
 3. **What priorities do you worry are out of balance in your life? Who could you talk to about this? What would you like to say to Jesus about this?**
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WEEK 2: FRIDAY - Temporary Kingdoms - Ecclesiastes 1:12-14

I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 12:8, 13

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Everything is meaningless!”

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.

Okay... this may sound morbid, but let's talk about death. Have you noticed how the knowledge of one's impending death changes things?

Recently, I spent time with a young couple in the hospital as the 37-year-old wife received treatment for a brain tumor. Hope gave way to resignation as treatment plans, surgeries, and solutions ran their course. Finally, consultations gave way to the simplicity of hospice. The heaviness of knowing how little time remained produced an uncommon honesty. The little things that get in the way of joy and love no longer mattered. Every minute became precious. Valentine's Day was celebrated in hospital gowns, amid pain medications and bland meals, each moment a cause for celebration. With each visit, I noticed the hugs grew more intense and our relationship deepened. It was an honor to be included in something so important.

I've been thinking. What if we lived like we're all on hospice? Would we be a bit less angry in traffic? Would we find it easier to show up for our children's ball games? Would we listen better and look one another in the eye more often? How would our priorities be reordered by understanding what Solomon came to know—that death is coming soon? Which concerns that take up the most important slots in our time and energy would be downgraded with this shift in perspective? Are there people you love who need to hear it from you? If you knew you had only one more week, how would you spend it? Who would you spend it with?

Solomon seems to want us to realize that his search for meaning has yielded one answer: all our plans, hard work, and pursuits yield only one thing—temporary satisfaction. So don't give in to the temptation to build your personal kingdom, stockpile the materials of selfishness, or prioritize work over relationships. Take joy in good food, feel the warmth of the sunshine, and breathe the cleansing air. Swim in the ocean's waves, tumble through snowdrifts, and stop to watch sunsets and rainbows. Celebrate relationships that are blessed with growing old.

The wisest man who ever lived couldn't think his way around a simple truth. There is only one way out of this dirt. His name is Jesus.

- 1. Make a list of 10 or more people who are important to you. When was the last time you told them about their importance? Is there someone you should tell today?**
- 2. Have you spent time with someone who knew they were dying soon? Who was it? What was that experience like?**
- 3. On a scale of 1-10, how much do you fear death? What is most frightening about it? What would you like to say to Jesus about it?**

BROKEN KINGDOMS

Daily Study Week 3 - King Ahab

WEEK 3: MONDAY - A divided kingdom - 1 Kings 16:29-33

29 Ahab son of Omri began to rule over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa's reign in Judah. He reigned in Samaria twenty-two years. 30 But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the Lord's sight, even more than any of the kings before him. 31 And as though it were not enough to follow the sinful example of Jeroboam, he married Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and he began to bow down in worship of Baal. 32 First Ahab built a temple and an altar for Baal in Samaria. 33 Then he set up an Asherah pole. He did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than any of the other kings of Israel before him.

After King Solomon, in the year 922 B.C., the kingdom of Israel divided into two separate kingdoms. In the north, was Israel, and in the south, was Judah. They were all Israelites, descended from Abraham, but they were a divided family. What drove this divide?

Well, as often the case, there isn't one easy answer. Solomon had become a harsh king, especially to the tribes in the north, taxing them exorbitantly, among other things, to expand his kingdom and build large structures. When Solomon died, the hope was that his son, Rehoboam, would be kinder and alleviate the heavy burdens imposed by his father.

It's a fascinating read in I Kings 12, because when the northern tribes ask for reprieve, Rehoboam actually takes time to consider their request. He even calls together some of the elders to give him wisdom. The elders suggest that Rehoboam lead as a servant king, which they believe will win the loyalty of the northern tribe for years to come. But Rehoboam doesn't like that idea. His dad was top dog, now he is top dog, and he doesn't want to start off his reign by showing weakness.

So he refuses to listen to the elders, and instead, invites in a crowd of his peers, people he grew up with, to give their "sage" advice. Surprise, surprise, they agree with Rehoboam and out of their conversation, the following message is sent back to the northern tribes:

14...“My father laid heavy burdens on you, but I'm going to make them even heavier! My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions!” 1 Kings 12:14

Sounds fun doesn't it? So the northern tribes revolt (aka Civil War), and the kingdoms divide. And though Judah would have some kings who did good in the eyes of the Lord, Israel did not. King after king did all the things God warned Israel would happen if they chose a king to lead over Him. And Ahab, well, he was the worst of the worst. He not only chose to worship Baal, he joined in marriage with Jezebel, the daughter of King Ethbaal, a former priest of a foreign god and whose name literally means “with Baal” or “man of Baal.”

So not only was Israel divided into two kingdoms, but Ahab led the northern kingdom to divide even further and dilute its loyalties between Yahweh and Baal.

In Jesus' inaugural sermon, he said, **24** *"No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money."* (Matthew 6:24)

In context it may seem like Jesus is simply referring to serving God or money, but the larger issue is, who or what do you value most in this life? Is it money and wealth, power, accolades, knowledge, superiority, popularity? Or is your number one in this life God, and your walk with Him? One side of that coin often keeps you in darkness, as Jesus said just prior to verse 24, and the other side leads to light, but you can't have one foot in both kingdoms.

Unlike Rehoboam, or Ahab, the example of Jesus was to come as a servant king. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28). This is why "exemplifying servant leadership" is one of our five end statements at Crosswalk, because we don't want to be divided, we want to serve ONE king, Jesus, the one who served us first.

- 1. Is there any part of your heart right now that feels divided, like you're trying to serve two masters? If so, name them.**
 - 2. In what ways are you, or can you, seek to follow the example of Jesus in your life this week (at home, at work, within your church); the example to be a servant leader?**
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WEEK 3: TUESDAY - Two many kings - 1 Kings 17:1

1 *Now Elijah, who was from Tishbe in Gilead, told King Ahab, "As surely as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives—the God I serve—there will be no dew or rain during the next few years until I give the word!"*

I'm sure you've heard the phrase, "there are too many cooks in the kitchen." Well I lived it one holiday, a few years back.

Though everyone in that kitchen had good intentions, everyone also had a different way of doing things and no one could agree on anything. It started off with a sarcastic comment here and there, then a verbal jab under the breath, then before the men in the room really knew what was going on, the voices of the cooks in the kitchen became so high and so loud that dogs in neighboring towns began barking.

Today's one verse sets us up for a coming showdown. We mentioned yesterday that King Ahab had divided allegiances, seemingly giving more attention to Baal and other foreign gods, than to Yahweh. Well now, God sends a prophet to remind Israel who really is God, and who is not; who has the power and is the maker of all things, including man, and who is made up by man and therefore not only powerless, but imaginary.

Baal was believed to be the god who controlled the rain and agriculture, and since this was an agrarian society, Baal ultimately controlled life. So for Elijah to show up and say that Yahweh was going to stop the rain for a few years, was a challenge to see who really had the power. Who was the only real cook in the kitchen, to complete that metaphor.

This challenge seems to take us back to the plagues in Egypt when the Israelites were enslaved there. Every plague was a challenge to one of the Egyptian gods. If those gods were real, and powerful, as the Egyptians claimed, then surely they could stop the God of the Israelites from sending those plagues. We know how that story turned out, and tomorrow we'll see what happened in this one.

For today, it does cause me to wonder why we need to be continually reminded about who is the real King in our lives? Why do we forget so easily? I don't know about you, but every time I think I'm in charge, that the outcome of my life is solely up to me, every time, something goes horribly wrong. Turns out, I was never meant to be in charge, but to simply surrender my life to the lifegiver, even when that's really hard to do.

Solomon once wrote, after years of experience doing the wrong thing, **5** *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. 6 Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."* (Proverbs 3:5-6) Notice he doesn't say your paths will become easy, just straight.

Oh that we wouldn't have to keep relearning that God is God, and we are not, but until that day comes, I invite you to keep verses like this Proverb close to your heart. Maybe we learn the lesson once and for all...some day.

- 1. What lessons in this life, spiritual and otherwise, do you seem to have to keep learning?**
 - 2. Are there verses and other words of wisdom and insight that help remind you or keep you grounded?**
 - 3. What area(s) in your life today do you need to hand over to God, and recognize that God is God, and you are not?**
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WEEK 3: WEDNESDAY - King of all kings - 1 Kings 18:1, 16-21, 36-39

18:1 *Later on, in the third year of the drought, the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and present yourself to King Ahab. Tell him that I will soon send rain!" 2 So Elijah went to appear before Ahab.*

16 *So Obadiah went to tell Ahab that Elijah had come, and Ahab went out to meet Elijah.*

17 *When Ahab saw him, he exclaimed, "So, is it really you, you troublemaker of Israel?"*

18 *"I have made no trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "You and your family are the troublemakers, for you have refused to obey the commands of the Lord and have worshiped*

*the images of Baal instead. **19** Now summon all Israel to join me at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah who are supported by Jezebel."*

***20** So Ahab summoned all the people of Israel and the prophets to Mount Carmel. **21** Then Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you waver, hobbling between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!" But the people were completely silent.*

***36** At the usual time for offering the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet walked up to the altar and prayed, "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, prove today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant. Prove that I have done all this at your command. **37** O Lord, answer me! Answer me so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God and that you have brought them back to yourself.*

***38** Immediately the fire of the Lord flashed down from heaven and burned up the young bull, the wood, the stones, and the dust. It even licked up all the water in the trench! **39** And when all the people saw it, they fell face down on the ground and cried out, "The Lord—he is God! Yes, the Lord is God!"*

A sure fire way to know you need more humility in your life is whether or not someone else is always to blame for the hardships you face. If that's the case, you may need to clean your mirror.

During the third year of the drought in Israel, while King Ahab and his wife continued to lead the people in prayers to Baal, and his mistress Asherah, for rain, God sends Elijah with good news; rain is on its way.

But Elijah knows that the last three years hasn't change the heart of the king and queen at all. He continues to have his allegiances divided, giving more voice to God's enemies, than God. God could have simply sent the rain, but he knows Ahab and Jezebel would likely have seen it as Baal finally answering their prayers. Something beyond obvious was needed.

So a showdown that would make the producers of World-Wide Wrestling jealous, was coming, and from all appearances, it was a very lopsided showdown. 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah, against one, lonely, prophet of Yahweh.

I encourage you to read the whole chapter of I Kings 18. As you do, you'll see how the story goes. No matter how much the prophets of Baal and Asherah yell and scream and seek to appease their god, nothing happens. Elijah even taunts them a bit, but then tells them it is time to stop wavering back and forth between Yahweh, and other gods. Either Yahweh is, or isn't, God. They must decide.

The people's response fascinates me. We're told, "the people were completely silent." Why silent? Did they know something was wrong but they were afraid to go against the king and queen? Were they too exhausted from trying everything they could think of to fix their problems, to bring rain, to put food back on their tables? Why were they silent?

Then Elijah steps up to the plate (yes, it's baseball season and yes, I will sneak in baseball metaphors as much as I can). And just to make sure the people know he has no tricks up his sleeve, he makes an impossible situation even more impossible. Ahh, but we serve the God of the impossible. Elijah prays to Yahweh, and Yahweh delivers in dramatic fashion, exposing Baal and Asherah as frauds, and showing beyond any shadow of any doubt that He alone is God.

I wish I could report that after this incident, everyone went back to worshipping Yahweh alone as the one true God, but nope. The people continue to struggle, Israel continues to have one bad king after another, and God's heart continues to ache as His people continue to suffer.

There are times when I read through the Old Testament and I struggle. Why couldn't the people learn? Why did they keep making the same mistakes? Couldn't they see that it was their choices that kept leading them to one bad circumstance after another? Then I realize, they are me. How many times do I have to learn that God is God and I am now? How many bad and harmful choices do I have to make before I repent? How many? I don't know about you, but I'm so tired of having to relearn the same lessons.

Thankfully, we serve a God of grace. A God who puts out this beautiful invite to us each and every day...

28 Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

I have stolen a line from Eugene Peterson's version of this verse, from The Message, and made it into a daily prayer. "Lord, help me learn to live freely and lightly in your unforced rhythms of grace."

- 1. What burdens are you carrying right now that you need to let go of?**
 - 2. Is there an area of your life that you need to fully surrender to God right now? If so, what is it and what can you practice that may help you let God be God in that area of your life?**
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WEEK 3: THURSDAY - A Kingdom of Blood - 1 Kings 21:1-16

1 Now there was a man named Naboth, from Jezreel, who owned a vineyard in Jezreel beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. **2** One day Ahab said to Naboth, "Since your vineyard is so convenient to my palace, I would like to buy it to use as a vegetable garden. I will give you a better vineyard in exchange, or if you prefer, I will pay you for it."

3 But Naboth replied, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance that was passed down by my ancestors."

4 So Ahab went home angry and sullen because of Naboth's answer. The king went to bed with his face to the wall and refused to eat!

5 "What's the matter?" his wife Jezebel asked him. "What's made you so upset that you're not eating?"

6 "I asked Naboth to sell me his vineyard or trade it, but he refused!" Ahab told her.

7 "Are you the king of Israel or not?" Jezebel demanded. "Get up and eat something, and don't worry about it. I'll get you Naboth's vineyard!"

8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent them to the elders and other leaders of the town where Naboth lived. **9** In her letters she commanded: "Call the citizens together for a time of fasting, and give Naboth a place of honor. **10** And then seat two scoundrels across from him who will accuse him of cursing God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

11 So the elders and other town leaders followed the instructions Jezebel had written in the letters. **12** They called for a fast and put Naboth at a prominent place before the people.

13 Then the two scoundrels came and sat down across from him. And they accused Naboth before all the people, saying, "He cursed God and the king." So he was dragged outside the town and stoned to death. **14** The town leaders then sent word to Jezebel, "Naboth has been stoned to death."

15 When Jezebel heard the news, she said to Ahab, "You know the vineyard Naboth wouldn't sell you? Well, you can have it now! He's dead!" **16** So Ahab immediately went down to the vineyard of Naboth to claim it.

What a story, right? Here you have a king throwing a temper tantrum when he doesn't get his way, and a queen, willing to lie, cheat, and kill, in order to make her husband happy. I guess we can see in this story why Ahab and Jezebel were drawn to each other; birds of a feather...

Jezebel has shown her colors before in the narrative. When Yahweh used Elijah to show them all who the real God is, Jezebel and Ahab were humiliated. Jezebel wanted revenge on Elijah, for he not only caused them shame, he also had the prophets of Baal and Asherah killed. After she heard what happened, she sent this message to Elijah, **2** So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them." (I Kings 19:2)

What a contrast between the kingdom of Ahab and Jezebel, and the kingdom of God. Where Ahab and Jezebel lie, steal, and kill to get their way, Jesus becomes a servant, turns the other cheek, and even loves the outcasts and the lowliest of society. Where violence and anger leads the kingdoms of man, love and sacrifice are the calling cards of the kingdom of God.

Did you know that for the first 300 years of the Jesus movement, his followers were largely pacifist (anti-violent)? It wasn't until Constantine made Christianity legal in 313 AD, then

Emperor Theudas made Christianity the official religion of the state in 380 AD, that Christianity began “waging war” in the name of God.

Yesterday was Juneteenth, the day we recognize the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States. In honor of that day, and with one of my favorite and impactful quotes, I want to share how a 20th century Civil Rights leader explained what it looks like to live in the kingdom of God and fight the evil in our world. In a sermon he gave at his church in 1957, King said, “Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

The lines are pretty clear between the kingdoms of man and the kingdom of God. One kingdom leads to more hate and more violence and more power-grabbing, whereas the other leads to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Which kingdom will you live in?

- 1. Do you think followers of Jesus are ever justified in causing violence? Why or why not?**
 - 2. Because everything incarnates, what do you feel you are giving your allegiances to in your life right now, and what kind of fruit is it producing in you?**
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WEEK 3: FRIDAY - A kingdom stuck in a vacuum - 1 Kings 22:4-9

4 Then he turned to Jehoshaphat and asked, “Will you join me in battle to recover Ramoth-gilead?”

Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, “Why, of course! You and I are as one. My troops are your troops, and my horses are your horses.”**5** Then Jehoshaphat added, “But first let’s find out what the Lord says.”

6 So the king of Israel summoned the prophets, about 400 of them, and asked them, “Should I go to war against Ramoth-gilead, or should I hold back?”

They all replied, “Yes, go right ahead! The Lord will give the king victory.”

7 But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not also a prophet of the Lord here? We should ask him the same question.”

8 The king of Israel replied to Jehoshaphat, “There is one more man who could consult the Lord for us, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but trouble for me! His name is Micaiah son of Imlah.”

Jehoshaphat replied, “That’s not the way a king should talk! Let’s hear what he has to say.”

9 So the king of Israel called one of his officials and said, “Quick! Bring Micaiah son of Imlah.”

Another fascinating story with lots we could talk about, but the focus for our time today will be spent on the wisdom of surrounding yourself with people who see things differently than you do; people you admire, and people not afraid to say something that challenges your opinions or beliefs.

As I Kings 22 starts, we learn that there had been some peace in Israel, especially concerning the kingdom of Aram. However, they soon discover a town that once belonged to Judah, that was still inhabited by the people of Aram even though they had been defeated.

Ahab wants to take it back, reaches out to Jehosaphat, King of Judah, for help. Jehosaphat had shown himself to be a king who at least sought God's counsel before acting, and he expresses that same characteristic here. He wants to make sure that taking back this town of Ramoth-gilead is the right thing to do.

In response to Jehosaphat's request, Ahab summons his "court appointed" prophets, to get their wisdom. The problem with court appointed prophets is that they are notorious for simply agreeing with what the king wants to do anyway. They cared more about the king's opinion of them, and his ability to take care of them, than they did being loyal to Yahweh and sending a message from Yahweh even if it wasn't popular.

As expected, these court appointed prophets agree with their king, but Jehosaphat sees through the charade. He says, "Is there not also a prophet of the Lord here? We should ask him the same question?"

We're told there is one, Micaiah, but the king hates him because he "never prophesies anything but trouble for me!" And that's how Jehosaphat knows Micaiah works for Yahweh and not the king. It's not that Yahweh is going to go against you all the time, it's that Yahweh is going to speak truth because that's who Yahweh is, and He'll do so even if it's not what you most want to hear. Why? Because he cares more about the person you are becoming, than the comfort you enjoy.

A mentor friend of mine once said, "Truth isn't fragile." The context is, truth doesn't have to be defended or else it collapses. Truth is true whether I defend it or not. I mention that here because it's important to be humble enough to listen to those who have a different opinion, or ideology, or even set of beliefs than you. We grow most when we are challenged, and certainly, growing hurts, it's uncomfortable, even painful at times (I speak from experience, I grew 6 inches in 6 months in high school and believe me, it hurt). But growth is for our own good, and a variety of voices and opinions can make us stronger when we are willing to surrender and submit to he who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Ahab wanted simply to surround himself with people who looked like him, talked like him, thought like him, and encouraged him, whether he was right or wrong. His approach to life got him killed.

Jesus once told us, “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” (John 10:10) Sometimes, to get that rich and satisfying life, we have to learn some hard lessons, we have to be challenged, held accountable, but we also have to trust that God has only our best in mind. I pray we could trust him in our journey, more than we trust ourselves or those that only agree with us all the time.

- 1. When was the last time someone, or something (a position, a book, an idea) challenged your previous understanding or way of thinking? What happened as a result of that challenge?**
 - 2. Who are the people you surround yourself with that you trust, even if they see things differently than you?**
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BROKEN KINGDOMS

Daily Study Week 4 - King Hezekiah

WEEK 4: MONDAY - Forgetting What is Behind - 2 Kings 18:1-7

1 Hezekiah son of Ahaz began to rule over Judah in the third year of King Hoshea's reign in Israel. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. 3 He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, just as his ancestor David had done. 4 He removed the pagan shrines, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He broke up the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the people of Israel had been offering sacrifices to it. The bronze serpent was called Nehushtan.

5 Hezekiah trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. 6 He remained faithful to the Lord in everything, and he carefully obeyed all the commands the Lord had given Moses. 7 So the Lord was with him, and Hezekiah was successful in everything he did. He revolted against the king of Assyria and refused to pay him tribute.

I don't know if you've ever thought about what you want on your epitaph/grave stone, but I have. When I die, I hope people remember me as someone who loved Jesus, his family, and life, helping others find joy and laughter along the Way. Fairly simple, but it helps put my life into focus.

But my epitaph is nothing compared to Hezekiah's. "There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before or after his time. He remained faithful to the lord in everything, he carefully obeyed, the Lord was with him." I mean, I don't think I could even stand anywhere near this guy's shadow.

What a contrast to last week's king, Ahab, whom we were told did more evil than any of the kings before him. Talk about polar opposites.

Hezekiah's father was King Ahaz, but according to 2 Kings 16, they were cut from different cloths. Ahaz "followed the example of the kings of Israel, even sacrificing his own son in the fire..." Suffice to say, Ahaz was not a good man, let alone king.

During the course of this week, we'll see that Hezekiah's greatest strength was his dependence upon God, but he wasn't perfect. If the kings of old teach us anything, its that we are badly in need of Jesus. But Hezekiah did a lot of good and we can learn a lot from him, even if his family line wasn't the best.

In fact, there is something familiar to me in Hezekiah's family history. I know I've shared before, but my McCoy family history has a lot of blood and violence in it, for at least two generations. In my office, I have a picture of my grandfather McCoy on the wall. I never met him; he died

when my dad was 16 from complications from black lung (a coal miner's disease) after having been in a cave in. In the picture, my grandfather is reading his Bible. To me, it's a reminder that we don't have to be what we were, change is possible. My grandfather wanted his family to be different, followers of Jesus, not people of violence.

Hezekiah chose a different path than his father, and from his father's father, and his father's father. He chose to let God be the author of his story, and to let God lead through Him to the people of Judah. Maybe you and I, no matter our past life or choices, or even our family history, could let God rewrite our lives as well, allowing us to live here on out as blessings for and reflections of Jesus.

13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14, NIV)

- 1. Is there anything from your past (history, family, choices) that you'd like to leave in the past?**
 - 2. How do we break family cycles to help bring about something new for ourselves, for our families, for our communities?**
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WEEK 4: TUESDAY - A Kingdom Reform - 2 Chronicles 29:1-11

29 Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became the king of Judah, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. 2 He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, just as his ancestor David had done.

3 In the very first month of the first year of his reign, Hezekiah reopened the doors of the Temple of the Lord and repaired them. 4 He summoned the priests and Levites to meet him at the courtyard east of the Temple. 5 He said to them, "Listen to me, you Levites! Purify yourselves, and purify the Temple of the Lord, the God of your ancestors. Remove all the defiled things from the sanctuary. 6 Our ancestors were unfaithful and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God. They abandoned the Lord and his dwelling place; they turned their backs on him. 7 They also shut the doors to the Temple's entry room, and they snuffed out the lamps. They stopped burning incense and presenting burnt offerings at the sanctuary of the God of Israel.

8 "That is why the Lord's anger has fallen upon Judah and Jerusalem. He has made them an object of dread, horror, and ridicule, as you can see with your own eyes. 9 Because of this, our fathers have been killed in battle, and our sons and daughters and wives have been captured. 10 But now I will make a covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us. 11 My sons, do not neglect your duties any longer! The Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence, to minister to him, and to lead the people in worship and present offerings to him."

Doing a deep-dive into the life of Queen Abijah, we learn that she actually remained faithful to God even though her husband, Ahaz, was not. Likely, it was her influence in Hezekiah's life that helped him become the kind of king who put God first. Oh the power of a Godly mother.

Even at the age of 25, Hezekiah knew all the evil that his father had done, and the impact it had on his people. He knew what he had to do first, if the kingdom in his time was going to fair better. He had to put God first. What happened from there is called Hezekiah's reform.

Hezekiah seeks to root out the evil that his father, and others before him, had let prevail. He went back to God's Word, he restored the temple and removed anything put in Judah to honor the gods, instead of honoring the one true God, Yahweh.

And I love that he brings the priests and Levites in to meet with him. Hezekiah knows he can't be the only one to bring about the reform. He's going to need other workers to till the soil, to put God first, to help the people repent of their evil ways. He recruits the priests and Levites to his reform by reminding them what God had chosen them to do in the first place; "to stand in his presence, to minister to him, and to lead the people in worship and present offerings to him."

Sometimes, we too have to be reminded of our call.

I've been thinking about this often, as of late, as it pertains to my journey planting a Crosswalk church in Portland. I moved to Portland in June of 2020, just a few months into the pandemic. I joined forces with a group of people that were hungry and passionate to bring a Jesus-centric form of worship and community to the greater Portland area. We worked hard, we stayed up late, we poured everything we had into it.

And here we are, almost 6 years later, and God has blessed. Our community has grown, lives have been impacted, people have given their hearts to Jesus, and I know in my heart of hearts that God's just getting started with us.

However, I also know some of us are tired. It can be easy to get distracted by the budget, or the building situation, or the need for volunteers. We can get so caught up doing all this good *for* Jesus, that we forget to do any of it *with* Jesus.

So from time to time, we have to come away with Jesus for a while and remember our story, our call, and the incredible opportunity we have when we partner with Him. We have to sit around a living room and share the stories of lives changed. We have to take time to dream and remind each other that God is still moving. We have to help each other keep the main thing the main thing. And that main thing, is Jesus? That call? To love well. Let us never forget His call.

- 1. If you have given your life to Jesus, when did you do it and what was the catalyst that drove you to make that decision?**
- 2. What about your community of faith? What draws you there and what might you need to be reminded of when it comes to serving in that community?**

WEEK 4: WEDNESDAY - A Kingdom Under Fire - 2 Kings 19:14–19

14 After Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it, he went up to the Lord's Temple and spread it out before the Lord. **15** And Hezekiah prayed this prayer before the Lord: "O Lord, God of Israel, you are enthroned between the mighty cherubim! You alone are God of all the kingdoms of the earth. You alone created the heavens and the earth. **16** Bend down, O Lord, and listen! Open your eyes, O Lord, and see! Listen to Sennacherib's words of defiance against the living God.

17 "It is true, Lord, that the kings of Assyria have destroyed all these nations. **18** And they have thrown the gods of these nations into the fire and burned them. But of course the Assyrians could destroy them! They were not gods at all—only idols of wood and stone shaped by human hands. **19** Now, O Lord our God, rescue us from his power; then all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you alone, O Lord, are God."

The letter that King Hezekiah received was from the King of Assyria, who had been laying siege to the known world for some time now. No one was able to stop them. What Assyria was telling Hezekiah was that they were next on their list.

Hezekiah's response is critical. He doesn't immediately call his generals together and begin planning how to defend themselves; rather, he went to the temple and prayed.

As part of his prayer, it's clear that Hezekiah isn't hiding from the threat, nor is he unaware of how serious it is. He knows what has happened to those that Assyria has conquered. Hezekiah also knows he alone can't find such a powerful force. He is simply not enough, but he knows the one who is. So he prays.

Hezekiah in this moment reminds me a lot of the story of Nehemiah, after Nehemiah had learned that the city he loved, Jerusalem, was still in ruins. Nehemiah had been weeping, but he also had to do his job, which was the cupbearer of the king. However, to go into the court of the king and not look your best was usually a death sentence. If you didn't look good and healthy, you were probably poisoned by the enemy, so they'd kill you and get another cupbearer.

But Nehemiah must have been a person of good character, because the king doesn't do what kings usually do in this moment. The king asked Nehemiah what was wrong. When Nehemiah told him about Jerusalem and his sadness over it's condition, the king responded by saying, "Well, how can I help you?" The king was basically giving Nehemiah a blank check. How does Nehemiah respond to this incredibly gracious question?

"4...With a prayer to the God of heaven, 5 I replied..." (Nehemiah 2:4b-5a, NLT)

I want to be this kind of person, a person whose first reflex is to go to God in prayer. Instead, and far too often, I try to do what I can to fix a problem, or I immediately begin to worry over all

the “what ifs...” But the few times I have been able to go to God in prayer first, God always reminds me first and foremost that He loves me. He then reminds me of how He is always and forever more than able to do immeasurably more than all I ask or imagine. Then, in all that, He simply whispers in my ear, “Trust me, I got you.”

Now that doesn’t mean my problems all go away, but it does change how I respond to my problems. It does change my attitude. It does change who I depend on.

So may you and I learn to follow Hezekiah’s lead; may we lean into prayer first, most, always, and see what God does in us whatever happens to the world around us.

- 1. Are you a person who turns to God first, or are you a problem solver, trying everything you can think of and then if not of that works out, you turn to prayer (I too often am the latter)?**
 - 2. How can we, as a community of faith, help encourage each other to turn to God first, as opposed to trying to fix all our problems on our own?**
 - 3. What is one thing you need to take to God in prayer right now?**
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WEEK 4: THURSDAY - 2 Kings 20:1-6

1 *About that time Hezekiah became deathly ill, and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to visit him. He gave the king this message: “This is what the Lord says: Set your affairs in order, for you are going to die. You will not recover from this illness.”*

2 *When Hezekiah heard this, he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord,*

3 *“Remember, O Lord, how I have always been faithful to you and have served you single-mindedly, always doing what pleases you.” Then he broke down and wept bitterly.*

4 *But before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, this message came to him from the Lord:*

5 *“Go back to Hezekiah, the leader of my people. Tell him, ‘This is what the Lord, the God of your ancestor David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you, and three days from now you will get out of bed and go to the Temple of the Lord. **6** I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my own honor and for the sake of my servant David.’”*

I don’t know if you’ve ever sat with someone, or been the person on the receiving end, when terminally bad news came their way. Talk about a roller coaster of emotions from shock to disbelief to feeling shattered and sad, and the list goes on.

Again, I’m impressed that Hezekiah’s first response, like a reflex, is to turn to God and pray. Interestingly, he doesn’t specifically ask for healing, he just asks God to remember him. And notice that after the prayer, he’s not confident that he’ll be healed. Instead, he breaks down and weeps. Wouldn’t you?

Now, I'm not going to presume to know why God interceded for Hezekiah, but so far he hasn't interceded and healed my friends daughter, or my other friends wife, or the other countless individuals I know that have either passed from, or are struggling with, terminal illnesses. All I can do in this moment is learn something from Hezekiah's turning to the Lord, as well as God's response.

God said, I have heard you, and I have seen your tears. I do believe with all my heart that whether God chooses to physically heal us or not, that he always hears us, and he see's our tears. Those same tears are the ones we read about at the beginning of our new stories with God, when we're told, 4 "He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Revelation 21:4, NLT)

Whether God chooses to heal or not, I know that God hates when His children hurt. He hates it so much that He came to this earth and laid down His life so that one day, He could be the one to wipe those tears from our eyes. God risked everything, and endured more pain than we can possibly imagine, in order to restore us to His side.

In the meantime, I know God hears us, and I know God sees our tears, and though there are a lot of other things I don't know; I do know God hears, see's, and loves beyond measure. And I do know that a time will come when no one gets sick anymore, and the pain caused by our own sin? God will wipe those tears from our eyes. And that, my friends, will be a really good day.

- 1. Is there anyone in your life right now that you've been praying over, wondering if God hears you?**
- 2. How can you and I keep praying for those loved ones, especially when we don't see the results we want?**
- 3. How do we remind ourselves of the end explained in Revelation 21, even when current life circumstances are hard?**

WEEK 4: FRIDAY - Future Generations - 2 Kings 20:16-19

16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Listen to this message from the Lord: 17 The time is coming when everything in your palace—all the treasures stored up by your ancestors until now—will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. 18 Some of your very own sons will be taken away into exile. They will become eunuchs who will serve in the palace of Babylon's king."

19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "This message you have given me from the Lord is good." For the king was thinking, "At least there will be peace and security during my lifetime."

This is a hard one for me. On one side, I totally get Hezekiah's response to this message from the Lord. Bad things are coming for future generations, but for now, in Hezekiah's time, it's going to be ok.

On the other hand, I wonder why Hezekiah didn't immediately turn to prayer, and lead the people in prayer, like he had done in the past? Why is he ok just to accept their fate now? Is it because he won't personally experience the fallout? If so, what about the future generations? Isn't a good leader someone who wants to leave a better world for their children, and hopefully their children's children?

Maybe Hezekiah was at a point in his life where he was ready to accept any good news. Maybe he was tired. Maybe he was in a season where his prayer life wasn't what it used to be. Whatever the case, the adage that comes to mind is that as good of a king as Hezekiah was, he wasn't perfect.

Part of the reason I've given much of my life to working with young adults, and certain other ministries, is my own drive to want to hand over a better church to my children and grandchildren. I want them to find the Jesus I found in my 30's, but much sooner in their lives, in grace-filled communities that are daily engaged in bringing more of heaven to earth. If all I do is try to simply make things better for me, then I feel like I've failed at the call of Christ, which is to serve others and make the world better...for them.

So though I can understand Hezekiah, I think he missed an opportunity to once again turn to prayer, and lead his people to their knees. Maybe it would have changed what happened with Babylon, maybe it wouldn't, but one thing is certain, it would have helped to create another generation that sought God first.

- 1. What kind of church would you like to leave for future generations?**
 - 2. What is something you are doing, or that you could start doing, to help obtain that goal?**
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BROKEN KINGDOMS

Daily Study Week 5 - King Josiah

WEEK 5: MONDAY - 2 Kings 22:8–11 (NLT)

"Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the court secretary, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the Lord's Temple!' Then Shaphan read it to the king. When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair."

In 1947, a Bedouin teenager named Muhammad edh-Dhib was wandering the cliffs near the Dead Sea looking for a lost goat. Bored, he threw a rock into a cave and heard something shatter. So he climbed in to investigate, and found clay jars, and inside them, linen-wrapped scrolls that turned out to be the oldest surviving manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. He wasn't on a spiritual quest, he was just a kid chasing a goat and throwing rocks and he stumbled on The Word of God, hiding in ordinary rocky ground.

That's sort of what's happening in 2 Kings 22. A bit of background helps here. By the time we reach this chapter, Israel has been through generations of kings — most of them bad, a few of them catastrophically bad. The people have drifted so far from the God who brought them out of Egypt that other gods have moved into the temple itself. Altars to foreign deities, pagan rituals, the whole thing. It hasn't happened overnight. It's been a slow, generational erosion, each king nudging things a little further in the wrong direction, until eventually nobody alive can quite remember what faithfulness was supposed to look like.

Into this mess is born Josiah. He becomes king at eight years old, and somewhere in his teenage years something shifts in him. He starts caring about God and one day he orders the grown ups to restore the temple. And it's during that restoration project, while workers are patching walls and clearing out decades of neglect, that the high priest finds something in the rubble. The Book of the Law, the actual words God gave Moses. The document that was supposed to be shaping everything. Just sitting there in the dust. It would be like finding the declaration of independence in a dumpster behind a Chipotle.

I rang my sister a while back, nothing significant, just one of those calls you keep meaning to make. Her first words were "Andreas, it's been ages!" I laughed, said something like "I know, I know," and we got talking. But after the call I sat there thinking, has it really been ages? I pulled up our messages. It had been months. Actual months. And the strange thing was I hadn't noticed. I hadn't decided not to call her, and hadn't been avoiding her. Life just kept moving and somehow she'd drifted from the foreground into somewhere further back without me registering it.

I think that's what Josiah is reckoning with when he hears the scroll read aloud. The tearing of his robes isn't a cringey performance, it's someone suddenly seeing the gap between where they are and where they thought they were. It's not that the kingdom had collapsed, nobody had staged a coup against God. But it was the kind of drift that happens when you're busy keeping things running and you assume the things that matter will keep mattering without any particular attention.

The grace in this story is that the scroll was still there, waiting to be discovered. God's voice hadn't disappeared, it had just been waiting for someone to stumble across it again in the middle of ordinary work. And the fact that it could be found at all, that's the thing that keeps me. Broken things begin to heal the moment honesty arrives. Not perfectly, not instantly, but honestly.

- 1. What truths about God or yourself might have been quietly buried under the pace of life?**
 - 2. Where have you been going through the motions without reconnecting to what matters most?**
 - 3. What would it look like to rediscover God's voice in your life this week?**
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WEEK 5: TUESDAY - 2 Kings 22:18–19 (NLT)

"You were sorry and humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I said against this city... You tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. And I have indeed heard you, says the Lord."

For years, Lance Armstrong, seven time Tour de France winner, didn't just deny the doping allegations, he went after people. Journalists, former teammates, anyone who got close to the truth. He sued them and publicly humiliated them. He called them liars with the kind of confidence that made you wonder if maybe he was telling the truth after all. The defensiveness was so total, so aggressive, that people started to wonder "maybe we've just got it wrong."

And then in 2013 he sat down with Oprah and said yes to everything. What's interesting isn't the confession itself, it's the years before it. All that energy spent managing the story, redirecting scrutiny, attacking the question rather than answering it. It's exhausting just to think about, and the whole time, the truth was simply waiting.

Which is what makes Josiah so amazing. When the scroll is read aloud, when he hears how far the kingdom, his Kingdom, has drifted from what God intended, he doesn't redirect. He doesn't question who found it or why it's being read now or what the political implications might be. He

tears his robes and weeps publicly, the text makes it obvious that something just breaks open in him.

God's response to Josiah is almost startling in its simplicity: He says *"I have heard you."* Not "you fixed it," not "you reversed the damage." Josiah's tender heart was enough to change the trajectory that his Kingdom was on.

In my research on differentiation of self (a measure of emotional self leadership) one of the consistent patterns is how hard it is for leaders to stay open when truth pushes back against them. The instinct is to harden, to protect the self-image, manage the exposure, control the narrative. And that instinct isn't stupidity. It's actually pretty understandable. But it closes something down that becomes very difficult to reopen, and the longer it stays closed the more energy it takes to keep it that way.

Armstrong spent years in that place. Josiah spent maybe thirty seconds. He heard the words, felt the weight of them, and just let them do what they needed to do. I think that's what Scripture means by a tender heart, it's someone who cries easily when watching Rom Com's, but someone who remains permeable to truth even when truth is costly. Someone who can still be reached. And it turns out that's exactly what God was looking for.

- 1. When was the last time God's truth genuinely moved your heart rather than just your mind?**
 - 2. Where are you tempted to stay guarded instead of tender?**
 - 3. What might it look like today to let God meet you in honest humility?**
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WEEK 5: WEDNESDAY - 2 Kings 23:1-3 (NLT)

"The king took his place of authority beside the pillar and renewed the covenant in the Lord's presence... The king and all the people pledged themselves to this covenant."

A member of my church told me once that the worst day of her life wasn't when she found out her son was an addict. It was the day she finally said no to him. He'd done well for a stretch, long enough that everyone had started exhaling. And then he slipped. She did what she'd always done, what any mother would do, caught him before he hit the ground. For years that's how it went, recovery, addiction, recovery on and on. Until someone who had gone through it themselves, finally said to her, with more gentleness than it probably sounds: he has to hit rock bottom before anything real can change. You keeping him from the bottom is keeping him from the bottom. So she said no with a broken heart, and he ended up on the streets.

She prayed every single day for years not knowing if he was alive. The not knowing had a particular quality to it she still couldn't quite describe. And then one day he came back he wasn't fixed, or suddenly transformed, but he was ready in a way he'd never been before. And slowly, over a long time, with a lot of help something real changed in him and he pointed his life in the right direction. What she did was right and necessary. But the external act and the internal transformation happened years apart, with a lot of suffering in between.

I think about that story when I read this passage. Josiah does something extraordinary. He gathers the entire nation, reads the scroll publicly, renews the covenant, and launches one of the most comprehensive reform movements the kingdom has ever seen. Idols are removed pagan altars are torn down and corrupt practices are dismantled. It's sweeping and real and it matters in the history of Israel.

And Scripture just quietly lets it sit there without resolving it. Because a few chapters later, after Josiah is gone, the nation drifts back. Which raises the uncomfortable question of how deep the renewal actually went, not in Josiah, but in the people who stood there and pledged themselves to the covenant that day. He could tear down the altars, but he couldn't tear down the desire for them.

Reform can change structures faster than it changes hearts. Behavioural change without internal transformation tends not to hold, you can restructure the external system, but if the brokenness underneath hasn't shifted, the old patterns find their way back through different doors. The mother couldn't change her son by managing his circumstances any longer. The change had to come from somewhere inside him that she simply couldn't reach.

Josiah does what good leaders do, he addresses what he can see and creates conditions for renewal. But most of us have done our own version of this. You make the change, have the conversation, set the boundary, and something does shift. But sometimes there's a else, a thing underneath you haven't quite got to yet. You've changed the outside but the inside hasn't caught up, or maybe you haven't let it. I think most of us have a version of this somewhere in our lives. Something we keep coming back to. Something we still haven't been fully honest with ourselves about. The external change matters, it just sometimes lets us feel like we've done the work when there's still something harder waiting a little further down. Sitting with what's in that gap is genuinely uncomfortable. Most of us would rather fix the next visible thing and keep moving

- 1. Where in your life are you focusing on external change without addressing deeper roots?**
- 2. What habits or patterns might God be inviting you to examine beneath the surface?**
- 3. What would true renewal, not just reform, look like for you right now?**

WEEK 5: THURSDAY - 2 Kings 23:25 (NLT)

"Never before had there been a king like Josiah, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and soul and strength... and there has never been a king like him since."

A friend told me about her grandmother, someone she didn't particularly like growing up. Seemed cold, a bit harsh, not the warm grandmother type. It was only later, as an adult, that she found out her grandmother had raised seventeen children. Seventeen. And suddenly everything she'd written off as meanness started to look completely different. The sharpness was efficiency. The distance was someone who'd learned to ration her emotional energy across an almost unimaginable load. My friend said it changed how she saw her entirely, like she'd been reading the same person in a completely different translation.

I think about that story when I read this verse. Because the commendation Josiah receives is the kind that usually only makes sense in retrospect, when you know the full weight of what someone was carrying. This is one of the most remarkable things Scripture says about anyone. And what's striking is what it doesn't say. It doesn't say he was the most successful king, or the most powerful, or the one who finally fixed everything. It says he turned to God with everything he had, it's an incredible commendation. That's what gets remembered.

And then, if you keep reading, you find something that takes a moment to sit with. Even Josiah's extraordinary faithfulness doesn't reverse the long-term consequences of generations of drift. The exile still comes and the kingdom still falls. He does everything right and the system is simply too broken, the damage too deep, the momentum of generations too strong.

I've sat with people who carry a version of this weight. Parents who were present and faithful and watched their kids walk away from faith. People who showed up with integrity for years inside institutions that were too compromised to be changed from the inside. There's a particular kind of grief in that, the grief of faithfulness without resolution.

But I think Scripture is doing something careful here. The writer doesn't record Josiah's story as a tragedy. He records it as a commendation as if the wholehearted devotion itself is the thing, not what it produced, not what it prevented, just the orientation of a life toward God in the middle of circumstances he couldn't ultimately control.

Friends, sometimes the most faithful thing you can do is keep showing up honestly in a situation that isn't going to resolve the way you hoped. Most people around you won't see it clearly until much later, if ever. Josiah didn't know how his story ended. He just kept turning toward God with what he had. And two and a half thousand years later, that's still what gets said about him.

1. **How do you define success in your spiritual life, by results or by faithfulness?**
 2. **Where might God be inviting you to stay wholehearted even without immediate outcomes?**
 3. **What helps you keep a tender heart in a hard environment?**
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WEEK 5: FRIDAY - 2 Kings 23:26–27 (NLT)

"Even so, the Lord was very angry with Judah because of all the wicked things Manasseh had done... The Lord said, 'I will also banish Judah from my presence just as I have banished Israel.'"

I'm hopeless when it comes to cars. A few years ago, I tried to replace a broken taillight. I watched the YouTube video, it looked straightforward enough, so I went out to the car feeling confident. I got the housing off fine and then there was a connector that simply would not budge. I tried everything, different angles, more force, less force, a screwdriver, watching three more videos to make sure I was doing it right. An hour later I was standing in the driveway having made things slightly worse than when I started. I ended up taking it to a mechanic who sorted it in about four minutes. Some things look fixable from the outside until you get in there and discover the problem is further down than you can reach.

That's where Josiah's story ends because after everything, the rediscovery of the scroll, the tears, the covenant renewal, the sweeping reforms, scripture lands with a heavy conclusion. We realize that the damage done by generations before him runs too deep to reverse. The exile to another country is still going to happen. One faithful king, however wholehearted, cannot carry the weight of that much accumulated and broken history.

This isn't a critique of Josiah. It's just honest about how far leadership can reach and where it runs out. America spent decades declaring a war on drugs, changing laws, increasing sentences, funding enforcement, cycling through administrations that each promised to finally fix it. And the overdose numbers kept climbing. Because the legislation was addressing the supply while the despair that created the demand went largely untouched. You can change a law without changing what people love. You can reshape behaviour without touching the thing underneath that keeps driving it.

Most of us have felt this somewhere, perhaps for you it's a family pattern that keeps reasserting itself across generations no matter how much therapy or good intention gets applied. A wound in a community that keeps reopening despite everyone's genuine desire to move on and bury it. You do the right things, make real progress, and yet underneath it all there's something that doesn't shift because it's further down than you can reach.

So Josiah's story doesn't end with the satisfactory resolution of a 30min soap opera, but with longing. If even the best king, the most wholehearted, the most sincere, the most courageous cannot ultimately heal a broken kingdom, then something more is needed than better leadership or more sincere reform. Something that doesn't just change what people do but reaches whatever it is inside them that keeps pulling them back.

Josiah, like all stories in scripture, points forward without knowing it, toward a different kind of king, one who doesn't just rediscover the law but fulfills it from the inside out, one who doesn't just remove idols but slowly, painstakingly reshapes what people actually desire. The whole long arc of this story is leaning toward something Josiah couldn't provide but couldn't stop needing. Broken things need more than good leadership. They need resurrection. And that's a different kind of work entirely.

- 1. Where in your life have you been working at the surface level of a problem that might have deeper roots than you've been willing to look at?**
 - 2. Is there something you've been waiting for a person, a leader, or an institution to fix, that might actually need a different kind of healing altogether?**
 - 3. What would it mean for you personally to stop trying to manage the broken thing and instead bring it to the one who can reach further down than you can?**
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