



David Petraeus was one of the most successful and well-decorated military leaders in our nation's history. His education was top notch: four years at West Point, where he graduated in the top 5% of his class; Ranger School; the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College; and Princeton University, where he earned both a master's and a Ph.D. in international relations. He went on to command a division to liberate Iraq. He steered the course for America's exit from Afghanistan. From his study of the Vietnam War, he developed the "Petraeus doctrine," an effective counter-insurgency strategy that combines troop surges, public relations with locals, media management and political savvy.

Then, after 37 years of service in the military, he became head of the CIA. At his retirement ceremony from the military, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff called Petraeus one of the nation's great battle captains and compared him with Ulysses S. Grant, John Pershing and Dwight Eisenhower. Some have even said President Obama appointed him to the CIA's top spot to keep him from running for President.

So it was quite a shock when he resigned after it became clear he had an affair with his official biographer, Paula Broadwell. Further revelations, of course, have revealed a lifestyle for not just him but other Generals living more like rock stars than public servants.

It's hard to imagine what life is like now for David Petraeus, but I'm sure it's not a lot of fun. And of course he's just one of many people we've read about who have lost jobs, friends, families, wealth and most of all their reputation as a result of poor decisions.

We've been studying the life of King Solomon of Israel for the past few months and today we'll see that we can add him to the list of men and women who've had a great fall and lost almost everything. The Bible is ruthlessly honest about the failure of some of its greatest heroes and the story of Solomon is no exception. So today we're going to look at this great man's fall and ask the question, what happened? Nobody wants to end up like that; nobody **plans** to end up like that. So where did he go wrong and how can we avoid his mistakes?

Solomon's Path to Idolatry

This chapter can be divided up into two sections. In verses 1–8 we see the path that led to Solomon's downfall. In the rest of the chapter the Lord appears to Solomon and pronounces

judgment and then we see Solomon dealing with some of the consequences of his choices. We're just going to look at the first section this week; next week we'll look at the rest. Let's start by reading of the path that led to his downfall.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.

He married Pharaoh's daughter

What's important to see here is that Solomon didn't go from being a godly, wise king to a full blown idol worshipper overnight. There was a progression. We already saw back in chapter 3 that early on in his reign Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. Although God had forbid such alliances for his people, I'm sure Solomon felt this was the politically expedient thing to do. I mean, isn't this what you have to do to survive in the world of real politics? And Solomon decided early on to play the game, despite what God had said. At this point, I doubt very much he loved Pharaoh's daughter. This was a political move, a pragmatic move, not a romantic one.

He loved many foreign women

We don't know how much time went by, but soon Solomon took this to another level. Verse 1 says, "**he loved many foreign women,**" and it lists all the surrounding nations they represent: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites. The writer reminds us the

Lord had expressly forbidden Solomon from doing this because eventually they'd turn his heart after other gods. By the way, the issue with foreign wives wasn't their ethnicity. The Bible has no problem with marrying someone of a different ethnicity. The issue is their faith. The Bible does warn us against marrying outside of our faith because of what it will eventually **do** to our faith. That's the issue here.

But Solomon at this point must have thought to himself, "I can handle this. I can love these women and still love God. Nothing could ever turn my heart from God." He might have even hoped he could influence them to come to know **his** God. So he kept up the practice and you can see here over time he accumulated a lot of wives—700, not to mention 300 concubines! That's like a "kinda wife." Rob Hall said to me this week, "Poor Solomon. That's a lot of talking!" Can you imagine Solomon waking up in the morning and going into the bathroom and seeing 700 pairs of stockings hanging from the walls!

But the bottom line here is Solomon was fooling himself. Notice it says **"he held fast to them in love."** That word "hold fast" means to cling to someone. Over and over again God told his people to cling or hold fast to Him (Dt 10:20). Way back in chapter 3 it said **"Solomon loved the Lord"** but now he loved his foreign wives. So what started as a pragmatic, political decision or compromise became something much more; something that got a hold of his heart; his affections. And it's no surprise that the next thing it says is **"his wives led him astray."**

As he grew old, his heart was divided

This leads to a third step in the progression. It took place when Solomon grew old. Now he's not just letting his wives practice their religion but he's actually worshipping their gods. In other words, now **he's** practicing **their** religion! Of course, he's still worshipping his God, but he's now got room in his life for other gods. He's like a lot of people today. It's like, "It's no big deal. Don't they all pretty much teach the same thing? It doesn't matter **what** you believe as long as you believe in something and it keeps you grounded."

But notice it says he "followed" Ashtoreth, Molek and Chemosh. Ashtoreth was a fertility goddess. Worshipping her included legalized prostitution. The Ammonites worshipped Molek by sacrificing infants on their altars. Twice it says these gods were "detestable." That's a pretty strong word, don't you think? So now the guy who built the Temple of God in Jerusalem is building places of worship for them. Solomon, the great builder-king, now has the plans for **their** temple spread across his desk. And just to show how bold-faced he was about it, notice where he built one of those chapels: on a hill east of Jerusalem. In other words, facing the Temple of God on what we know as the Mount of Olives. It's like, "Where do you want to go to church today, honey?" "I don't know. Hey, we can go to the 9:00 service at the

church of Molek and then just hop over to Yahweh's church for the 11:00 service!"

So there you have it: Solomon's great fall. As I thought about it this week, somehow my mind went back to a game I used to play with my kids. It's called Jenga. Do you know that game? You start with a tower made up of a bunch of rectangular blocks. During the game, you take turns removing a block from the tower and balancing it on top. So every time you pull a block out you create a taller and more unstable tower as the game goes on. The game ends and you lose when the tower collapses after you pull out a block and add it to the top.

Solomon's been playing a game of spiritual Jenga. How many blocks of his commitment to God can he pull out before the whole tower collapses? When you start removing blocks and putting them where they don't belong, sooner or later, you're going to crash.

As Your Heart Goes, So Goes Your Life

What strikes me about Solomon's fall most of all is that it was a matter of the heart. That word "heart" appears five times in verses 2–4. **"They will surely turn your hearts after other gods"** (v. 2). **"His wives turned his heart after other gods"** (v. 3). **"His heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been"** (v. 4). Keep in mind the Bible doesn't use "heart" the way we do to refer just to emotions or feelings. That's part of it, but the Bible has a more comprehensive view of the heart; it means not just our feelings but our mind and our will. Jesus talked a lot about the heart. He said it's from within, out of a person's heart, that evil comes (Mark 7:20-23). The heart is the control center of our lives.

Long before Solomon was building a chapel for Molek his heart had turned. Remember how Solomon asked God for a **"wise and discerning (listening) heart"** (1 Kings 3:9). God was pleased with that request. Solomon started out with a holy affection. We saw that in the way he governed, in the way he built the Temple, and in the way he prayed. He'd kept the first commandment: **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart"** (Deut 6:5). But little by little, he began removing small blocks, and everything looked great for awhile. As a matter of fact, the tower got taller and taller. But soon it collapsed under its own weight. You see, Solomon teaches us that as your heart goes, so goes your life. It's that simple: as your heart goes, so goes your life. That's why Solomon himself once wrote, **"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"** (Prov 4:23).

So let's talk about some ways we can apply this to our lives. Let me give you four life lessons that flow out of this principle.

Spiritual gifts and blessings do not guarantee a heart for God. Solomon's life is a testimony to that. Think of all the blessings and gifts Solomon had. He had a great role model for a father. David was a great man and he handed his son not just a secure

kingdom but a legacy of faith. He had the privilege of God showing up to him twice. He had the gift of wisdom. He was a great intellect. His breadth of knowledge was amazing. He was a fine writer and skilled philosopher. He had wealth and power and fame. He was even a great blessing to others. Solomon was the last person in the world you'd think would fall.

But here's the deal: the gifts of God can't operate for long apart from a heart for God. You can pull it off for awhile, but sooner or later what you are on the inside will come out and take over. This is a sober warning for anyone who is strongly gifted, because the more gifted we are, the more danger there is that we'll think it's all about us. Even worse, the more gifted we are, the more damage we can do when our hearts turn away.

This is a sober warning for parents. What do you focus more on with your kids—their talents or their character? Are you more concerned about their SAT score or if they're developing a heart for God? Are you more concerned with their batting average or their prayer life? Are you more worried about which college they'll get into or where they'll spend eternity? You know the right answers to those questions, but if I asked your kids what **you** cared most about, what would they say?

Some of you have a great track record of ministry in this church or in our community. But do you know what? Even that doesn't guarantee a heart for God. You can know the Bible inside and out, serve the poor, teach in our Children's Ministry, lead a Community Group, become a Biblical Counselor, but none of that will protect you from spiritual collapse if you let your affections be divided.

Disobeying God's clear commands sets us on a gradual trajectory in which our hearts turn away from him. We've already looked carefully at the gradual progression of Solomon's sin. We've seen he started falling into sin long before he fell into disgrace. It's a lesson for us that we need to tend to the little things in our lives. It's always wrong to lie, even when you tell yourself you're doing it for that person's good. It's always wrong to steal, even when it's just a few extra dollars on your expense report and everyone does it. It's always wrong to lust, even when the show is on network television at 9 pm. It's always wrong to gossip, even when it's part of a prayer request. It's always wrong to drink too much, even when you have a designated driver. And it's always wrong to marry a man or woman who doesn't genuinely know and follow Jesus, even when they're "open" and "supportive" and say they "believe in God."

You see, sin always has a trajectory. If I just take my two fingers and set them together like this they're only about an inch apart at the top. But if you keep extending out the trajectory of those two fingers they'll eventually be miles apart. It's the same way in our relationship with God. It almost always starts with a small

compromise, a minor concession, a brief indulgence, but that can make a huge difference in your eventual destination.

I want you to look at Deuteronomy 17:14–17. *"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us,' be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, 'You are not to go back that way again.' He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold."*

Can you imagine Solomon as a young man saying, "You know, that was written for a different time. This is a new day. Certainly God wants me to defend my country with chariots and horses. And he's the one who promised me all of this wealth. Why shouldn't I just put a little away for a rainy day? And how could I possibly be happy with just one wife?" You see, Solomon never explicitly decided to stop loving God. But the more he compromised, and the more he loved other things, the less he loved God, until one day he wasn't living for God at all.

So take some time and ask yourself the hard questions. What are the areas where I'm dabbling with sin? What are the small choices I'm making now that could lead to a big disaster? Be honest with yourself. Maybe it's something your spouse or your parents or a friend has spoken to you about, but you've blown them off as legalistic or old school or just too controlling. Maybe they're right. Maybe you need to listen.

There is no telling what we might do if our hearts turn away from God. Here's a guy who started out so well. God was very pleased with his request for wisdom. That was a good decision on Solomon's part. It was a good thing to build God's Temple. It was a good thing to dedicate it with earnest prayer. If someone would have told Solomon that down that road he'd be building chapels for Molek, he'd have told them they're crazy. He'd never do that!

But making the right choices in your 20's or 30's doesn't mean you'll make the right choices in your 40's and 50's. Just because I worked out in my 30's doesn't mean I'll be in shape in my 50's, right? In the same way, you can't live off past obedience. You have to choose to follow God anew at every stage of life. You don't choose to follow Christ once, but each and every day. If you don't, there's really no telling what you could do.

Maybe you look at the downfall of other people and think, "Wow! I'd never do that. I couldn't do that to my family. I couldn't do that to my kids. I couldn't do that to my God." But you'd be surprised what you could do. This text is especially significant for

those of us in the last half or even last third of our life. It's so easy to get complacent in our spiritual lives. We've fought so many battles. We've made our marriages work. We've raised our kids. We've built a career. We've served in ministry. Now it's **our** time. So all of a sudden it's no big deal that we only make it to church about once a month. It's no big deal that we're not serving in ministry any longer. It's no big deal that we're doing things now we'd have never let ourselves do ten years ago. This week I heard about a man in his 70's who's been married for decades to the same woman, but now they're getting a divorce. There's a part of me that says that could never happen to me. But if I allow my heart to become divided there's no telling what I could do.

God is always willing to restore a repentant heart. We'll see next week how God speaks to Solomon and tells him that there will be some severe consequences for his actions. Verse 9 says God was angry with Solomon. In v. 11 God tells him, **"I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates"** (v. 11). And later it says that three different times God raised up different adversaries against Solomon. Why did God do that? I believe there was still plenty of opportunity for Solomon to repent and come clean. It's sad because we're never really told what Solomon did with this. We know what his father did, though. The Lord came to David much like he did to Solomon. David had committed not just adultery but murder. And yet the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to reprove him and David immediately confessed his sin. He wrote a Psalm about it. It's like a prayer. Here's part of what he wrote:

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

**For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.**

**Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge**

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

**My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.
(Psalm 51:1-4, 11-12, 17)**

The good news is that God did restore David and he can restore us. It starts with being ruthlessly honest with yourself about the choices you're making now. The good news is this is no surprise to God. The Bible says, **"All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us have turned to his own way."** Our salvation doesn't come from us cleaning up our act, nor does our forgiveness. Salvation and forgiveness come from confessing our sin and putting our faith and trust in the only One who never turned away from God—Jesus. He was obedient even to the point of death, even death on the cross. And through that, he paid the debt for our sin. And so, we keep coming back to him, and regardless of where we've been or what we've done he'll not despise a broken and contrite heart. So take some time this morning and ask the Lord to create in you a clean heart, because as the heart goes, so goes the life.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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