



Today we're continuing our series through The Story. It's our 31-week journey through the Bible. We are seeing that the Bible is really one story about a God who created us out of love and a desire to be in relationship with us. It tells how we've run away from him in our pride and desire to live life on our own terms. But this is a story about a God who won't quit until he wins us back; he even goes so far as to send his only Son to bring us home.

Today we come to chapter 13 of The Story. It's called Solomon: The King Who Had It All.

The story is told of a certain African tribe that learned an easy way to capture ducks in a river. Catching their agile and wary dinner would be a feat indeed, so they formulated a plan.

The tribesmen learned to go upstream, place a pumpkin in the river, and let it slowly float down into the flock of ducks. At first, the cautious fowl would quack and fly away. After all, it wasn't ordinary for pumpkins to float down the river! But the persistent tribesmen would subsequently float another pumpkin into the re-gathered ducks. Again they would scatter, only to return after the strange sphere had passed. Again, the hungry hunters would float another pumpkin. This time the ducks would remain, with a cautious eye on the pumpkin, and with each successive passing, the ducks would become more comfortable, until they finally accepted the pumpkins as a normal part of life.

When the natives saw that the pumpkins no longer bothered the ducks, they hollowed out pumpkins, put them over their heads, and walked into the river. Meandering into the midst of the unsuspecting ducks, they pulled them down one at a time. Roast duck for dinner!

If we don't correct our hearts back to God, it won't be long until we start tolerating "pumpkins." They have a seductive way sneaking into certain areas of our lives. It's a slow fade, one by one until we sink beneath them and drown.

This duck and pumpkin story illustrates the life of Solomon. He started out well. He had it all, but one pumpkin at a time flows into his life. Each time he becomes more and more comfortable with things he was warned could drown him. There is a lot for us to learn in this story. Every one of us has pumpkins floating down our stream that we have become comfortable with that can drown us.

Do you remember Israel's first King? His name was Saul. Well, he didn't work out too well so God raised up a second King and his name was David. David was far from perfect but he had a

genuine desire to know God and put God first. And God blessed his reign. God promised David he'd have a descendent on the throne of Israel.

Here is where we pick up our story this morning. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Kings chapter 1.

"When King David was very old, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him" (1 Kings 1:1).

It's hard to visualize David as an old man who needs to be cared for. As he got older and older, he just couldn't get warm. I remember a few years ago reading this passage and I was thinking, "Oh no. I just can't get warm. I'm getting old." But now I look at this passage and say, "It wasn't that I was getting old. It's that I was living through winters in Wisconsin." I have to say, since moving to California and living through the last two winters, I am not cold. I can get warm. It's like I am growing younger; kind of like that weird *Benjamin Button* movie.

It was normal that the oldest son would become King, but in this case it was more complicated. Several of David's sons had died and his oldest living son, Adonijah, was a jerk who tried to take the throne prematurely. So David appointed his son Solomon by his wife Bathsheba to be King instead.

David said, "There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah" (1:34–35).

It's important to know that this was a time of peace and prosperity in the kingdom. This was a brief period in Israel's history where they were not at war. For 40 years, 970 BC to 930 BC, Solomon sat on the throne of a united Israel where it says, "every man lived under his vine and under his fig tree in the days of Solomon." There was no Gaza Strip, no high concrete walls with gun towers and check points, no threats of annihilation from outside enemies.

"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. 'So be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go...' (2:2–3).

David is saying, "The Lord is with you, son. This is what I have dreamed for our nation and for you. But watch out for pumpkins floating down the river." We see God's hand on Solomon. In fact God actually appears to Solomon three times in these 11 chapters of 1 Kings. In 1 Kings 3 we see that God appears and Solomon responds like a godly man. His heart was tender to God.

"At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you'" (3:5).

Now imagine this for a moment. Suppose God were to come to you at night and say to you, "Ask me for whatever you want... no boundaries... no limits... anything." What would you ask for? What would it be? Look at King Solomon's response:

"So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" (3:9).

Solomon wanted wisdom, a discerning heart to know the difference between right and wrong in hard situations. Discernment, not for himself, but to govern "this great people" of yours. The humility, the desire to serve, to not gain personal blessing for his sake, but to be blessed with wisdom for the sake of your people, God. Look at God's blessing.

"The LORD was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for a long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be (3:10–12).

So God makes a pact with Solomon and blesses him with wisdom. And did he ever. Much of his wisdom is recorded in the three books Solomon wrote: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. He describes wisdom as a woman and says she is better than rubies, that instruction is better than silver, and knowledge better than gold.

Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings." (3:10-13).

You have to wonder... because Solomon didn't request wealth and honor is that the reason God blessed him also with wealth and honor among men? Solomon was a poet and a song writer. He was wiser than all men. His fame rose in surrounding nations and that was God's plan, that the nations would look to the nation of Israel for the way back to God. That Israel would be a light to all nations and point them to God. And that the leaders in Israel were to honor God and represent him in the court of public life and culture. Even the Queen of Sheba made the trip from Ethiopia to meet and seek counsel from Solomon. She was amazed at the wealth and wisdom of Solomon.

It goes on to say that Solomon's interests included music, botany, zoology. He hung out with the Nobel Peace Prize winners of the day, the intellectual elite of his day. We can see that he appreciated beauty, diversity and creativity. He was an administrator and an architect. He built houses, reservoirs, gardens, orchards and vineyards. And wealth poured into the state treasury. It said that in one year over 600 talents of gold came into the country. That's 800,000 ounces or 50,000 pounds. He made alliances and did trading with other nations. He must have had a thing for horses. He had 40,000 horse stalls, 1400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen.

"Solomon son of David established himself firmly over his kingdom, for the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great" (2 Chronicles 1:1).

But Solomon's opus, his grand achievement, was the temple he built for the Lord as laid out in 1 Kings chapter 6. It was in this time that God allowed Solomon to build his permanent temple on the top of Mt. Moriah in the middle of Jerusalem.

The temple wasn't large, it was only 90 feet long, 30 feet wide and 45 feet high, but in scope the project took seven and a half years to complete. It was a marvel. Form was as important as function for Solomon. A porch led to the main sanctuary with inner and outer courts and the holy of holies where God himself resided in their presence. God himself dwelled there. Artistic detail to carvings and gold overlaid the walls. It was beautiful. It was to be God's permanent home; no more wanderings in the wilderness, no threats from other nations... God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was being fulfilled.

In 1 Kings chapter 9 God appeared to Solomon a second time, right after he had offered a prayer of dedication to dedicate the temple. He said to Solomon, *"if you walk before me faithfully and with integrity of heart, and with uprightness as your father David did, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever. Your son will succeed you on the throne. But if you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land and reject this temple. And the name Israel will be come a byword, and object of ridicule among all peoples."* There could be no misunderstanding. God had appeared to Solomon this second time to warn him as he did.

Some of you are familiar with the study done on frogs in pots of warm water. Frogs love pots of warm water. They can swim and swim and with a few flies for food, frogs could live long healthy lives in pots of warm water. But the study showed that when the heat was turned up fast and the water got too hot too quickly the smart frog would jump out of the suddenly hot water. But on the other hand if the temperature of the water was turned up gradually, the frog wouldn't notice the affects and he would lay

still and not jump out until he literally began to cook in boiling water. Happy frog gradually becoming delicious frog legs!

Why are we talking about a frog in a pot? Because I liken the story of Solomon to be that frog in the pot. The warm happy pot of wisdom, wealth and power gradually became hotter and hotter with compromise and he was being slow cooked to death.

You don't have to be a king to relate to what is about to happen in our story. Let's look at four warnings that God gives us from Solomon's story, warnings that if we ignore we risk getting cooked.

“Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem” (1 Kings 3:1).

So Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter. It wasn't formed out of the love between two people, it was to form an alliance between two nations. It was a marriage based on economics or politics, not on God's precepts for marriage. Solomon is trying to help his nation become a player on the world's stage.

The Bible takes a dim view of power alliances. God wants us to trust in him alone for salvation. Back in Deuteronomy, God laid out some very detailed instructions about not marrying foreigners who worshipped other gods. God isn't saying don't marry a person from another race; Boaz married Ruth, Rahab joined the clan. No, this isn't about race, it's about being spiritually equally yoked.

Do my business partnerships reflect a fear of God or do I compromise for other types of gain. When I need wise counsel, where do I go? Is my counselor, my mentor, my coach working from the same foundation as I am? Where am I investing in my closest friendships? Are my closest friends on the same foundation as I am?

This verse also applies to marriage and dating. Julie and I raised our daughters to not date boys, but if they have to make sure they are equally yoked in faith. We hope and pray that they stand firm on their own spiritual foundation to want God's blessing of being equally yoked spiritually. So as early as chapter 3 we see Solomon's grip on God's Word showing signs of loosening.

“King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar and juniper and gold he wanted. But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. ‘What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?’ he asked. And he called them the Land of Kabul, a name they have to this day” (9:11-13).

Some of you might think of this as not a big deal. But it resonated with me. Remember Israel was to be the light of God to all nations. His business partner Hiram gave him unlimited cedar, juniper and gold to build his palace right next to the temple. And

in exchange for the building materials, Solomon gave a bunch of crummy towns out in the desert. Hiram tried to talk it through with Solomon but we don't see that Solomon made this right. The heat is turned up in the pot with shady business deals and treating friends poorly.

Are you in any unresolved conflicts? Are you doing everything as much as it depends on you to make a relationship right? Do you need to ask anyone for forgiveness? Do you need to make generous restitution/ Asking these types of questions help us recognize when the heat is on and to jump out of the pot before getting cooked and deal with unresolved conflicts.

Solomon not only had Pharaoh's daughter as a wife, he indulged himself beyond anything else recorded in Near East history.

“King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides the 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” (11:1-3).

One thing about Solomon, when he is in, he doesn't go half way. I could see Solomon saying, “I can handle this. I can love all these women and still love God. I mean, nothing could ever turn my heart from God.” In fact maybe he hoped he could turn their hearts to God. When we embrace the values of those not grounded on the foundation of the scriptures, the heat knob is turned up another click. I read this and I think, How could this wise man ever have intimacy trying to love 1000 women?

Is it possible to play yourself to death? Officials at a Chinese internet cafe think so ever since a 30-year-old man died after playing a game online for three days. The man collapsed, and paramedics failed to revive him on the scene. About 100 other people using the cafe for internet purposes left in fear. China is second only to the U.S. in the number of internet users and is home to millions of online gamers who play for hours in public internet cafes. Internet addiction has spawned a counseling industry to treat people who cannot stop playing online games or surfing the web for days at a time.

Aldous Huxley's book, *Brave New World* was written in 1932, but Huxley correctly forecast some of the issues of the 21st century. Huxley's premise was that people would come to love the things that enslaved them, and that they would worship the technology that would undo their capacities to think. He believed that by inflicting pleasure upon people, they could be controlled, and ultimately ruined, by the trivia they pursued.

“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” (11:4).

It wasn't that Solomon was just letting his wives practice their religion, he was worshipping their gods. The wise man Solomon was practicing their religion. Kind of like the thinking today, don't all religions basically teach the same thing? It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe it strongly and it keeps you grounded. They worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians through prostitution. The Ammonites worshipped Molek by sacrificing infants on their altars. The same guy who built the Temple of the Living God built a high place of worship for his Ammonite wives to worship their god Molek.

Here is the deal: No one starts out wanting to get cooked. But it happens. I've seen it happen a lot. If you're a follower of Christ, we don't want that to happen to you for your own sake, but also for the sake of others who are watching, like your kids, your co-workers and neighbors. People are watching. They know you're a Christian. Maybe they have never read a Bible. Maybe we are the only Bible they ever read, and they are relying on us to connect with God.

I want to encourage everyone here to desire to finish strong. We start out great, but so many of us succumb to the temptations that Solomon succumbed to and we end up cooked. Pray to finish strong, for your own blessing, but also for the blessing finishing well is for your kids and your grandkids, your company and your neighborhood.

I want to encourage you to pray for wisdom. It says in James 1:5 says, ***“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who give generously to all.”*** He goes on to say when you ask, you must believe and not doubt. He will deposit it in you. Believe that the wisdom Solomon asked for will be given to you to apply God's word to your life and circumstances.

I want to encourage you to read through all 31 Proverbs and recognize all the ways we can get cooked. It's not just romance

with foreign women; it's finance, it's work, it's how we use our tongue, a whole bunch of things to be aware of that can torpedo the blessings. But that is not enough. Having wisdom wasn't enough for Solomon to finish strong. You need to be in a community of people that you invite to hold you accountable. I get no sense that Solomon had this. I get the sense he had only “yes” men around him. There was no one to tell him to get out of the pot or you will get cooked.

Each of us need to have people in our lives we can say this to: If you see me making choices that are bad, if you see me doing things, planting seeds that will grow into something really bad, please come to me and call me on it so I can deal with that. Make a mental list right now of who you've invited to do that. If I were to pass an open mic around the room right now, would you be able to name a person or a few people in your life that you have given permission to hold you accountable? That you know can help you not be deceived by the incremental heat that you don't recognize that will one day cook you?

A while back I was talking loosely about a ministry issue to people who were not involved in the issue, in no way had the authority or responsibility to solve it, and were placed in a tough spot by me to carry it when they did not have the context to understand both sides. An elder and friend called me on it. I was humiliated at the time. “Who do you think you are?” But I thank them today. It was gossip by any definition. I think their honesty and courage to risk our friendship elevated our ministry and the health of our church and saved me from getting cooked.

Credit: The specific wording of my 4 warnings from Solomon's life included in this message came directly from a Bible Study Guide called “Solomon,” by Chuck Swindoll, *Insight For Living*, 1986, pp. 18-20

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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