



Today we're continuing our series through *The Story*. *The Story* is a 31-week journey through the Bible. I must tell you, I've been loving this series. I was a little skeptical at first because we're all about careful exposition of the Scripture here—verse by verse, book by book—and so this was a departure from the norm for us. But what I've come to see is sometimes in verse-by-verse exposition you can lose sight of the forest through the trees. You can become so nearsighted you fail to see the bigger picture and how everything fits together. 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 about how we've run away from him in our pride and desire to live life on our own terms. But this is a story of a God who won't quit until he wins us back; he goes so far as to send his only Son to bring us home. It's so important we don't lose sight of that larger story in all the details.

Today we come to chapter 13 of *The Story*, called "The King Who Had It All." It covers the life of King Solomon of Israel from 1 Kings 1–11. Maybe you recall we did a study of the life of Solomon a couple of years ago, but today we're going to look at his story as a whole. As I read the chapter this week I remembered an illustration I used in one of the messages from that series I thought I'd share with you again. It's from a game I used to play a lot with my kids called Jenga. Have you played it? You start with this tower made up of all these rectangular blocks. During the game you take turns removing individual blocks and placing them on top. Every time you pull out a block you create a taller and ultimately more unstable tower as the game progresses. The game ends and you lose when you pull out a block and add it to the top and the tower collapses.

This is the story of Solomon. He started out well. He's like a tall, strong tower. But little by little, one block at a time, that tower became weaker and weaker, increasingly top heavy, until he finally collapsed under its weight. He started out so strong and he had so much going for him, but he ended in a messy pile. One scholar writes the end of Solomon's life is "a pivotal point in the book of Kings. All had gone well for Solomon, who seemed to fulfill the promises to the patriarchs and accomplished all God wanted for his people. But from this point on, the narrative of 1 and 2 Kings is a tragic tale of destruction and loss."

So, what happened? Let's go back and get some context to his life. We've seen how God called a man named Abraham to leave his country and go to a land he'd never seen. By faith Abraham

obeyed God and eventually became the father of the nation Israel. It was God's desire to use this one nation to show the world who he is and what his plan is to bring people back into a relationship with him. The time came when Israel decided they wanted to be governed and led by a King, and God granted their request and gave them their first King. Do you remember his name? Saul. Saul didn't work out too well so God raised up a second King and his name was what? 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 even promised David he'd always have a descendent on the throne of Israel.

### **Solomon Has a Great Start**

Eventually David grew old and it was time to appoint one of his sons as his successor. Normally, the oldest son would become King but in this case things were more complicated. Several of David's sons had died and his oldest living son, Adonijah, was a schmuck who tried to take the throne prematurely. So David appointed his son Solomon to be King instead.

Remember David had fought many battles, and he was passing on the throne at a time of peace and prosperity in Israel's life. And Solomon had a pretty good start. The Bible says in 1 Kings 3:1–3.

**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. The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the Lord. Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.**

Notice Solomon loved the Lord and obeyed his father's instructions. That's a good thing. But there were a couple of little seeds he planted that would have a major impact down the road. He made an alliance with the King of Egypt and married his daughter. God's word had warned against doing this. There was also a problem of him offering sacrifices on the high places. In the pagan religions of that day, all people worshipped on mountaintop altars. Again, God had forbidden his people from worshipping there. David had placed the ark of God in the tabernacle in Jerusalem, and that's where sacrifices were to be made. So, in a sense two blocks have been removed.

But then several things happened to strengthen this tower. First, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, *“Ask for whatever you want me to give you”* (3:5b). I’ve always been fascinated by the whole genie-in-a-bottle-thing, but this is the real deal. What would you ask for? Long life? Wealth? Fame? Solomon doesn’t ask for any of that. Instead he says to God,

**“Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 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?”** (3:7–9).

You can see the humility behind his request. He’s overwhelmed by the immensity of the task before him. He knows he doesn’t have what it takes and he asks God for wisdom in governing the nation. God was so pleased with his request he promises him not only great wisdom but also what he didn’t ask for, both wealth and honor.

Solomon became the wisest man in the world. The Bible talks a lot about wisdom. Wisdom is the skill of living. It’s not so much about knowledge or intelligence, but knowing how to live life well. A wise person knows how to say and do the right things at the right time. Solomon’s wisdom was demonstrated right away in 3:16–28 when he settled a dispute between two women who claimed to be the mother of the same baby. The two women were prostitutes living in the same house. Both had given birth at the same time, but one baby died. Each woman claimed the living baby was hers. So they brought their case to Solomon and he said, “Bring me a sword.” He laid the baby before them and said, “Cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.” One woman said, “...give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!” The other one said, “Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!” Well, it’s obvious whose baby it was. With great wisdom, Solomon flushed out the impostor and spotlighted the real mother. Wouldn’t it be great if today’s judges had that kind of wisdom in settling disputes in our courtrooms?

Solomon’s amazing wisdom is described in detail in 4:29–34.

**God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Kalkol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls.**

**He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.**

What was great about Solomon is he took time to record all this wisdom. There are four Wisdom books in the Old Testament: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs. Solomon was responsible for much of this. Notice he wrote 3,000 proverbs. Many of these are in the book of Proverbs. A proverb is a short observation or warning that’s given in a witty and memorable way. We use proverbs like “haste makes waste,” “two wrongs don’t make a right,” or “birds of a feather flock together.” In a way, the book of Proverbs identifies all kinds of ways to build a strong tower, as well as ways to weaken your tower until it eventually collapses. The foundation for the entire thing is found in 1:7, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”* That’s where it all starts, with fearing God. This fear isn’t the type that causes you to run away from him, but it’s the recognition he’s holy and you’re accountable to him. And flowing out of that is all kinds of wisdom for everyday life. Just listen to some of Solomon’s proverbs:

**Can a man walk on hot coals**

**without his feet being scorched?**

**So is he who sleeps with another man’s wife;**

**no one who touches her will go unpunished. 6:28-29**

**Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler;**

**whoever is led astray by them is not wise. 20:1**

**It is to one’s honor to avoid strife,**

**but every fool is quick to quarrel. 20:3**

**Food gained by fraud tastes sweet,**

**but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel. 20:17**

**A gossip betrays a confidence;**

**so avoid anyone who talks too much. 20:19**

**The eye that mocks a father,**

**that scorns an aged mother,**

**will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley,**

**will be eaten by the vultures. 20:17**

**The glory of young men is their strength,**

**gray hair the splendor of the old. 20:29**

**Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor**

**will also cry out and not be answered. 21:13**

**Better to live in a desert**

**than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife. 21:19**

**The rich rule over the poor,  
and the borrower is slave to the lender. 22:7**

You get a taste from all that of what wisdom is all about. Solomon also used his wisdom in building a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. This is all recorded for us in 1 Kings 5-9. For 400 years, Israel had worshipped in a portable tent called the Tabernacle. But Solomon fulfilled the dream of his father for a permanent and glorious place where God would dwell and the people of Israel could worship. The description of the splendor of the temple in these chapters is awesome, but even more awesome is what happens when it was all finished. The glory of the Lord filled the temple and then Solomon knelt down and prayed a prayer of dedication. It's a beautiful prayer in which he shows great insight and passion. He recognizes God can't be contained by a building. He prays for the people of other nations who'd come and pray there that they'd come to know this great God. He even acknowledges "there is no one that does not sin" and prays for mercy and forgiveness to be given to those who pray there. It's a truly amazing prayer!

Then right after that in chapter 9 God appears to Solomon a second time, just as he had when he offered to give him whatever he asked for. This time God doesn't make him an offer, but he issues a challenge. He says, "Listen, Solomon, I've heard your prayer and I plan to answer it, but understand that all this is conditional upon you continuing to follow me." God even warns him if he starts worshiping other gods "this temple will become a heap of rubble" (8:8). In other words, your tower will collapse if you go that route.

For a while it appears Solomon took that to heart. There's a great story in chapter 10 of when the Queen of Sheba hears all about the glories of Solomon's kingdom, his wisdom and his relationship with God, and pays a royal visit to him. Solomon is at the height of his fame. At the end of the visit she says, "I'd heard all about you, but I didn't believe it. Now I see you're a bigger deal than I ever imagined." She's not just impressed; she's overwhelmed! She even says, "**Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel**" (10:9a). Remember, this is why God chose Israel to begin with, to be a witness to the nations of who God is.

### **Solomon's Tower Collapses**

So, at this point I'm thinking, Solomon may not be perfect, but he's doing awfully good. Look at him, he's a rock star! 1 Kings 10:23-24 says, "**King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.**" It doesn't get any better than that.

But as time went on and Solomon grew older he began to change. Aristotle once wrote, "In the brain of the wisest man always resides the corner of a fool." Solomon began to remove more and

more blocks from his tower and he didn't realize it until it was too late. Chapter 11:1-6 tells us what that looked like.

**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.**

Now remember, Solomon didn't go from being a godly, wise king to a full blown idol worshipper overnight. There was a gradual progression. We already saw back in chapter 3 that early on in his reign he planted two bad seeds. One of them was making an alliance with the king of Egypt by marrying his daughter. We don't know how much time went by, but soon Solomon took this to another level. It says, "he loved many foreign women," and it lists all the surrounding nations they represent: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites. Back in chapter 3 it said, "Solomon loved the Lord" but now he loved his foreign wives. The writer reminds us the Lord prohibited 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 faith. The Bible warns us against marrying an unbeliever because of what it will eventually do to our faith. Paul says, "**Don't be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?**" (2 Corinthians 6:14).

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 may have 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 many wives—700, not to mention 300 concubines. That's a lot! In Proverbs 18:22 Solomon had written, "**He who finds a wife finds what is good.**" Apparently, Solomon believed too much of a good thing is wonderful! But Solomon was fooling himself. Notice it says, "**he held fast to them in love.**" That word "hold fast" means to cling to someone. God wants his people to hold fast to Him (Dt 10:20). So what started as a pragmatic, political decision or compromise became much more; something that

got a hold of his heart; his affections. And it's no surprise the next thing it says is *"his wives led him astray."*

This leads to another step in the progression. It says, *"As Solomon grew old his wives turned his heart after other gods..."* Now he's not just letting his wives practice their religion but he's worshipping their gods. **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 makes you feel better." But notice it says he "followed" all these other gods, including Ashtoreth and Molek. That would have included things like legalized prostitution and sacrificing infants on the altars. Twice it says these gods were "detestable." That's a strong word. So now the guy who built the Temple of God in Jerusalem is building a house for Molek, too. The great builder-king now has the plans for their Temple spread across his desk. 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 at 11:15."

So there you have it: Solomon's great fall. 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, eventually you're going to crash. He knew the dangers of this; he'd written about it! Why did he let it happen? Why do **we** let it happen? Maybe we think we're different from everyone else. "You have no idea what I have on my plate. I have to make these concessions just to survive." Maybe we think we're smarter. "Listen, if the situation gets out of hand I'll rebuild the tower." Maybe it just all happens so gradually, one block at a time, we don't realize it until it's too late.

Here's the deal: No one starts out wanting to ruin their life, but it happens. I've seen it happen a lot. We don't want anyone in this room to end up in a heap of rubble. And if you're a follower of Christ we don't want that to happen for your own sake but also for the sake of others who are watching, like your kids, co-workers and neighbors. People are watching. They know you're a Christian, and you may be the only Bible they ever read. So what are some practical steps we can take to avoid ending up like this falling tower?

First, ask God for wisdom. James writes, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you"* (James 1:5). Wisdom starts with a healthy fear of God; a sense he calls the shots and you answer to him. I challenge you to read through the book of Proverbs, slowly chewing the wisdom there. Read the Song of Songs too, if you're married, that is, it will help your love life. Solomon had a lot of experience in that area!

Second, invite accountability. Solomon knew this. He was the one who wrote, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another"* (Proverbs 27:17). I just don't see anyone in this story sharpening him. Each of us need to have people in our lives who will sharpen us, even when it causes sparks to fly. Say to them: "If you see me removing blocks, if you see me making choices that are bad, if you see me planting seeds that will eventually take root and grow into something really bad, please come to me and call me on it so I can deal with that." Can you make a mental list of people you've invited to do that in your life?

Third, practice daily repentance. Solomon said it himself, *"Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?'"* (Proverbs 20:9). The answer, of course, is no one can. So instead of rationalizing our sin, call it what it is, confess it to God as we saw King David do after committing both adultery and murder, and repent of it. God sees your heart, so confess not just your outward sins but your thoughts and affections that aren't God-centered.

Advent is a time of preparing for the coming of another King named Jesus. John the Baptist prepared the way for his birth by telling people to repent. You want to be ready for the coming of the King? Repent. And the good news is this King came into the world not just to rule but to die. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* He said, "I'll make you a deal. I'll take your sin and give you my righteousness, and we'll call it even." It's like he gives us the opportunity and the strength and the wisdom to rebuild the tower. But that doesn't happen without repentance.

*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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