

**The Point:** Rejecting God's loving rule reveals a lack of satisfaction in Him and personal holiness within our lives.

**HIS STORY**

**The Israelites reject God as their king**

Samuel was the boy who was miraculously born to Hannah and later became one of Israel's greatest prophets. He heard directly from God and then spoke on behalf of God to the people. Unfortunately, Samuel's sons turned from the Lord, and their rebellion provided the chance for Israel to request something they had been searching after for quite some time.

Samuel sensed that the people's request represented a lack of trust in God. God was supposed to be their true King, as they were to depend on Him for everything. But the people were asking for something more than God to bring them security. The people had not rejected God outright; they were, in effect, saying, "God, yes, we want You . . . but we also need a guarantee of this, and that, and this, and that."

**Samuel warns them of putting their security in a human king**

Samuel didn't hold back when he foretold the consequences of Israel's demand for a king.

The dominant word in this description is "take." The king will take your sons and daughters; he will take your crops and your lands; he will take the best years of your lives. And he will exploit them for himself.

The irony here is tremendous. The Israelites looked to a king to guarantee prosperity and security. What they would receive instead were kings who would take those things from them. They wanted a king whom they could control. Instead, their kings would wind up controlling them. What they thought would empower them would actually enslave them!

► **What are some things that offer you a sense of fulfillment or a feeling of security? What are the signs that we are trusting in these things and not in God alone?**

**The people want to be like the surrounding nations**

We've seen that when we demand a king, we are admitting that God is not enough for us and therefore, we are opening the door to enslavement. As the story continues, we see that the demand for a king makes us (just like Israel) look like everyone else.

Even though Israel had been warned that a king would ultimately abuse his power, they still demanded one. They wanted someone they could visibly see who would "fight their battles." They were forfeiting the very thing that set them apart from every other nation. God is not like a human king, who will abuse his power and unfairly take from his people. God is a loving Father who has gone to great lengths to rescue and save His people. Yet Israel wanted to be like every other nation.

**Essential Doctrines**

**Authority of Scripture:** *Since the Bible is the inspired Word from God, containing God's special revelation to humanity, the Bible is the ultimate standard of authority for the Christian. Because it is truthful in everything that it teaches, Scripture is humanity's source for wisdom, instructing us on how to live life well to the glory of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture means that we are to believe and obey God by believing and obeying His Word.*

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## YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Share about a time when you received something that you really wanted, only to feel unsatisfied after you got it? Why do you think we often believe the “next” thing will bring the satisfaction we were hoping for?**
- ▶ **What are some examples of things in life that “promise” to give us something but instead “take” from us?**
- ▶ **Why do we often turn to these “lesser kings” in our lives instead of turning to the only true and loving King?**
- ▶ **How has flirtation with or submission to these “lesser kings” compromised our personal holiness?**

## YOUR MISSION

### Head

God called Israel’s request for a king disobedience, but then He allowed it. If this request was so bad, why did God grant it to them? Why not simply say, “No?” This is why: God will sometimes answer your prayers to let you learn the hard way that your motivation was wrong. In Romans 1:24, Paul says, “Therefore God delivered them over in the cravings of their hearts.” In other words, God’s judgment was to give them over to what they wanted. Of course, it is also true that some of God’s greatest mercies come in the form of unanswered prayers. Refusing to answer a prayer may be God’s way of protecting you.

- ▶ **Why is it important to remember that our desires are not always good for us?**
- ▶ **Share about a time where you think you may have been protected by God’s mercy when He did not allow a prayer to be answered.**

### Heart

Every life has a king. Every human heart has a throne upon which someone or something sits. A king in your life is whatever you must have in order to be happy and secure. And kings make all of their subjects into servants. The apostle Paul says it this way in Galatians 4:8, “But in the past, when you didn’t know God, you were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods.” Everybody serves something. There are no exceptions. You are either submitted to Someone who brings life (God), or you are enslaved to something that brings death.

- ▶ **Where do you find yourself turning for fulfillment other than God?**
- ▶ **How do these “lesser kings” fail to deliver on their promises?**

### Hands

Our society is full of people willing to make room for God as a piece in the puzzle of their lives. What sets believers apart from the world is that we find true happiness and satisfaction only in God Himself. When we begin to trust God alone with our entire lives, it is inevitable that our lives will look different from those around us. Not only will we not seek to be like the world around us, but we will also be a witness to the world that lasting joy and happiness can only be found in God.

- ▶ **What are some ways that clearly demonstrate a person finds more delight in God than in the things of this world?**
- ▶ **How does standing out in this way help us in witnessing to others?**





## HIS STORY

### God's expectations are different from the world's

The story picks up with the prophet Samuel in deep distress because of Saul's sin. After all, Samuel had anointed him, and Saul seemed like such a promising prospect. But the king turned out to be nothing like what Samuel had hoped. Saul was faithful only to himself, and the king's sin grieved the prophet.

God sent Samuel on a mission to find the next king of Israel. To help with that task, Samuel ordered a consecration for the sacrifice, in which each member of the community offered themselves to God. This was the perfect moment for Samuel to inspect the sons of Jesse, who would come marching by him in succession.

Samuel finally asked about the youngest son. David was a shepherd, which was not a coveted position in Israel. He was also the smallest, perhaps to the point Jesse didn't even think his youngest son could be a king. The text implies that David was outwardly unimpressive, even to those who knew him best; yet he was the one God chose!

### ► Out of all of Jesse's sons, why do you think God chose David to be the next king?

### God wants a king who will fight for His people

We pick up the story in 1 Samuel 17, when Jesse sent David out to visit his brothers on the battlefield. So David left the tending of sheep, packed his bags, and headed to the front line.

David wasn't affected by the discouragement of people around him. He was the anointed king and he trusted in God's power. Besides, he had done his real training in the pasture, and compared to a lion or a bear, Goliath was not terribly impressive.

There are people today who love to use this as an analogy about the underdog: no matter the odds, you can do it! Just believe in yourself! Sadly, this misses the point. God does not want us to read this story and come away with a cocky assurance that given the right confidence, we can achieve whatever we set our minds to. Yes, we can glean insight from David's courage and how he overcame insurmountable odds. But that's not the main point of the story.

The entire scene of David's conflict with Goliath is cast in the light of representative warfare. When David took on Goliath, it was not merely one man against another; this was Israel and Philistia, squaring off. What's more, the battle between Israel and Philistia represented the struggle between their gods, as both David and Goliath mentioned in their taunting monologues. And when he won, the entire nation of Israel shared in his representative victory, even though they did nothing to earn it themselves.

### Essential Doctrines

**Christ as King:** *God has always been King over His Kingdom from eternity past, whether in heaven or on earth. Yet some of His creatures in both realms have rebelled against Him, leaving destruction in their wake. To restore His broken world, God promised a King who would deliver His people and restore all of creation. The promise of a coming King finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, and looks forward to its perfection when Jesus returns for His bride, the church.*

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## YOUR STORY

- ▶ **What are some expectations our culture usually holds for those who will become effective leaders?**
- ▶ **What are some snap judgments we tend to make about others based on their appearance? How does this account warn us against misjudging others?**
- ▶ **How is the truth that “God looks at the heart” both bad news and good news for you?**
- ▶ **What is something new you have learned about this familiar story of David and Goliath? What does it teach us about the type of people God is molding us to become if we are followers of Christ?**

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## YOUR MISSION

### Head

In one sense, the real giant in this story is the unbelief that dominated the hearts of God’s people as they stood in cowardice and unbelief against Goliath and the Philistine army. Unfortunately, the same opposition is often at work in our churches today. Too often, we are like Eliab—scoffing at other believers’ grand visions to reach their communities and their world. How different would our schools and cities be if, instead of responding with Eliab’s cynical spirit, we assumed with David that God was eager to work powerfully in the lives of His people?

- ▶ **Share about a difficult time when you experienced similar unbelief in God’s power.**
- ▶ **What are some ways we can encourage others to boldly live out their faith in such difficult moments?**

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### Heart

When you think about it, the pasture was the place where David honed some of the most vital skills in his life. It was there that he grew in courage, fending off lions and bears from his helpless flock. It was there that he learned humility, having to clean up after the sheep day after day. The pasture was the type of place where you could develop an upright heart and shepherding attitude versus growing up in the palace. This is why it is important to remember that God is at work in the different pastures we live in, forging our character, patience, and integrity. We ought not despise the pasture or resent our suffering: these are God’s laboratories for molding our hearts to trust in His deliverance.

- ▶ **What “pasture” are you in right now or have you experienced in the past?**
- ▶ **What does it look like for you to faithfully trust God through that experience?**

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### Hands

As God’s people who have been given new hearts and transformed characters through a relationship with Christ, we should seek to live out this transformation in front of those around us, pursuing them with the same message of grace that found us when we were lost in our sins. In a similar way that David was jealous for God’s name and glory, we too should seek to make much of Christ and His salvation by pointing others to His great name and glory.

- ▶ **How does this story challenge the way you live?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can make much of Jesus this week?**

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## HIS STORY

### God promises peace for his people

We catch up with David in 2 Samuel 7, where he was living large as the king of Israel. From his palatial balcony, David looked down and saw the travel-worn tabernacle that served as God's house. So David made a commitment to build God a beautiful new house. In response to David's seemingly generous act, God flipped David's script. Instead of accepting David's offer He wrote one of His own.

Before God issued one of the most notable promises in the Old Testament to David, He referred back to recent history to remind David how he got where he was. God reminded David that, every step of the way—from the pasture to the palace—He was orchestrating David's steps. In keeping with a common pattern in Scripture, God reminded David of His faithfulness before He made His promise.

► **Why is remembering God's past faithfulness in our lives important when it comes to trusting His faithfulness to us in the future?**

### God promises an eternal home for his people

At this point, God opened David's eyes to see something amazing. David had been thinking of building God a house, but what God offered to do instead never would have entered David's mind as something to ask for. Look at what God promised.

Here we see God promising to build David an eternal house. This is a promise that refers to the Messiah who would come and reign forever. But one detail immediately strikes a lot of readers as odd: "When he does wrong..." If we're talking about Jesus here (which we are), what is this about? Jesus never sinned!

It is helpful to remember that most biblical prophecies have a dual meaning. There is an immediate meaning, and then there is an ultimate one. From the perspective of the prophets it was often difficult to untie the two, but they remain distinct. Think of it like the experience of seeing a mountain range in the distance. When you first spot it, you might see two distinct peaks, seemingly right next to each other. It's only as you get closer that you see that these peaks are miles apart.

The first fulfillment of this prophecy was David's biological son, Solomon. Solomon's name means rest, so in many ways he would exemplify this promise. His reign would extend rest throughout Israel, and it would be on his watch that Israel constructed the temple. And yes, Solomon would do some foolish things—some Saul-like acts, as God puts it here—like having 700 wives and worshipping idols. Even so, God will keep His promise, and will not strip the kingdom from him.

This prophecy points through Solomon, to another King: Jesus. He was the descendant of David whose kingdom would last. He was the descendant who would establish a real temple, not a building constructed with human hands, but the temple of His own body. And after His ascension, He would send His Spirit to make us, His people, the temple of God.

Unlike Solomon, Jesus would not need to be disciplined with the stripes of men. Instead, He would be bruised for our iniquity, and by His stripes we would be healed. The real Son of David would build the real temple of God and establish God's real presence with His people—forever. And He would not just be David's son. He would be God's own Son, building the house of salvation for God's people on earth.

### Essential Doctrines

**God is Faithful:** *God's faithfulness means He keeps His word and always fulfills His promises (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:19). God's faithfulness is demonstrated in His fulfillment of the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Apostle Paul linked the attribute "faithful" to God's coming through on His word: "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24). We reflect God by keeping the promises we make to Him and to others.*

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## HIS STORY

### David Falls Into sin

The first thing we should note about how King David became captive to sin is that this temptation comes after he has received the blessing of God. In the preceding chapters, David has emerged as the victor of many battles. So at this point in the biblical narrative, the kingdom of Israel is firmly established. David is at the height of his popularity.

Does it surprise you that David's sin comes after his receiving so much blessing? We tend to think that adversity is what precedes sinful behavior, as if sin becomes nothing more than an escape from reality. But blessings can be just as dangerous.

The danger in times of blessing is that we forget the extent of our dependence on God. When life showers us with goodness, the default response from many is to push God to the side.

► **What blessings has God provided you that are most likely, if you let them, to make you forget your dependence on God?**

Another element of this temptation is that David was put himself in a place where he could be tempted. It is far easier to avoid temptation than it is to resist sin. Don't get me wrong: resisting sin is important, immensely so. We must cultivate a habit of coming face-to-face with temptation while still resisting sin. But the world throws enough temptation our way. Do we really need to seek out more of it?

► **Maybe you know of a certain place where you could be tempted. How can you avoid that place? If you cannot avoid the area, then what can you do to guard yourself against temptation while there?**

### David attempts to cover-up his sin

As the story unfolds, we see David sink lower into the consequences of his sin as he attempts to hide it.

### David confesses and repents of his sin

Fortunately for David, God chose to expose what David had covered up. He sent the prophet Nathan to remind David that although he thought he had gotten away with everything, God wouldn't let it end there. And in a moment of profound humility, David finally came clean. The result was one of the most beautiful and exemplary songs in Scripture—Psalm 51. In this psalm, David shows us the keys to gospel-centered repentance and confession.

### Essential Doctrines

**Sin as Rebellion:** *Because the Bible portrays people as responsible beings, called to respond in faith and obedience to God's revelation, the Bible often portrays sin in terms of defiance and rebellion toward God the King. Isaiah 1:2 is one of many passages that describes sin in terms of rebellion against God: "I have raised children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me." Seen in this light, sin is personal and willful disobedience, the raising of a clenched fist toward the One who made us.*

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## HIS STORY

### Solomon asks for Wisdom

This is one of the most remarkable stories in the Old Testament. God appeared to Solomon in a vision and said, "Ask. What should I give you?" (v.5).

- ▶ **Imagine if God told you to ask for anything from Him. What immediately comes to mind? What would you most likely request?**

Solomon could have asked for all sorts of things, but he chose to request wisdom. Below, we will look closely at two things about this prayer: Solomon's posture in the prayer and his purpose for the prayer.

Notice how Solomon saw himself as he prayed. He admitted that he had no business being the king of such a great people, and he recognized that he was there only by divine appointment. God placed him there, and it was an act of God's grace.

- ▶ **Why is Solomon's humble approach a good model for the way we should go before God?**

- ▶ **What can we learn about prayer requests from Solomon's choice and God's response?**

### Solomon displays wisdom

After Solomon's prayer for wisdom, we see him confronted with a situation that will test the depth of understanding God gave him. Two prostitutes approached the king to resolve a dispute. Let's look at the story and see how Solomon responded.

This story shows that God truly answered the prayer of Solomon. The people of Israel saw their king reigning in wisdom and discernment in a way that could only be attributed to God. Here we have proof that when God promised to give Solomon wisdom, He was committed to fulfilling His promise. This is the kind of God we serve, one who does what He says He will do.

### Essential Doctrines

**God is Truthful:** *The Scriptures are clear that in God there is no falsehood (Heb. 6:18; Titus 1:2). God represents things as they really are. Everything He says can be trusted because God guarantees the truth of everything He tells us. The call for humans to be honest and not to bear false witness is rooted in the utter truthfulness of our Creator. Telling the truth is one way we bear the image of God, whose Son is the Way, "the Truth," and the Life (John 14:6).*

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## YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Why do you think people rarely pray for wisdom?**
- ▶ **What are some situations in your life (relationships or otherwise) in which you most need God's wisdom for right now?**
- ▶ **Share about a time when you sensed the Lord granting you wisdom as you gave advice to someone or as you made a decision.**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you when it comes to seeking wisdom in your own life?**

## YOUR MISSION

### Head

As we saw with Solomon, one of the reasons God gives us wisdom is so that we can rightly relate to those around us. We need wisdom to be godly sons, daughters, friends, athletes, and students, etc. James, the half-brother of Jesus, once offered a warning about asking for things only for ourselves when he wrote: "You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires" (Jas. 4:2b-3). Often we want God to give us things because of what it does for us. Our comfort and our pleasure are at the center of our minds. Solomon made a request because he had a godly desire to bless and lead others.

- ▶ **Which relationships in your life could benefit from wisdom right now?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can begin to think about the needs of others before your own?**

### Heart

Jesus told His disciples: "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:5-6). What a good reminder for us when it comes to our prayer life. We truly are nothing without Him, though many of us have a hard time admitting this. We must trust that humbling ourselves before God in this way is always the best for us. We will never regret fully depending on God and casting all our care and anxiety on Him.

- ▶ **Why is it important to remember that apart from Him we can do nothing good?**
- ▶ **How will humility within us serve others?**

### Hands

Another reason God gives us wisdom is so we can better announce the gospel to the world. In other words, wisdom is for mission! If we are going to be salt and light in the world, we need wisdom. We need it to rightly relate to the non-Christians around us. We need it to show how money, power, and pleasure are not what matters most in life. We need it as we interact with those who are skeptical or even hostile to Christianity. It was because of Solomon's wisdom that people came from everywhere to hear from him (1 Kings 4:34).

- ▶ **Do you value wisdom above things like money, power, or pleasure? Why or why not?**
- ▶ **Solomon's wisdom pointed people to the greatness of God. How might your own life and actions do the same?**

## HIS STORY

### Wisdom is rooted in the fear of God

Wisdom starts with a relationship with God. He is the fountain of all wisdom, insight, and knowledge. Thus, only the fool attempts to live without God. That is the argument that Solomon makes in the opening verses of Proverbs.

First, notice how being wise is related to receiving information. Wisdom involves understanding, insightful sayings, instruction, learning, and knowledge. However, wisdom is more than information, though it is certainly not less. Knowing how to live is dependent upon ideas, sayings, and teachings.

Wisdom involves information. But we must never believe that because we have lots of information we are wise. Solomon goes on to say that wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord (v. 7). We must start with God, who alone possesses all wisdom and knowledge.

### Wisdom leads us to faith in God

It's popular in our day to hear people say, "You just have to believe in yourself!" In one sense, a measure of self-confidence is good and healthy. But "just believing in yourself" as a way of life is the way of foolishness. True wisdom does not lead us to faith in ourselves, but in God.

If we had to summarize Solomon's main point in this passage we might say: put your faith in the Lord, not in yourself. Wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord, and our fear of God must translate into a rock solid faith in God. So what does faith in God look like?

► **Jot down a few areas of life in which you are tempted to rely on yourself. What would it look like if you relied on the Lord instead of yourself in these cases?**

### Wisdom shows us how to live in the world God has made

Proverbs is a practical book. And that should come as no surprise since wisdom is about life. Wisdom is truth in action. God wants us not only to know things, but to do things. Solomon intended for his hearers to actually live out the truths and sayings he put forth.

► **Record one phrase that captures the main theme of each of these proverbs from Solomon:**

- V. 1:
- V. 2:
- V. 3:
- V. 4:
- V. 5:
- V. 6:
- V. 7:
- V. 8:
- V. 9:
- V. 10:

### Essential Doctrines

**God is Omniscient:** *Scripture teaches that God is all knowing. He is the One who "has perfect knowledge" (Job 37:16), and this knowledge extends to all things past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. His knowledge is complete, and as He is outside of time, He has known from all eternity whatever will come to pass. In response to God's omniscience, we admit our finite knowledge and trust His decisions as wise and good.*

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## YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Where do people receive information and instruction today?**
- ▶ **How will a Christian's receiving of instruction differ from an unbeliever?**
- ▶ **Who are some people in your life who display biblical wisdom consistently in their actions? What are some characteristics you admire about them?**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you when it comes to pursuing biblical wisdom in your own life?**

## YOUR MISSION

### Head

There's a difference between worldly wisdom and biblical wisdom. Although people in our society may have some level of wisdom according to the world, Solomon would make a distinction between the world's wisdom and true God-given wisdom. Biblical wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (a central theme not only in Proverbs, but also throughout the Bible). "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10; cf. Ps. 111:110). Wisdom is rooted in fear of the Lord.

- ▶ **Why is fearing the Lord the essential to becoming wise?**
- ▶ **Do you consider yourself wise? If not, where should you begin your pursuit of wisdom?**

### Heart

It is important to realize that wisdom isn't merely about information, but transformation. While it will certainly involve information, wisdom isn't intended to sit idly in the confines of one's head, but meant to be lived out as a result of a transformed heart and character. It begins on a personal level—an internal fear and love for God—and is continually expressed on a personal level as it influences and shapes one's actions from day to day.

- ▶ **Why do you think people often equate wisdom with knowing lots of information?**
- ▶ **What are some ways your life demonstrates God's wisdom working through you?**

### Hands

The danger for many of us is to memorize these words, study them more in-depth, discuss them with one another, but never actually get around to doing them. These words, and all that God has said, must take root in our hearts and result in actual obedience to God. Only then can we really call others to embrace them and obey what God has said. Unless His truth pierces our hearts and brings about obedience, we will be ineffective and unfruitful as we call others to follow God.

- ▶ **How can you seek to grow in wisdom this week?**
- ▶ **What are some ways you can seek to share God's wisdom with others?**

**The Point:** Far from being a distant deity, God has always desired to dwell among His people.

## HIS STORY

### Solomon builds the temple

David, Solomon's father, was unable to build the house because of constant war during his reign. But the Lord gave Solomon rest on every side. The only fitting thing to do now was to build a temple to show the world the might and power of the God of Israel.

Up to this point in redemptive history, Israel's God was not associated with any particular place. He had manifested Himself in visions, in a burning bush, a pillar of fire, on the mountaintop, in the tabernacle, and through the ark of the covenant. But until now, there was no established place where His people could point and say, "This is the house of our God."

That all changed with Solomon. It was time to finally build a structure that would display the glory and renown of the God whose name is majestic in all the earth (Ps. 8). He wanted that name—Yahweh—to be glorified and lifted high for all the nations to see and treasure.

► **In what ways do you see people try to honor God's name today? How do you try to honor God's name?**

### God fills the temple with His presence

After Solomon completed the temple, he gathered all Israel, along with the priests, Levites, and leaders, to bring the ark of the covenant to the Lord's house (1 Kings 8:1-9). On that day God displayed His glory among His people. As we read our text for this section, imagine that you are standing among the assembly witnessing this spectacular display of God's glory.

Normally, God dwelled in thick darkness (v.12), in a place where no one could see Him. But now, God had come down to be with His people in the place built for His Name and presence. God was so near and real that day that even the priests had to stop what they were doing.

On that day, Israel received the blessing of God Himself. This is the greatest blessing that God can give to His people—His presence. In fact, we see all throughout the Bible that God's intention has always been to dwell among His people.

### God's People Go From the Temple to Fulfill God's Mission

As Solomon prays, he blesses the people and offers a prayer for the nation "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that Yahweh is God" (v. 60). This was one reason God chose the nation of Israel. He did not choose them for their own sake. He chose them for the sake of the nations. He is a global God who desires all the nations to be glad in Him (Ps. 67). They were to be a particular people with a universal purpose—to extend the name and glory of God to the ends of the earth (Ex. 19:5-6).

► **God's purpose is to spread His name for His glory. Are you ever tempted to believe that a relationship with God is all about what God can do for you?**

### Essential Doctrines

**Temple of the Holy Spirit:** *The Holy Spirit indwells the church, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 12:13). As the temple of the Holy Spirit, we live lives differently than before, bearing the virtuous fruit that comes only by the indwelling work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). This indwelling work of the Spirit also equips individual members of the church with gifts for the work of the ministry (1 Cor. 12:11).*

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## HIS STORY

### Solomon compromises His devotion to God

1 Kings 10 describes Solomon's great wisdom and his great wealth. It describes the Queen of Sheba as mesmerized by the depth of his insight and it gives us a detailed list of his possessions.

If Solomon's story stopped there, we would be applauding him as the greatest king in Israel. We might even be wondering if he was (at last!) the long-awaited king whose sons would rule over God's people in God's promised land forever. Unfortunately, the story goes on to reveal Solomon's compromise and downfall.

Solomon's sin began when he decided to disregard the Lord's commands. Before God brought Israel to the promised land, He gave them specific commands about how kings were to conduct themselves. They were not to gather much gold and horses for themselves, and they were not to acquire many wives (Deut. 17:14-20). If they did, their hearts would go astray.

We see this fleshed out in Solomon's life. He acquired much wealth, vast amounts of horses and chariots, and he had 1000 women in his court. The result? His heart was led astray.

► **How is your focus sometimes divided between God and other people or your possessions?**

### Solomon's choices have consequences

Our choices impact others, often more than we know. When we make foolish choices, we inevitably create problems for those around us. Solomon's son reaped the consequences of his idolatry, and so did the nation of Israel, which saw a divided monarchy for the first time in its history.

These words must have hit Solomon like a freight train. Not only would Solomon suffer (1 Kings 11:14-40), but the kingdom would be torn from his son's hands. His idolatry led Israel into a downward spiral that would eventually result in their exile into Babylon years later. This is what happens when we allow foolishness to lead us into idolatry. We may think we are only hurting ourselves, but we inevitably hurt other people as well.

### Essential Doctrines

**Sin as Selfishness:** *When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mindset that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Because sin is manifested in our tendency to be "curved inward" toward self, it is the opposite of love. Love looks outwardly to place others before oneself, operating from the mindset that others are more important (Phil. 2:3). Where sin selfishly seeks personal gratification and happiness, love works for the joy of others in the hopes of making others happy in God.*

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## HIS STORY

### Life and meaning

The opening verses of Ecclesiastes introduce us to the question: Does life have meaning? While Solomon's response initially seems to be quite gloomy and sorrowful, it is important to realize that Solomon is presenting two very different pictures to his readers—a life without God and a life with God. After reflecting on a world without God, Solomon comes to the conclusion that all life under this scenario would be meaningless and futile.

The picture Solomon paints here is reality if we push God out of our lives. But when God is at the center of our lives as our King and treasure, all of life is filled with meaning and purpose. All that we do matters. If Jesus is who He said He was, and if He truly is raised from the dead and reigning over all things, then everything we do matters. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he said, "Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). Without Him, everything we do is in vain. With Him, everything we do has meaning, value, and purpose.

► **Do you tend to look at the world through the lens of your circumstances or through the lens of your hope in Christ?**

### Justice and Goodness

As we move further into the book of Ecclesiastes, the second question that we see Solomon grappling with is the issue of justice in the world. As he looked out and observed, he saw more injustice than justice, and more pain than prosperity.

All of us long for things to be set right, for things to be put back in their proper place. We lament with Solomon that when we search for righteousness, we often find wickedness in its place. We long for peace and restoration, and our only hope is that God will bring everything into judgment (v.17).

### HUMANITY'S PURPOSE ON EARTH

Of all the questions that we are prompted to ask as we read Ecclesiastes, this one is the most important: "What are we on earth for?" Solomon concludes his book by warning us of all the other voices we'll hear in the world, but that only One matters.

As Christians, we have a tremendous opportunity to offer hope to our world. We know why we are here! We know why we were put on this earth. We know the path to ultimate meaning and purpose. We have a living Savior who came to give us abundant life and overflowing joy (John 10:10; 15:11).

### Essential Doctrines

**General Revelation:** *General revelation refers to God revealing Himself through His creation (Ps. 19) and through the human conscience (Rom. 2). Knowledge about God through general revelation is limited because it only communicates general knowledge about God and His character. We can look at the vastness and fine-tuning of the universe and recognize that God is all-powerful and wise, or look inward to our innate sense of right and wrong and know there is a moral lawgiver in the universe. General revelation is not sufficient for understanding how to know God or be saved, but it provides enough knowledge about God for us to be held accountable for suppressing God's truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1-2).*

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