

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

- ▶ **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?**

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?**

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?**

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?**

HIS STORY

Jonathan was committed to David

After David's victory, he grew in popularity. He was celebrated as a national hero, so much so that Saul—the reigning king—began to worry. Saul saw David as a threat to his throne. Saul might have been paranoid, but he wasn't dumb. Perhaps he knew the old proverb: keep your friends close and your enemies closer. So Saul decided to place David where he could keep an eye on him, in the king's palace itself. While David was under "palace arrest," he met Saul's oldest son, Jonathan.

It doesn't take much knowledge of royal lineage to figure out that this friendship wasn't an obvious one. As Saul's oldest son, Jonathan was the king-to-be. Even though Jonathan was next in line, David was the one who had been anointed, the man whom God declared as the next king.

Shouldn't David and Jonathan be rivals then? Shouldn't Jonathan see David as a threat? In most cases, yes. But in this story, David and Jonathan become fast friends—with a covenant commitment based in Jonathan's loving David as much as he loved himself.

- ▶ **In your world, the word commitment probably doesn't paint the same picture as the covenant bond we see between David and Jonathan. How can you create this kind of commitment, or covenant, in your friendships?**
- ▶ **What does it mean to love someone as much as you love yourself? How would your relationships look different if you lived this way?**

Jonathan put David before himself

Covenants are a beautiful form of commitment, but they always come at a cost. Jonathan's covenant with David, by human standards, cost him almost everything. That's what sacrifice means—giving up something and committing to something greater. And this is where we see Jonathan risking his own welfare for the sake of his friend.

Jonathan had nothing to gain in his relationship with David, but had everything to lose. He lived out his covenant friendship even when things got difficult. When adversity struck David, Jonathan was there. When death seemed certain, Jonathan was there. When the odds were stacked against David, Jonathan was there.

Jonathan reminded David of God's promises

As we fast-forward in the story of David, we find him on the run from King Saul. David flees into the desert and moves from cave to cave, running for his life. The friendship of David and Jonathan takes a backseat to Saul's high-speed chase after David. But every now and then, the author lets us know what Jonathan was up to. And as it turns out, Jonathan was doing whatever he could to strengthen David's hand and put him in the best position to survive.

Friends who strengthen and encourage our faith in God don't do so by minimizing the problems in our lives. When Jonathan showed up, David was still on the run. Saul still wanted him dead. The fear was still real. But Jonathan provided hope in the midst of the fear. He pointed to a greater promise—God's promise that David would be the king. And just as David had hoped in God in days gone by, he could continue to hope in His promised future. Jonathan didn't present himself as the answer to David's problems. He presented God's promises as the answer.

Essential Doctrines

Edification: *Edification refers to the progressive growth and maturity of the church, both individually and collectively. The Bible talks about different ways maturity, or edification, may happen, such as through the fellowship Christians share with one another (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2). In addition, edification takes place through the church's preaching and teaching of Scripture (Eph. 4:11), helping people understand and internalize the whole counsel of God. In the end, edification is building up the body of Christ, equipping people to live on mission for the kingdom of God.*

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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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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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YOUR STORY

- ▶ **Solomon disregarded God's command about having too many physical possessions. How can this serve as a warning for us? What are some physical possessions that have interfered with your walk with Christ?**
- ▶ **Solomon also allowed personal relationships in his life to direct his affections away from God. How can we avoid similar outcomes in our own relationships?**
- ▶ **Solomon's foolishness blinded him to the long term effects his sin would have on those around him. Why do you think people don't usually consider the negative impact sin can have on those around them?**
- ▶ **How has this session challenged you personally?**

YOUR MISSION

Head
In 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul addressed a case of immorality of which the entire church seemed to be proud. Listen to his words to them, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast permeates the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch" (1 Cor. 5:6-7a). Do you see what Paul is saying? The sin of one individual was permeating the entire church. The foolish decisions of one person affected all of them. The same is true for us as well. Choosing to walk in foolishness will impact those around you.

- ▶ **How have you been positively affected by someone else's wise choices?**
- ▶ **How have you been negatively affected by someone else's foolish choices?**

Heart
We have seen time and time again the devastating effects that come from heart idols. Idolatry creates division in the hearts of God's people by setting up on the throne of our hearts. When some other person, experience, or pursuit grabs our attention, thoughts, and affections, God is slowly pushed away from the center of our lives. The Psalmist recognized this when he prayed, "Give me an undivided mind to fear Your name" (Ps. 86:11b). He knew that he could not worship and fear the Lord appropriately unless God had his undivided affections.

- ▶ **What are some signs that a person has a "divided" heart?**
- ▶ **What tends to divide your heart from devotion to God?**

Hands
There are several practical applications that stem from this session that should challenge the way we live from day to day. We can learn from Solomon about the traps of material possessions and unhealthy relationships, and how those can lead one's heart astray. We can be on guard more when it comes to fending off heart idols. We can be challenged with the fact that, as with the people of Solomon's time, our world today needs a greater wisdom—a wisdom that saves. And as Christians, we are the ones to talk about Him. Whatever the application, be sure to not just hear this story, but allow it to challenge you to live differently as a result.

- ▶ **How can we serve and support unbelievers when the wisdom of this world lets them down?**
- ▶ **How has this challenged you to live differently this week?**

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).*

Leader Note: *Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.*

HIS STORY

Job and His story of Suffering

Job's story does not answer the question of why good people suffer. But it does offer us some direction. First, Job did not suffer because God was angry with him. One of the greatest temptations for Christians is to think that suffering is a sign of God's anger. We think: "God is paying me back!" But Job's story reminds us that God's anger is not why we suffer. In fact, one of the most interesting things about the conversation between God and Satan is that God is the one who brings Job into the conversation (1:8). The Lord suggested to Satan that he consider Job because of his faithfulness and integrity. God did not suggest Job to Satan because he was angry with Job. He suggested Job because He was pleased with him! God knew that Job trusted Him for reasons far deeper than cattle and oxen. He trusted God because of who He is.

► Do you think understanding the reasons for your suffering would help?

God reveals Himself to Job and his friends

After Job's life came unraveled, his friends showed up on the scene to offer counsel and comfort. Unfortunately, his friends gave answers that angered God and proved unhelpful to Job. Look at Job's response to their wrong advice.

When we suffer, we ask many questions. We ask: Why me? What is God doing right now? What did I do to cause this? Why does suffering come to those who love God? How could a loving God allow this to happen? Those are legitimate questions and they need good, thoughtful answers.

But what we learn from Job—who asked lots of questions—is that what we need most in times of suffering is God. We need His presence, His voice, and His nearness when we are suffering. The greatest thing God can give us when we suffer is more of Himself.

If nothing else, Job learned that suffering reminds us that we are not God. Suffering has a way of humbling us and reminding us that we don't have control over our lives. Job also learned that even though suffering is often beyond our control, God comes near to us during those times.

Job's journey is both difficult and beautiful. It is difficult because we see just how deeply he suffered and what he endured. Although many of us will never experience what Job did, we shouldn't minimize our own pain and trauma when trials come our way. But Job's story is also beautiful. The way God came to Job's aid, revealed Himself, and eventually restored Job gives us hope and courage. We are reminded that God will not leave us or forsake us. He even gave us His own Son to remind us He wants the best for His people.

► How is God different from us? How is His view different than ours? What is the problem with our point of view?

Essential Doctrines

The Problem of Evil: *Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all loving, and knows everything, evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a "good" moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and secondly, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God's character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that, even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).*

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