

40 DAY

# Easter Devotional

*Based on passages  
from the  
2014 FBC Bible Reading Plan*

Written by  
leaders & teachers  
of

 **First Baptist Church**  
of New Castle



*Our purpose is to help you become a developing follower of Christ in every area of your life. That comes directly from Matthew 28:19-20 when Jesus commanded His disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations.” A disciple is simply a follower of Christ. In order to develop as a Christ-follower, you must be taking in and living out God’s Word.*

*The 2014 Bible Reading Plan we publicized and encouraged includes 365 key chapters from the Bible for us to read, one for each day of the year. We hope you’ve enjoyed reading these chapters so far. This devotional, written by various leaders and teachers of FBC, uses the chapters starting on Wednesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> and concluding on Resurrection (Easter) Sunday, April 20<sup>th</sup> as the biblical basis for each reading. Our goal is that you will be encouraged to read God’s Word these next 40 days, looking forward to and preparing for our celebration together on Easter Sunday.*

*You’ll find the author for each reading at the bottom of each page and his/her picture on the last page. This is one way for you to get to know some of leaders and teachers God has blessed FBC with. The Bible, God’s written Word to us, is central to all we do as leaders of FBC. We pray that you will be enriched and blessed by consuming God’s Word with us these next 40 days!*



## Judges 15

Today begins forty days leading up to Easter (traditionally known as the season of Lent). This is a time to stop and reflect on what God's sacrifice meant to you and me in the burial and resurrection of our Lord and Savior. If you have been reading the one year journey through the scripture, you very soon realized that God used individuals in many walks of life to accomplish His plan. We saw how He used Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, Moses and now as we have moved into Judges, we have Gideon, Samson and others. We are reminded that God uses all types of people including non-believers to accomplish His plan.

Lent also reminds us that we also need to sacrifice things in our own life so we don't depend on material possessions or circumstances to get us through life. We are reminded that 'things' get in the way of serving our God.

So, this Lenten season, we need to take inventory of our own lives and ask 'what do I need to eliminate in my life that gets in the road of reminding me of His sacrifice for me?'

I love the prayer for day 30 in our reading plan.

"Teach me to look to you alone, as my source of provision in all things, and not to put my hope in people, possessions or circumstances to deliver me."

—Gaylord Kauffman, Chairman of the Elders

**BAD CHOICES? WE CAN STILL SERVE!**

## Judges 16

This chapter tells the story of the end of Samson's life, a sad story of unrealized potential.

Samson was born into a Nazirite vow, which in his case was for life. He was set apart for God's service, and God gave him great physical strength in order to rescue Israel from the Philistines. But he had a weakness for women, and he let sensuality control him. By making bad moral choices and using his strength foolishly, Samson wasted his potential. He eventually gave in to Delilah, the woman he loved, and lost his strength.

As we read Samson's story and see his moral failures and foolish actions, we learn that though we may be strong in one area of our life, a God-given strength won't cover up a glaring weakness in another area. In spite of God's presence, our natural tendency is to sin, make poor choices and act foolishly.

Samson, in his final act cried out and God used him to destroy the Philistine temple and start the process to free Israel.

We all need to acknowledge and confess our shortcomings, turn to Him and ask for His strength to help us realize our potential, instead of living a life of what might have been!

God will still use us in spite of our mistakes.

—Dan Monaco, Vice-Chairman of the Elders

## JESUS KNOWS THE TROUBLE YOU'VE SEEN

### Ruth 1

Miracles have backgrounds. Many miracles are born in trouble, distress or tragedy. Ruth had a background; and in the opening verses of this short book, we learn that circumstance had dealt her some robust obstacles: she was a widow, and both her mother-in-law and sister-in-law were widows. Widows in any age face challenges and surely Ruth must have carried concerns about protection, support, and security. She was also born a Moabite – not necessarily an obvious problem from our perspective today; but considering the ancient pronouncements of Moses (Deut. 23:3, “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation.”), Ruth – and Naomi – may have had apprehensions about her eventual acceptance into Israelite society.

Naomi tried to discourage her daughters-in-law from following her back to her original home in Bethlehem, and she was apparently successful with Orpah; but Ruth persisted, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” (v. 16) She is a classic example of commitment and faithfulness.

Do you suppose Ruth knew she was destined to be part of God’s miraculous invasion into human history? Did she know that, years later, an angelic host would welcome one of her descendants? Did she know shepherds would one night bow in reverence to her great, great, great ... grandson? Or that “Wise Men” would one day offer kingly gifts to Him? Did she know any of that as she walked with Naomi on those dusty roads from Moab to Bethlehem? Or was she – like us – oblivious of her role in the miraculous activity of our all-powerful God?

Historical perspective permits us to see Ruth’s troubles as an early phase of God’s miracle of redemption. Do you wonder what ultimate results God will produce through the difficulties you’re facing today?

—Gordon Mooney, Elder

## COINCIDENCE...NO SUCH THING

## Ruth 2

I know that everybody has seen a good love story, and has shed a tear, or two, or many! Ruth is an amazing love story where Boaz, the Bible-time Disney Prince, rescues Ruth and takes care of her and mother-in-law, Naomi. But as I read this passage, there is more to it than just a nice love story. It is a story of devotion, grace and mercy. A story about how there are no coincidences with God. A story about being a light to a dark and sad world. A story about how decisions we make at any age can play a major role in our life and the lives of others around us.

Ruth was living in a land that was hostile to God's people. Yet, God was working behind the scenes to protect her and her family. A dear friend of mine once told me "a coincidence is simply when God chooses to remain anonymous." Look back at the times in your life when you were struggling. Did you feel abandoned? Hopeless? Here is a story about a woman who lost her husband, is taking care of her mother-in-law and working hard to provide for her family—life wasn't easy. But she was loving, loyal, hard-working and devoted. Boaz took notice of Ruth and her character and, as a result, made sure she was taken care of. Boaz was a respected man whose love for God was genuine. Was it coincidence that brought Ruth and Boaz together? It "just so happens" that she begins to glean grain from Boaz's field? While Ruth is gleaning Boaz arrives and gives her more than she could ask for – God is providing in ways that Naomi and Ruth could never have dreamed!

I can remember times in my life where I felt that I was living as Naomi & Ruth in a foreign land with no help in sight, times when I was unsure of my future, unsure of relationships, loss of family members. In those moments, unbeknownst to me, God was working mightily to strengthen and encourage me. If you are in the midst of a situation that seems to be beyond your ability to endure remember that God can bring hope to your darkened light in a mighty way. Also, listen to "Devoted" by Citipointe Live. Powerful, encouraging song!

—Jenny Bolinger, Director of Missions

**BRAVE AT MIDNIGHT**

## Ruth 3

Imagine being a young widow, destitute in a foreign country, alone except for your mother-in-law, who is also a poor widow. She has a desperate plan for your survival, but for it to work you must be very brave. In chapter 3 of the book of Ruth, after her mother-in-law described the plan Ruth responded, "All you have said, I will do."

How frightening it is for the weak to approach the mighty. Boaz was a powerful, rich leader in a strange land. Ruth hid while Boaz prepared to spend the night sleeping on the threshing floor to protect his grain from robbers. Boaz was startled awake in the middle of the night. He was expecting robbers but instead he found a woman lying at his feet. Ruth was brave as she asked Boaz to be her redeemer. At that moment Boaz could have struck her down as a thief. He could have rejected her totally. Boaz could have taken advantage of her in the dark night with no one near. Ruth faced all these fears with a brave and obedient heart.

Sometimes we avoid following God's plan because we fear the things that might happen. Perhaps our motives will be mistaken and we will be attacked. Perhaps we will be rejected because of our actions or worse yet made vulnerable to others. Ruth faced her fears and did as Naomi had instructed. She bravely sought out Boaz and asked for redemption in a time and place that made her very vulnerable. When God instructs us to do things that seem difficult or dangerous we should remember Ruth's answer to Naomi. "All that you have said, I will do." Then we should act bravely, like Ruth.

—Sandra Webster, teacher of Evening Gals group

## EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY

## Ruth 4

The book of Ruth is an extraordinary story about the seemingly ordinary lives of a few faithful people. In this book the sea does not part nor does the sun stand still, but God is still working in the lives of these people to bring about His purposes. The main characters, Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz were probably in some respect oblivious to what God was doing and was going to do through their family line. Think about it. Naomi returns home with daughter-in-law, Ruth, after tragedy struck, but this is nothing we would consider spectacular. Then Boaz goes to work and sees Ruth picking up leftovers in his field. What could be more normal than simply going to work during the day? But this “chance” meeting between the two, Ruth and Boaz, led to what we read in 4:13. “So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife... and she bore a son.”

Boaz was simply being faithful to his duties and to his responsibility as a family member of Naomi. This marriage and the birth of a child are wonderful things but nothing out of the ordinary. People have been doing this for thousands of years. In fact it happens every day. But if you read the genealogy at the end of the chapter you see that Boaz and Ruth are the great grandparents of King David, so our Savior Jesus Christ traces His lineage back to this wedding (cf. Rom 1:3).

It is easy to become discouraged and believe God is not working in and through you when nothing spectacular seems to be happening in your life. But be encouraged because most of life is lived not in the spectacular or extraordinary. You can be sure and confident that God is bringing about His purposes in your life and working through you in ways you do not even realize as you faithfully go to work every day, or as you have changed what seems like the hundredth diaper that day. Our faithful ordinary everyday lives are tools in the hands of the Father, used to bring honor and glory to the Son, Jesus. Rejoice today knowing that whatever task God has before you today is from Him and for Him.

—Jeremy Lutz, teacher of a Sunday morning Bible study and Spending Time with God course

## STEWARDING OUR MOST PRECIOUS GIFTS

### 1 Samuel 1

This chapter has resonated in the core of my heart and soul. A woman's yearning for a child can truly become the deepest heartache. The waiting without knowing, the torment of being shamed by others, or feeling your barrenness is on display when confronted by women who have numerous children, can feel like waves of torment washing over you. Praying earnest prayers with every fiber of your being, pleading with everything that you have while trying to faithfully wait with expectation... Making "bargains" or deals" as a way to get your heart's desire is common. But, to follow through with your promise and have faith in the One to whom you are making that promise is extraordinary.

Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:11 prayed, "Lord Almighty if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life...." This was the bargain she made. The Lord was gracious, and she soon became pregnant and gave birth to a son naming him Samuel, meaning "because I asked the Lord for him." Many would have taken that beautiful baby boy and clung to that gift and refused to release that child to the Lord. Hannah though, realizing her vow to God and wanting to be a good steward of the gift bestowed to her realized the joy of releasing Samuel back to the Lord.

Parents are called to be good stewards of everything God has given them including their children. It is easy to see material possessions in that light but not our children, our most precious commodities. Having faith that the One who gave you that child will be faithful in caring for them is comforting and a necessary mind set.

*Lord, help us to look to you and nobody else to meet our needs and deepest desires. Help us to be thankful for the blessings that you give us. Help us to realize and remember that our children belong to you and help us in our willingness to release our children back To You.*

—Christy Stewart, Director of Childrens Ministry

## THE GREATER BLESSING

### 1 Samuel 2

Hannah is praising God!

Eyes closed, hands lifted, feet skipping, Hannah declares *My heart rejoices in the Lord! ... I delight in your deliverance!* Her whole being is a “thank you” to her Heavenly Abba for his gift of baby Samuel. But, wait. Would we praise if we were in her sandals?

At the end of these accolades, she is to return home while her precious two-year old stays in the temple to be raised by Priest Eli. She promised her baby to God and is to see him only once a year at festival time. Her arms will ache to hold him and, in spite of her trust in God, she will wonder if Eli sees his need for hugs and story times, correction and band aids -- the rest of the chapter suggests “No. He will not.” Yet, Hannah sings of her God who *knows, ...lifts up the needy, ...gives strength.* How can she? How can we?

Indeed, disappointments and broken dreams are common to life. How does one trust God and praise when their heart cry is *Why? Doesn't God Care?* The answer is tucked in the folds of Hannah's praise. For her, God is holy and worthy; her Rock, guardian, and giver of strength; the one whose plans are wiser than her own and she bows to Him.

She understands that with God the present comes wrapped in the arms of eternity. She cares more about God's plans than she does holding onto her own and this ushers in the greater blessing. Her decision to trust sets God free to use her child to bless, not just her, but her whole nation.

Got any disappointments or broken dreams?

The greater blessing waits for a “YES” to God and his plan.

—Roberta Thomas, teacher of Grief Group

## 1 Samuel 3

Chapter 3 begins by telling us again that the boy, Samuel, ministered before the Lord under Eli, the priest. Even as Eli's sons were disobedient and rebellious against God and their father, Samuel did not allow their bad examples to effect his service. For Samuel to be in the position he was, shows that he was faithful, trustworthy, and dedicated to serving Eli and God. Eli had chosen him to be what we might refer to today as a personal assistant, even over his own sons. He slept nearby so that he could be a help to Eli, if there would be a need through the night. We see his desire to serve in the way he responds to God's voice, quickly and with a serving heart, even after the second and third time. When Eli realizes that it is the Lord who has been calling Samuel he instructs him how to respond. "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." When faced with a clear calling or instruction from the Lord, through His word or through prompting of the Holy Spirit, are we so willing to listen and respond in a quick, obedient manner? God gives to Samuel a message that He wants relayed to Eli. Even as a young boy, Samuel is obedient with what had to be a very difficult task. It's not a positive message and the fact that God speaks to Samuel instead of Eli shows His disapproval with Eli and his sons. It's a simple lesson to learn that, to accomplish His will, God uses those who are faithful and willing to serve no matter what their age. God's message to Samuel was of His plan to remove Eli and his family from the priesthood because of the sins of Eli and his sons. It's a message that Eli had heard in the previous chapter and it's also the beginning of God establishing Samuel as his first prophet and his being God's mouthpiece to the people of Israel. God continued to bless and honor Samuel's service.

Lesson we can learn:

Through Samuel's faithfulness and commitment in serving and honoring God, we can see a picture of Luke 16:10, "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much..."

—Joe Lutz, Elder

## WHO IS YOUR RULER?

### 1 Samuel 8

God was to be the King over Israel (v. 7) but the people looked about and saw how their neighbor's Kings led in battle and defeated Israel. The corruption of Samuel's sons did not give the people of Israel hope in the leadership of God's representatives. The people did not recognize they were being defeated because of their idolatry (v. 8). They assumed that if they had a King he would fight and win their battles for them (v. 20), make life easy, and they would not have to worry about obeying God. As we know God did use this rejection of Him as their King to start the Davidic line through which the King of Kings would come and provide for our ultimate salvation.

Sometimes we look at those not following Jesus and think that they are doing so well, and we get jealous. We think if we do as they do then we will make more money, take nicer vacations, have a better car, etc. Samuel pointed out that the King would basically take all their freedom that they had under God and make them his slaves (v. 17). So when we think we can live our lives on our own and not follow Jesus as our King, we too become slaves to the world. We give up the freedom and peace that Jesus promised if we follow and depend on Him. We exchange His peace for worry and fretting about how to make more and/or how to keep what we have. Jesus promised that if we follow him he will make sure we get the necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter) and even more (Matthew 6:24-34).

We need to ask ourselves, are we living our lives like the Israelites, rejecting the King of King's Lordship over our lives because we don't think he will take care of us? If so, we need make Jesus Lord of our daily lives, seeking his guidance and relying on his provision and protection.

*—Ron Webster, Chairman of the Serving Deacons*

## THE DONKEY-CHASER'S SURPRISE

### 1 Samuel 9

This is an interesting look at the principal characters involved in the selection of the first of the earthly kings of Israel. The godly prophet/judge Samuel has been charged by God with anointing the first king for the Israelites, which was something that the people of Israel had clamored for, in spite of Samuel's warnings against it. God had chosen Saul, a physically impressive man, but utterly unprepared and ill-equipped for the task that lay ahead of him.

The plan through which this would come about is not unlike scenarios that affect us today in our own private worlds. Saul had been sent out by his father to find his pack of donkeys that had wandered off on their own. Samuel had been told by God of the man who he would meet and, ultimately, anoint to be King. When the two crossed paths in an unlikely happenstance, the Plan of God came into fruition as determined before the foundation of the earth, precisely as desired and at the proper time. Samuel knew exactly what was occurring and what the future results would be. Saul didn't have any idea of the magnitude of the events, yet he was intrinsic to the outcomes.

What can we learn from this historical chronicle?

- God's Plan will always be accomplished, in spite of humanly unlikely circumstances.
- Practice in following God enables us to have confidence in service. Samuel's lifetime of obedience gave him a spiritual perspective concerning the path that was being embarked upon.
- God sometimes uses negative events to bring about his purposes. Saul was brought into the realm of Kingship via the disaster of losing an important financial asset of his father. In times of distress, it's important to pick up our eyes to the Father.
- God doesn't look for qualified people; he looks for available and willing people for His use.

—Tim McMillin, teacher of a Sunday morning Bible study

## 1 Samuel 10

I think of what it would be like to have a father who was able to tell me what the future will hold to the level of detail Samuel reflected to Saul. To know the people, the place, the time, and from which direction they will come. In my particular world, the cell phone conversation might go like this:

“Well son, as you head into the office, customer “so and so” will accept the proposal you sent last week. Your production manager will come in at 10:50 and let you know that the repair he made to the plant is complete and everything is up and running smoothly. At 2:10, you need to take your wife to lunch because she will let you know your daughter made the dean’s list at college...”

*I couldn’t help but live my life SO differently.* To know that I need to obey my father and take simple steps so that everything can come to pass. Imagine what it would be like to take in all the things that were promised to me earlier that day and say “OK dad - Not sure I understand it all but, I can’t wait! I will be ready!”

We have a heavenly father that has told us what will come to pass. The simple steps that we need to take are laid out before us, and the promises of what will come to pass are clear.

BUT - Are we living our life differently because of those promises? Even when Saul had experienced each and every occurrence precisely as Samuel had predicted, Saul still “hid amongst the supplies “ (v. 22) It is difficult to not get lost in the day and even “hide amongst the supplies” at times.

I’d encourage you to be diligent to the promises our Heavenly Father has laid out. Live life differently, and faithfully live out the simple steps He has placed before us. In your prayer... “Ok Father, not sure I will always understand the things in my life but, *I can’t wait! I will be ready!*”

—Chris Collier, Chairman of the Financial Deacons

## 1 Samuel 15

In 1 Samuel 15 we read the sobering story of King's Saul's fall from power. It's sobering because it's easy for us to recognize our own shortcomings when we review Saul's. Saul receives word from God that he should destroy the Amalekites, careful not to spare anyone - including animals. While he easily gained victory, Saul disobeyed God by modifying the instructions and sparing the king & the "best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs - everything that was good."

Good? In whose eyes? Certainly not in God's eyes. His assessment of Saul was simple & direct: "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Soon afterwards Samuel offered this stinging critique: "For rebellion is like the sin of divination"

God said He hates divination in Deut 18:10. "There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord."

Why is rebellion and disobedience seen as the sin of divination? Divination is seeking to know what to do in a way that ignores the word and counsel of God. And that is exactly what disobedience is based on. God says one thing, and we say, I think that I will consult another source of wisdom—namely, what? In Saul's case, it was his men! Listen to his own admission: "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them.

Peer pressure led to partial obedience which resulted in Saul's removal from leadership. This chapter in Saul's life gives me pause as I reflect on how often I modify His truth to suit me and whether I have a greater fear of God or of what others might think. Consider the wisdom of Solomon found in Proverbs 29:25, "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."

—Larry Jacobs, teacher and Life Group leader

## 1 Samuel 16

This passage raises a very interesting ethical question – what makes a lie a lie? God tells Samuel to say he has come to sacrifice when in fact he was there to anoint the new king. The familiar definition of truth-telling “tell the truth – the whole truth – and nothing but the truth” does not fit here for God would never tell someone to lie.

Truth telling is foundational to establish and maintain any deep, meaningful relationship. Think about this simple set of questions to help give you perspective and guidance relative to this very important discussion.

A lie occurs when:

- 1) You are trying to deceive someone.
- 2) You state information that does not match reality
- 3) The person has a relationship with you that merits a complete and accurate answer.

So by applying these 3 questions – if my daughter asked me where her mother was and I said the dentist where I genuinely believed she was but in fact was not, I would not be lying – mistaken – but not lying because I was not trying to deceive.

Likewise using these questions as a guide Samuel was not lying. The primary relationship here was between Samuel and God. Samuel’s relationship with God was more important than the need for anyone to know the full purpose of his visit. Samuel told the truth, but not all the whole truth.

We could wish that life was simple – black and white. It is not. When you find yourself trying to deceive someone, be very careful. It is my experience that rarely am I justified in “being sneaky.” Samuel was obeying God. We definitely need wisdom, courage, and grace to “speak the truth in love”, Eph. 4:15 in our real-world lives.

—Mike Wells, Senior Pastor

## 1 Samuel 17

The battle between good and evil is a conflict that goes back to the beginning of time. Some of the most exciting stories ever written have been those which pit evil against good.

In the book of 1 Samuel chapter 17 we hear of a familiar conflict. David was sent by his father from Bethlehem in Judah to the valley of Elaih. David carried with him provisions for his brothers, in the conflict, and the commander of the Israelite forces.

Day after day Israel was challenged by the Philistine army and especially by its greatest warrior Goliath. "This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." David had no idea when he left home of what this trip had in store for Him. In our journey of life we likewise have no clue "what a day may bring forth".

The secret to it all was that David was prepared. God had prepared David in days past with the lion and the bear. The lions and the bears that cross our paths in this life are but a preparation for the greater battle ahead. Let us seek God for victory over the battles of life that we may stand strong in the end.

By the time David faced Goliath, God had prepared him. He did not fear, but stood up to the challenge and God gave him the victory. God provides for us in this life the resources we need to be a victor in the battles we face.

Be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Peter "His (God's) divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him..." II Peter 1:3

*—John Yergan, Pastor of Visitation*

## 2 Samuel 5

Here are some of my take-aways from this chapter. Verses 1-3: David was finally anointed (his 3rd anointing) King, by all the tribes, thus uniting the nation of Israel. Fifteen years earlier, the first anointing was performed by the prophet Samuel, as a mark of God's intention. What struck me is how, in that 15 year span, God was molding, training, teaching and maturing David until just the right time to anoint him King. Wow a 15 year training program!! Try selling that to today's apprentices.

Looking back at my own life, I can see how God used the various jobs that I held in the electrical field to mold me for my current electrical contractor position. Verses 6-15: David conquered Jerusalem. Verses 17-25: David defeats the Philistines. The Jebusites assumed that they were invincible because of their strong fortifications, as did the Philistines who were big, powerful warriors that definitely had a score to settle with David. In Verse 10 it says that David became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty (God of Hosts, God of Armies) was with him. In Verse 19, David inquired of the Lord before engaging the Philistines. This is a good example and reminder of how powerful the Lord is and to go to him with every activity, concern and situation big or small. In Verse 24, it says "as soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army." It is reassuring to know that the Lord has legions of angels to use for our protection at his beck and call. In Verse 25, David did as the Lord commanded and struck down the Philistines pushing them back to Gezer (about 20 mile northwest of Jerusalem). Our God is an awesome and powerful God! In *Our Daily Bread* for February 24th Jer. 32:27 says "Behold I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for me?"

That's my God, and who I want on my side!!!

—Greg Hogue, Financial Deacon

## 2 Samuel 7

In this chapter David settles down after battle in which the Lord had delivered David many victories. At this time in David's life he was living in a palace and, as in the past, had a strong heart for God. He spoke to Nathan the prophet; he felt guilty living in a palace while the ark of God was in a tent. Nathan gives his blessing to David to build a house for the Lord. That night in a dream, God tells Nathan that He never asked David to build him a house. The Lord proceeds to give a history of what He has done for David. Then says, your offspring will build My house, and I will establish your house for eternity, so instead of David building a house for God, God builds a house for David.

Now David's response is not one of winning that I want to build the house for you, but of awe that the Lord would establish David's house, forever. In verses 18 & 19 David asks who am I that you brought me this far, and is this your usual way of dealing with man?

David, being a man after God's own heart, is so humbled and taken back at the grace of the Lord, he can only praise him, displaying his love for the Lord.

We are studying 2 Samuel in Sunday school, and I am amazed at David's faithfulness and how he seeks God will. I often wonder is our heart in the right place in what we do for the Lord? Is it His will, or ours? Seek his will, in all that we do.

—Mark Fisher, Financial Deacon

**WAITING UPON THE LORD**

## 2 Samuel 11

Has the bombardment of self-gratification from a world of perverseness, lust, addiction, irresponsibility, immorality, and many others cast its weight on your daily walk through life's unpredictable journey? In 2 Samuel 11, we find David's desire and lust for Bathsheba to be so overwhelming that he is brought to a point where killing is used to justify his inability to use proper judgment and discernment.

As we walk in our daily path, call upon the Lord for strength and decisiveness to meet the days unknown challenges from a world filled with evil. Engage life's challenges in a positive manor and wait upon the Lord for direction in moments of compulsiveness or weakness. Our heavenly father is abundant in love and a source of unfailing knowledge. So the next time life has thrown you a curveball, wait upon the Lord, have confidence and know that he will see you through it all.

*—Mike Ruperto, Vice-Chairman of Serving Deacons*

## 2 Samuel 12

In God's gentle creativity he used a parable to make David aware of his sin (adultery with Bathsheba and having Uriah killed). David was quick to point the finger at the "rich man" in the parable for being greedy and selfish until he realized the "rich man" was he. We as Christians are often insensitive to our own sin but are quick to condemn others of their sin.

Once David recognizes his sin, he is also quick to ask for forgiveness. In Psalm 51 we can read David's plea for mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing. It is a clear example of true repentance, and we can learn a lot about David's character. It also offers us hope that no matter how terribly we sin, we can seek God's forgiveness. And while God readily forgives us, He doesn't always eliminate the consequences. David and Bathsheba's first son became very ill and died. This was not judgment on their son, but rather judgment on David for his sin.

But David did not dwell on his sin. He returned to God, and God forgave him, opening the way to a new life. In God's amazing grace, he blessed David and Bathsheba with another son, Solomon.

### Challenge:

- 1) Which friends or family members are you quick to judge or condemn?
- 2) Pray that God would allow you to see your own flaws more clearly this week.
- 3) If there is something you need to repent, pray through Psalm 51 and ask God to forgive you.
- 4) Is there something you have asked God for forgiveness for? If so, have you moved ahead like David with a fresh approach to life?

—Tiffany Preston, Mission Deacon

## SUCCESS REQUIRES SUCCESSION

## 1 Kings 1

As I read the account in 1 Kings of how Solomon became king of Israel, I cannot help but feel bad for Adonijah. Obviously, he was impatient and unwise in his attempt to become king, but it seems to me that more effective leadership from David may have prevented this whole fiasco.

I wonder what Joab and Abiathar were thinking when they decided to support Adonijah's claim to throne. It's possible that they thought that David was unwilling to surrender the throne to a successor. They probably believed, along with Adonijah's other fans, that David was becoming incompetent but reluctant to let go of power. The alternative was to support someone who would take power.

Imagine their surprise when they heard that Solomon had been anointed king. You can see in v. 49 that the shocked supporters scattered immediately. If David had communicated clearly and laid out a clear path to succession, he could have helped make Solomon's succession story a lot less messy.

I believe a major obstacle to leadership succession is our tendency to view our sphere of leadership in terms of ownership rather than stewardship. If we think of ourselves as owners, we are reluctant to step aside or step down and allow someone else to screw up *our* stuff. Instead, when we see ourselves as stewards, we understand the importance of raising up stewards/caretakers for future generations. Owners do not empower their subordinates because of fear, while stewards prepare their replacements because they realize that they are not really in control to begin with.

Contemplate your areas of influence today and think of one way in which you can delegate, train, or creatively empower someone else to step up. Do not allow pride or perfectionism to stand in the way of developing future leaders. *Let go and let others...*

—Dan Fries, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

## FAMOUS LAST WORDS

### 1 Kings 2

Have you ever Googled “Famous Last Words?” I did. Amazing what people say on their death bed. I found humorous statements, scary declarations, heartfelt wishes and courageous inspiration. On September 11, 2001, as the passengers on the infamous Flight 96 began their revolt against the terrorists, Todd Beamer spoke his last words, “Let’s roll!” His courage and resolve in the final moments of his life inspires us all. The essence of who he was radiates through those two small words.

In First Kings, Chapter 2, David is on his death bed and has the opportunity to speak these last words of wisdom to his son, Solomon: “Observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go.” David’s words of wisdom were born out of his personal experience. He was known as a man after God’s own heart. He lived out his passion for God, and he knew the pathway to success meant living a life dedicated to the truth of God’s word and obedience to His commands. David desired this for Solomon and for all the generations to come.

Scripture declares, “The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” 2 Chronicles 16:9. God is looking for people who are walking in his ways, who are committed to living a life that is pleasing to him. His blessings are waiting for them to claim.

Consider the famous last words of King David, can it be said that they reflect the essence of YOUR life?

—Cindy Dodds, teacher of Our Family ROARS course

## A DISCERNING HEART

### 1 Kings 3

The words *wisdom* and *discerning heart* are closely linked in scripture. I'm not sure they convey the exact same meaning, but they appear to be inseparable. *Wisdom*: the ability to make good use of knowledge; the ability to recognize right from wrong. *Discern*: the ability to discover or recognize. *Heart*: the vital center of one's being, emotions, and sensibilities. Combining these thoughts creates a powerful mind picture of what true wisdom is. It involves both knowing and doing.

In a dream, God made an offer to Solomon. "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon requested a discerning heart, not for selfish reasons, but so he could serve God and His people well.

Solomon was a young man when he assumed his father's place on the throne, probably around 20 years old. He felt like a child. We are told that he loved God and followed God's laws. As 1Kings 3 begins, he is faced with the enormous task of organizing, leading and building. He understands that he would need supernatural wisdom to succeed.

Solomon needed a discerning heart... Imagine God appearing to you in a dream one night, offering you a discerning heart....godly wisdom. What confidence that would give you to step out and accept the challenges and opportunities before you!

In reality we don't have to rely on dreams. God has given us a clear path to wisdom. Ask. According to James 1:5-6, it is as simple as that. "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all ....but when you ask, you must believe..."

God has revealed His wisdom to us through His written word and His Holy Spirit who resides in us to give guidance. As we read through the Bible together this year, we should be asking God for a discerning heart and wisdom.

*Lord, please give me your wisdom today. From the depths of my being, let me live as a wise follower of you. Amen*

—Lois Mooney, teacher of Finding Your Fit course

## WHOLEHEARTED DEVOTION

### 1 Kings 8

One of Solomon's greatest accomplishments as the wisest king of Israel was to build the temple. This glorious structure, which took more than seven years to build, would now provide a home for the Ark of the Lord's Covenant signifying God's permanent presence with the people of Israel.

As King Solomon prayed to dedicate the temple of God, he prayed also that the people would rededicate their lives to God's service. He praised God for His faithfulness to the people of Israel and asked that God would give them the *desire* to "do His will... and obey His commands". For what reason did Solomon ask this? He understood that without intentional obedience the human tendency is to turn from God. Solomon continues in verse 60 to explain the result of faithful living - "Then people all over the earth will know that the Lord alone is God and there is no other".

May it be so with us! As we give God permanent residence in our hearts and lives through the Lord Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, may we also pray that God would give us the desire to do His will, obey His commands, and then lead others to the one and only true God. Let's be wholeheartedly devoted to His will by living in obedience to His desires.

1 Kings 8:23 - "O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in all of heaven above or on the earth below. You keep your covenant and show unfailing love to all who walk before you in wholehearted devotion."

—Karen Monaco, Mission Deacon

## THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR FUTURE

### 1 Kings 9

Remember that scene in the movie, *The Matrix*, when Morpheus offers Neo a choice between a red pill and a blue pill? In case you don't remember or haven't seen the movie, in this scene, each pill represents a different future for Neo. As Neo is about to choose, Morpheus reminds him, *'All I'm offering is the truth, nothing more.'* Neo chooses the red pill, which was the more mysterious and adventurous option.

In our passage today, God presents a similar scenario to Solomon. There are distinctly different futures for Solomon to choose from. One is a future of blessing, where the nation and the future kings would thrive. God promised that this future would come true, if Solomon and future generations walk with integrity and obedience to God. The other is a future of cursing, which will come true if Solomon and/or future generations turn aside from following God.

Unfortunately, Israel chooses poorly and their worst nightmares come true. Generation after generation turned aside from God. Eventually, they would experience the devastation that God had promised - uprooted, rejected, mocked, and ridiculed.

Fortunately, God has chosen to offer us the Truth. Jesus said, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He willingly uprooted himself from heaven, was rejected by His own, was mocked and ridiculed by the masses, and was killed on a cross for our sins.

Because of Jesus, God hears every one of our prayers and pleas. Because of Him, God has set us apart as His own, has placed His name on us forever, and His eyes and heart are on us forever. Because of Him, who sits as King on the throne of heaven, our future in Christ is now and will always be hopeful and secure. Seek, Share, and Serve the King today.

—Josh Watts, Pastor of Student Ministry

## WHO GETS THE GLORY?

### 1 Kings 10

I find this chapter particularly interesting. While it certainly highlights God's blessing of Solomon and Israel under his reign, Solomon clearly disobeyed God's instructions to kings in Deut. 17:16a & 17b, "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself... He must not accumulate large amounts of silver or gold." This account describes massive accumulation of both horses and gold.

At the same time, we see that God establishes and blesses Solomon's kingdom in extraordinary ways. The queen of Sheba is compelled to acknowledge the fulfillment of God's promises to Solomon because his wisdom and fortune are unmatched. While the focus *seems* to be on Solomon's splendor, the real message here is that world leaders' homage to Solomon actually gives honor to God – the success of Solomon is entirely God's work. The world comes to seek Solomon, but the kingdom of Solomon makes the name of God known to the world.

The lengthy description of Solomon's wealth is not unlike descriptions of the wealth of other kings found in ancient literature (e.g. the Assyrians and Egyptians describe phenomenal wealth in their history). However, one major difference is that the purpose of those texts was to exalt that particular nation or king. However, this book and all of Scripture clearly points out the repeated failures of the nation of Israel and of her kings while exalting *God* and His continued faithfulness.

While God does indeed keep His promises and bless His children – in the case of Solomon in unparalleled ways – these blessings can lead us to conclude that we have no needs when the truth is that our need for God never diminishes. Looking to Solomon's example here, let us direct all the glory to God for every success that ever comes our way recognizing that every perfect gift comes from Him. Let us also avoid the danger of permitting God's blessing of success/ possessions, etc. to drive us away from the loving hands that provided it.

—Dan Fries, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

## OF WHAT VALUE IS WISDOM?

### 1 Kings 11

Proverbs 3:15 states that “wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her”. Really? How then can one explain the choices made in 1 Kings 11 by King Solomon, admittedly a man who had been blessed with greater wisdom than any other man? In direct disobedience to God’s clearly stated commands regarding intermarriage with pagan partners, Solomon proceeded to ignore God and instead to do what was right in his own eyes – 1,000 times! Did Solomon perhaps think that he had become wiser than the Most High?

His choice of human wisdom over Godly wisdom would be his downfall. Solomon would eventually experience reaping from what he had sown, and the choices made by his own human wisdom would lead his heart away from his God, the God of all grace who had given him everything. How tragic a lesson this was for the “wise man” to learn. Can we learn from Solomon? Treasure wisdom – Godly wisdom, that is – with a childlike faith, and let it guard your heart.

*—Neal Smith, teacher of a Sunday morning Bible study and Grasping God’s Word course*

## PAY ATTENTION TO WHOM YOU PAY ATTENTION

### 1 Kings 12

I found our chapter today to be sad. We saw the nation of Israel experiencing unity and blessing for years under the reigns of David and Solomon. We understand it now as a “golden age” in their history. However, now due to Solomon’s disobedience and disloyal heart, God takes most of the kingdom away from Solomon’s son, Rehoboam (as He said he would do in chapter 11).

Rehoboam is a tragic figure. Imagine the positive heritage of having David (a man after God’s own heart) as your grandfather and Solomon (the wisest man in the world) as your father. You would think this young king would be so full of wisdom as he soaked in the writings of his father and grandfather.

On the positive side, Rehoboam did seek out counsel for his first major decision as king (Proverbs 12:15; 15:22). However, he chose to ignore the counsel of the older men trusted by his father and followed the advice of the younger men (his friends) who were proud, arrogant, and selfish. These young guys obviously felt like they had something to prove and gave foolish advice. Prior this to poor decision by Rehoboam, it seems like everyone accepted him as the rightful king. But afterwards, he lost the ten northern tribes to Jeroboam. To his credit, when God told him through Shemaiah to back off from taking the northern tribes by force, he relented.

This story should teach us that while we ought to seek counsel, we should go further than that, and seek counsel only from those who have shown themselves to be wise. There is a reason why the New Testament prescribes a list of qualifications for leaders of the church. Wisdom involves skillful living, which can be readily observed. We should look for godly character qualities in those we seek for advice. None of us are above being influenced negatively when we surround ourselves with fools. It truly pays to pay attention to whom you pay attention.

—Dan Fries, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

## WE MAY NOT SEE THE SOLUTION UNTIL WE TAKE THE FIRST STEPS OF FAITH IN THE TRUE GOD

1 Kings 17

Faith, it is an interesting thing isn't it? It always amazes me what we put our faith in and what we don't put our faith in. At home we have this really wobbly stool that I seem to have no problem putting my faith in when I go to sit on it, yet when life seems to be hitting me from every direction my faith in God just seems to wane.

Elijah was the first of many important prophets of God sent to warn Israel and Judah as the two kingdoms fell from God. When Elijah met with the widow, the interaction was pretty interesting. God told Elijah to go and meet with her, when he saw her he asked for a drink and for some bread. If you were the widow...how would you have responded? Whether she believed in God or not, she did what was asked of her. The widow and her son were down to their last meal and God intervened in their lives! God provides! Things became much worse when the widow's son became very sick and died. She called upon Elijah, she blamed Elijah, but through Elijah God demonstrated, powerfully and dramatically, His superiority to all false gods and their prophets.

What false gods and prophets do you look to in your times of real need? Elijah sought help from the true and living God who always keeps His word. Most of the people in Elijah's day were following false gods and prophets and found themselves constantly disappointed. God's word is full of kept promise after kept promise, miracle after miracle, hope after hope!

Some miracles we can only see in retrospect. How has God worked in your life in the last six weeks beyond your expectations? Now take that a step further, share that provision with a friend you have been building a relationship with! *Father, thank you for all that you do for me, seen and unseen, in my life. Help me to keep my eyes open and my heart faithful to you the true living God!*

—Scott Frederick, Pastor of Worship Arts

## JUST A WORD

### 1 Kings 18

The focus of I Kings 18 is the amazing story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Elijah prayed. Fire came and people repented.

But let us not overlook the faithful Obadiah who feared the Lord greatly since his youth. His position in the palace meant he had a good reputation and was trusted. He served a King and queen who's reputation was "doing far greater evil than all those before him". Obadiah was faithful in the midst of adversity, even risking his life by hiding prophets. For 3 ½ years Obadiah was quite alone in the midst of this sinful atmosphere. His support group was killed or in hiding. Even if Obadiah did have someone to talk with, conversations about God could not be public. This weary Obadiah continued to show his character as he bowed down in respect to Elijah.

This meeting was God ordained. Obadiah was faithfully serving a wicked king when in verse 7 "Obadiah was on his way". God knew what Obadiah needed. Even though Obadiah blurted out the details of the last 3 ½ years' struggles, the words of Elijah were gracious. It was only one sentence, but it was enough. Obadiah responds by obeying the word of the Lord.

We all get weary like this. Sometimes, just when we think we cannot take it anymore, God sends a word. Sometimes through a friend, or a coworker, or a song on the radio, but His word comes. And we are changed. God knew right where Obadiah was and God knows right where we are. He knows the drought we have experienced. He knows the difficulties we are facing. He knows all about us. And He will send His word just when we need it. May we respond as Obadiah.

—Bob Burns, *Financial Deacon*

## 1 Kings 19

1 Kings 19:2 — So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say “may the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely if by this time tomorrow, I do not make your life, like that of one of them.”

Elijah was truly afraid. He feared for his life, and fled. He had just witnessed God’s amazing power, first hand. He saw God decisively show himself to the people in an amazing way on Mount Carmel. What could possibly have changed in this short amount of time? He depends upon God to defeat the priests of Baal, and wins with great confidence. Enough confidence that he rubs it in and almost mocks them.

Have you ever had a convincing victory in your life and shortly thereafter you are overwhelmed with doubt and fear? I find myself believing that “I” can do things in my own strength and the victory simply reinforces my belief in myself. I am constantly tempted toward self-reliance. I believe it is in all of us, to be tempted toward self-reliance. Our culture emphasizes it and our nature drives us toward it. We each have a tendency to fall back upon our own strength, our own wisdom and our own desires.

Allow God’s direction and example to Elijah, and the quiet whisper times of life, to be a reminder that in times of great victory, the evil one desires to lure us away from God with overconfidence in ourselves. The subtle but powerful voice “I can do this on my own.” is a lie. God desires us to daily, and moment by moment, walk with him and he will direct our paths.

Elijah’s fear for his life was real – Jezebel was a powerful threat. We have real and powerful threats to our lives. It is not easy to depend upon the Lord; we are easily distracted and swayed by our culture and our nature. I am encouraged that the great prophet Elijah demonstrates both dependence and self-reliance, and that God worked in and through him. I hope you are encouraged as well by God’s desire to use you, a regular everyday person, actively seeking to rely upon him.

—Mark Williams, Elder

## OUR GOD IS JEALOUS

2 Kings 1

One of God's names is *El Qanna*, "Jealous God". Exodus 34:14 says, "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, *whose name is Jealous*, is a jealous God" [italics mine]. Likewise, Deut. 4:24 affirms, "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." *The Truth Project* course, which we offer at FBC, gives an extended explanation on this aspect of God's character that I find helpful...While jealousy is normally a negative trait, the righteous jealousy of God is what arises within Him when something (specifically sin) or someone threatens His covenant relationship. The historical account recorded here is an example of what God's consuming fire of jealousy looks like.

If you haven't already, read the last couple of verses of 1 Kings 22, since this chapter is really just a continuation of that account. Ahaziah angers God by worshiping Baal and demonstrates that by turning to Baal in his time of need. God sends a messenger to Elijah in order to intercept Ahaziah's messengers – informing the king of his impending and certain death. The king does not respond with repentance but instead demands an audience with Elijah, sending soldiers to retrieve him by force. God did not mess around and literally consumed two groups of soldiers with fire. It was not until a soldier who understood God's power approached in humility that Elijah was told to go with them. Ultimately, God judged Ahaziah just as He said He would.

God takes idolatry seriously. We are all unceasing worshipers going after someone, going after something, pouring ourselves out. If it's not God, it's not that we cease, it's that we are misdirected towards something other than God. That's idolatry. The human heart is an idol factory, and if we're not careful, things that God has made or we have made take the place of God, and everyone and everything gets sacrificed to the glory of that thing. To whom and for what are you sacrificing and giving prominence to in your life? Would it please *El Qanna*?

—Dan Fries, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

## WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?

### 2 Kings 2

Elijah was about to be taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. As he and his devoted apprentice, Elisha, traveled from town to town ministering, Elijah encouraged Elisha to stay behind. We see in v.12 that Elisha views Elijah as a father (and Elijah likely viewed Elisha as a son). Three times Elisha chose to remain in his dad's presence. Elisha was aware his dad's ministry was almost finished, and Elijah's departure was near. Elisha's commitment to his dad's ministry was unfailing and he was determined to accompany Elijah until the moment the Lord would take him away.

Elijah asked his son "what can I do for you before I am taken from you?"

Elisha said "let me inherit a double portion of your spirit."

Elijah answered "You have asked a difficult thing." Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, and his son received a portion of his spirit.

In Matthew 20:32, Jesus asks us the same question today, "What do you want Me to do for you, (your name here)?"

Really Lord? Really... Lord You gave the perfect sacrifice for my sins, You provided the only way that one day I would see You, and enter into Your Holy Presence. You Lord, offer me comfort, joy, protection, assurance of my salvation, hope, wisdom, spiritual understanding, provision, peace, unmerited favor... above all these, You offered me Your grace!

Yet Lord, Your question remains to your child,

(Matthew 20:32) "What do you want Me to do for you?"

What if our/my answer to God's question were

"To have a double portion of His Holy Spirit!!!"

Wow... imagine that... frail human beings that we are, responding to a question of intrigue from the RISEN LORD OF ALL.

—Michele Barker, leader of Monday evening women's group

## WHAT DO YOU HAVE?

### 2 Kings 4

2 Kings 4 reflects the compassion of our God in the 4 stories found in this chapter. Consider the widow and the oil. Due to her husband's death she was left with an unpaid debt, and her debtor was less than sympathetic to her plight. In fact, he wanted to take her children as slaves. The woman turned to the prophet Elisha hoping for help. Elisha told her to go and collect all the pots she could from her friends & neighbors then fill them with the small amount of oil she had in her home. Upon starting to fill the pots she found a miracle, a continual flow of oil that only ceased when she ran out of pots!

What can we learn from this passage? I feel we can learn several things. Many people have debts. As a Christ follower we are commanded to repay our debts. Not only are we to ask for God's help with our finances, but we are to take an active part in settling our debts. This story also shows compassion by her neighbors who gave her the empty pots to help her. The widow knew she must not only have faith that God would take care of her and her sons, but that she also needed to do her part to help settle the debts. Her faith was demonstrated by the number of pots she acquired – knowing that she only had a little oil herself at home.

Elisha had asked the widow an important question. "What do you have?"

What do you have that can help others? Or help yourself?

Do you have time? Money? Resources?

God provides much more than we need so we must be careful to use the resources God has provided to us.

Ephesians 3:20 tells us that God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine!

*I'm asking you – "What do you have?"*

—Vicki Luchkiw, teacher of Financial Peace University

## THE WITNESS OF A CHILD

2 Kings 5

This is a wonderful account of God's kindness. Through Elisha, God miraculously healed an Aramean commander, Naaman, who did not know Him or worship Him. At first, Naaman's pride nearly prevented him from receiving God's gift of healing, but he eventually listened and went into the Jordan river to be healed. This is a great picture of how God saves us. In Scripture, leprosy can be a portrait of human sin. Naaman wanted to leverage his power and wealth to accomplish his healing, but ultimately, he needed to learn, as we all do, that we cannot trust in riches or power, but only in God's grace.

It may seem sort of an odd thing to notice, but I see quite a contrast between two seemingly minor characters in this narrative. The first character is an easily-overlooked heroine of the story. She firmly believes that her master, Naaman, will be healed if he were to visit the prophet Elisha back in Israel. She cares enough about her captor to convince him to go to the king of Aram with a travel request to Israel (my guess is that her life gave her credibility with Naaman). She did not try to gain from this (she could have tried to negotiate her freedom), and surely she bore some risk if Naaman came back unhealed. It is obvious that she had faith in God's healing power through Elisha and wanted to freely share this good news with anyone, even if he was her slave master.

The second character is the king of Israel, who was paralyzed with fear instead of seeing an opportunity to demonstrate the power of God. While the girl thought about the plight of others, the king thought only of himself. Perhaps he wasn't even sure God could heal him, or perhaps he even thought Naaman deserved his disease.

Let us be like the young girl who had faith in God's power to save. Let us truly be concerned about the people around us and tell them of the good news of Jesus Christ. Let us not be paralyzed by fear or so wrapped up in our own interests that we miss key opportunities to introduce others to our powerful and loving God.

*—Dan Fries, Pastor of Spiritual Formation*

## PRAY FOR THEM TO SEE

### 2 Kings 6

There are some really cool stories in the Old Testament. I do not think I could pick a favorite, but if I could travel back in time to see one of the historical events take place I am pretty sure 2 Kings 6 would be somewhere near the top of my list. Hopefully, you have already read the chapter and can recall what the dire situation Elisha, the man of God, and his servant find themselves in early one morning. Just in case you forgot, they are surrounded by the Syrian army. We have the benefit of knowing what comes next but what if you were the servant and did not know? Horses and chariots probably would not raise any level of fear in you in 2014 but just imagine if you walked outside one day to see your city surrounded with enemy tanks on the ground and fighter jets in the air. That is probably how the servant is feeling. Elisha told him to not be afraid and then prayed for the servant to have his eyes opened.

“Then Elisha prayed and said, “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.” So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” 2 Kings 6:17

God was gracious to open the eyes of the servant to see something amazing. If the servant did not believe before, he definitely believed now. People have a far greater problem than an enemy army. They did in the days of Elisha and they do now and the truth of the matter is our friends, family members, co-workers etc. live day after day still in their sins not realizing the power of gospel. Having eyes open to a mountain full of angels is pretty cool. Having your eyes opened to the gospel of Jesus Christ is truly amazing. Think of someone, anyone right now and pray for them. “O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.”

*—Jeremy Lutz, teacher of a Sunday morning Bible study and Spending Time with God course*

**GO AND TELL****2 Kings 7**

What would it have been like to have been one of the lepers from II Kings 7? Lepers were mocked, maligned and isolated – they lived with rejection as their daily experience. They were greatly in need, but then so were all residents of the city from which they had been expelled. All were suffering from famine and in the midst of starvation. Yet, God supplied the lepers' need and did so from the enemy's camp, no less! The lepers stumbled upon a gold mine – an abundance of food and other spoils - and no one else knew about it. This was their chance to exact retribution against those who had rejected them – a measure of revenge for the lack of sympathy from the town's residents.

Surprisingly, at least to me, they chose instead to inform the city of their discovery. What the lepers had received by grace, they chose to give by grace! What about us? Are we not spiritual lepers who have been delivered solely by God's grace? Will we choose to share the good news of our discovery with others who also need deliverance, even if they have mocked, maligned or rejected us? Freely, freely we have received; freely, freely give.

*—Neal Smith, teacher of a Sunday morning Bible study & Grasping God's Word course*

## ILLUSTRATIONS OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

### 2 Kings 8

Recorded in the first half of this chapter are a couple more episodes in Elisha's ministry. The same Shunammite woman whose son was raised from the dead in chapter 4 reappears in this account. As a woman of faith, she immediately acts upon Elisha's prophetic word of an imminent famine and is spared from hardship. I can't help but notice the contrast between her and the royal official in the last chapter who did not believe Elisha's prophetic word and was trampled to death. When she returns, her land had been claimed or occupied by someone else, so she had to appeal to the king to return her land.

In God's sovereign care, it "just so happens" that the king is talking with Gehazi (Elisha's servant) about the resurrection of the Shunammite woman's son, when she and her son come walking into the room. Of course, the king restores her land to her and, as a nice bonus, also gives her all the land's income for the past seven years. This story clearly illustrates the steadfast love and providential care of God for His people, especially those who walk with Him by faith. Although we should not conclude from this that God will always warn us of disaster and restore anything we have lost, it does clearly affirm God's love, concern, power, and ability to do beyond all we can ask or think.

The second story in this chapter also demonstrates God's sovereignty but in a different way. God told Elijah back in 1 Kgs 19:15 to anoint Hazael as king of Syria, which was part of His judgment on Israel for their worship of Baal. It is clear that Elisha knows who Hazael is and what he will do, and it's also clear that he knows it is ultimately God's will. If Elisha thought he could save the lives of thousands Israelites by killing Hazael, he surely would have done it. The only thing the "powerful" Elisha could do was weep as he emotionally processed God's wrath meted out through Hazael. Let us allow these history lessons to teach us about God's loving care for His faithful people while reminding us of His immeasurable power in accomplishing His will.

—Dan Fries, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

## 2 Kings 18

Hezekiah was a high water mark relative to the Kings of Judah and Israel. Remember after the death of Solomon, David's son, Solomon's young son – Rehoboam – came into power. He ignored the wisdom of his elders and the result was rebellion and the united Kingdom of Israel being divided into the northern Kingdom - Israel, and the southern Kingdom - Judah (1 Kings 12). There were no good – righteous rulers (Kings or Queens) in Israel, and few righteous Kings in Judah. Hezekiah was the best of the best “there was not one like him among all the Kings of Judah, either before him or after him.” Don't miss the fact that he was 25 years old when he became King and that his father was not a quality – godly man.

A 25 yr. old running a country?! I am reminded of Paul's words of exhortation to young pastor Timothy, 1 Timothy 4:12. “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”

When I look around our fellowship and see so many young, godly – quality men and women who are taking on the mantle of leadership I cannot help but rejoice! Our future as a church is as bright as the next generation of obedient, humble, courageous, grace-filled leadership that the Lord has given us.

I for one am committed (in obedience to the Lord, and dependence upon the empowerment of the Holy Spirit) to train, resource, and release the next generations to lead this fellowship into a deeper walk with God and a greater Kingdom impact on our community and world. The best is yet to come!

—Mike Wells, Senior Pastor

## DON'T PICK A FIGHT WITH GOD

2 Kings 19

Wow! As a guy, I just love this passage as it is such a powerful story demonstrating this simple truth, “Don’t mess with God!” I’m going to just recap some highlights of this story since I cannot improve on it:

Sennacherib’s Spokesman: Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, “The Lord will deliver us.” Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? ...Who of all the gods of these countries has been able to save his land from *me*? How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from *my hand*?

Hezekiah (to God): O LORD Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Give ear, O LORD, and hear; open your eyes, O LORD, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God... Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God.

God (to Sennacherib): Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel!... Have you not heard? Long ago *I* ordained it. In days of old *I* planned it; now *I* have brought it to pass, that you have turned fortified cities into piles of stone... But I know where you stay and when you come and go and how you rage against me. Because your insolence has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will make you return by the way you came.

God (to Hezekiah): Sennacherib will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or built a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city. *I will defend this city* and save it, for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.

That night the angel of the LORD slaughters 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. The “angel of the Lord” may refer to the pre-incarnate Son of God Himself. This same God freely laid down His life for us, and He is on our side! Let’s celebrate His victory over Death tomorrow!

—Dan Fries, Pastor of Spiritual Formation

## A TRIP WITH YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW

2 Kings 20

What would you do if God told you that you would die in four weeks? To this one man replied, "I would travel throughout the U.S., with my mother-in-law in a Ford Escort, and stay in a Motel 6 every night, because that would be the longest 4 weeks of my life!" My apologies to mother-in-laws but King Hezekiah had a similar experience. When told he would die in 15 years, he wept bitterly and prayed to God, trying to have Him reconsider and let Hezekiah live. God granted his request, telling the prophet Isaiah, "I will add 15 years to [Hezekiah's] life." How great is that!? But was it?

2 Kings 21 tells us that during those 15 years, his son Manasseh was born. Note v. 9 where the son is king, "[Manasseh] led them astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites." This included: erecting pagan altars, sacrificing his son in the fire, and practicing the occult. It would have been much better for all concerned, had Hezekiah accepted God's original plan! Also, I wonder what thoughts about death plagued Hezekiah, as each of his 15 years ticked away.

Two important thoughts: Isaiah 40:28: "God's understanding no one can fathom." We should trust God in our lives because He knows what is best for us. Psalms 90:12: Moses encourages us to ask God to "...teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." For our best and God's glory, we need to follow God's will and ask Him to help us number our remaining days. Then you can be sure you will lead a faithful life! Why not make it your goal to trust God with your life during this Lenten season? No "mother-in-law trips" necessary!

—Gary Weimer, Elder & teacher of a Sunday morning Bible study

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