

The Story Series
Week 13: Solomon
The King Who Had It All
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Today we resume our journey through the stories of the Old Testament. We finished up the story of David – that unlikely shepherd boy who was chosen by God as the new king of God’s people. David was “a man after God’s own heart,” a king who personified the virtues and plans of Almighty God.

Today we press on in *The Story* and encounter King David’s son, Solomon. I brought with me a few objects today. (*bring out frog and boiling pot*) Perhaps you are familiar with the recipe for frog legs. If you drop a live frog in a boiling pot of water, the frog will immediately jump out of the pot. But, if you put a frog in a lukewarm pot of water, you can slowly turn the heat up on the pot and the frog will stay in the pot. You can boil a frog to death and have a yummy plate of frog legs. I’ve never indulged in frog legs, but I’ve heard they taste like... chicken!

What does this tell us? It tells us that a frog can detect big changes in their environment, but they cannot detect small, incremental changes. And by the time a frog realizes that he is in a dangerous situation, it’s too late. The frog’s body is too weak to jump out.

I share this analogy with you because it tells the tale of King Solomon. Solomon starts off strong, like a lively frog. Solomon can jump around the lily pads like no other frog. He’s royal blood, the offspring of King David and Bathsheba. Any princess would consider it a privilege to kiss this frog, and as we learn in *The Story*, 700 princesses actually do kiss Frog Solomon at the altar. He is a powerful, wealthy, not-to-be-messed-with frog.

But one day Solomon drops himself into a pot of lukewarm water and doesn’t recognize what is happening. Slowly but surely it gets hotter and hotter, and Solomon gets cooked. Started strong; finished poorly. That’s the epitaph of King Solomon.

So here’s *The Story*, as told in the book of 1 Kings. The Israelites settle into the land that God had promised them, and after a few years, the people demand their own king. The first king turns out to be a nightmare of a king. Do you remember his name? *Saul*
Instead of representing the nature and character of Almighty God, Saul chooses to represent his own interests and agenda. So after a few years, God replaces Saul with a second king whose name is? *David*

David turns out to be a spectacular king, representing in a very authentic way the true nature of God – one who is truthful and just, merciful and loving. Even in David’s tragic moment of weakness – by sleeping with Bathsheba and then murdering her husband – David still represents the character of God by going before God in true repentance and receiving God’s forgiveness and healing. David reveals to the people that God is willing to give us a second chance when we come clean and commit to change our ways.

Now David has become very old and it is time to pass the torch on to his son. Solomon starts off with everything going his way. He was the king who had it all. The nation Solomon inherits is strong and wealthy. There is peace, with no wars being fought. It was paradise.

In the 3rd chapter of 1 Kings, God comes to Solomon in a dream and says, “Solomon, you can ask for anything you want – 1 thing – and I will grant it.” What an awesome gift, huh? If God made that offer to you, what would you request? Be truthful, you’re in church. What one thing would make your life so much better? You might ask for a long life. You might ask for wealth, or health, or power. You might ask for a really nice car, or in Solomon’s case a *three* hump camel. I spent last week in the beautiful Ozark mountains where the temperatures were in the 40s at night, so I would be tempted to ask for another week in the mountains.

Well, Solomon mulls it over and decides to ask for wisdom. Not wisdom for his own sake, but wisdom in order that he will have the insight needed to govern and guide the people according to God’s way. God is SUPER impressed with Solomon’s request, and *The Story* says that God imparts wisdom into Solomon. God tells Solomon, “Because you have asked for this honorable, unselfish thing, I will also bless you with wealth and honor and power.”

God’s divine-like wisdom is seen clearly in Solomon in an encounter he has with two women in the third chapter of 1 Kings. Two women stand before King Solomon each claiming that a particular infant belongs to her, that she is the child’s mother. It’s one woman’s word against the other. How’s a king to handle such a situation?

Solomon’s wisdom kicks in, and he orders his men to cut the baby in half and give one half of the baby to one alleged mother, and the other half to the other alleged mother.

The first mother says, “Sounds fair to me!” But the other woman becomes very distraught and gives up her claim to the baby. She pleads for King Solomon to spare the life of the child and to give the baby to the other woman. Solomon, in his great wisdom, surmises that the woman willing to give up everything for the child has the heart of a true mother. She is the real mother and Solomon presents the child to her. It’s a beautiful story. It reveals what true love is all about.

Solomon not only exercised the wisdom given to him by God in his daily life, but he also wrote down the wisdom that God had given to him so others could be blessed by it. Here’s a Bible 101 moment. The Bible as we have it today is not organized chronologically, but

topically. It's organized by the kind of book. The first 17 books of the Old Testament are historical. They tell the history of God's people. The next set of books is poetry or wisdom books – there are five of them – books like Psalms and Proverbs. Then the final 17 books of the Old Testament are prophetic books – books written by prophets or spokespeople for God.

If you were to read the Old Testament from cover to cover, you would end up scratching your head because there is no cohesive story line that runs all the way through. This is what makes this *Story* series so meaningful because all of the different kinds of books (history, poetry, and prophetic) have been molded together into one chronologically story. *The Story* as I am presenting it tells the tale of one family – God's family – and how each character is related to one another.

I mention this because Solomon contributed to three of the five poetry books in the Old Testament: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. In the book of Proverbs, Solomon records thousands of these pithy little statements of wisdom. Some of my favorites are, "A bowl of vegetables with someone you love is better than steak with someone you hate." Or "We may throw the dice, but the LORD determines how they fall."

What's so interesting about Solomon's writing is that he identifies all kinds of lukewarm pots that one should avoid. Because, Solomon instructs, if you get into these lukewarm pots, you will end up getting cooked, just like the frog! What seems so innocent and harmless at first can turn into something with tragic consequences. Solomon says things like, "If sinners entice you, turn your back on them! They might say, 'Come and join us. Let's go have some fun!' Don't go along with them," Solomon says. "Stay far away from their paths. Otherwise, you will end up eating the bitter fruit of living according to your sinful desires." Such advice is full of truth. But what's so ironic is that it will be this very truth that Solomon chooses to disregard that will cause his downfall. More on that later.

Solomon was not only known for his great wisdom but for also constructing the great Temple in Jerusalem to honor Almighty God. God is pleased with the beauty of the Temple and *The Story* says that the true presence of the Lord resided in the Holy of Holies in that Temple. There is that truth again. God – the creator of all – residing among his people here on earth. And God visits Solomon a second time and tells him in plain English (or rather in plain Hebrew): "Solomon, if you continue to follow me, you will finish strong, and you will pass on your kingdom to one of your sons, just as your father David passed the kingdom on to you. However," God says to Solomon, "if you choose to disregard my ways, you will get cooked, and the nation of Israel will be torn apart, and the throne will be taken away from your family." It was a come-to-Jesus moment between God and Solomon.

Solomon knew full well what the Lord expected and required of him. There was no "I wonder what the Lord meant by that." God's commands to Solomon were direct and clear, just as the Lord's commands to us are direct and clear.

After the dedication ceremony of the Grand Temple, Solomon's popularity and power grow exponentially. People from all over the world come to visit him to see for themselves the magnificent Temple and to sit at the feet of Solomon to be blessed by his God-given wisdom. Life was good. He was the king who had it all.

But then... even if you didn't read *The Story* this week you saw this coming... but then, as we come to the end of Solomon's life, to the end of his 40 year reign, we discover that Solomon gets cooked. In Chapter 11 of 1 Kings, all kind of adversaries start arising. Trouble comes knocking. So what changed? All we need to do is to remember what God told Solomon: "Solomon, if you continue to follow me, you will finish strong, and you will pass on your kingdom to one of your sons, just as your father David passed the kingdom on to you. However," God tells Solomon, "if you choose to disregard my ways, you will get cooked, and the nation of Israel will be torn apart, and the throne will be taken away from your family."

Somewhere along the way Solomon chooses to jump into a pot of lukewarm water. I'm sure Solomon told himself, "What will it hurt... just this once." What Solomon didn't recognize – even with his great wisdom – is that the burner on that lukewarm pot of water was turned on and that it was slowly starting to heat up. I imagine Solomon reasoned, "I know what I'm doing is risky, but I'm too wise to let this out-smart me." It was no longer words of wisdom, but words of pride.

Solomon's downfall was that he started to marry women from foreign lands, which brought with it the worship of foreign gods. To keep his wives happy and satisfied, Solomon built altars to those foreign gods so that his wives could worship the gods of their lands. Instead of introducing his wives to the one true God – to the God of Israel – Solomon allowed his wives to usher into his family the worship of their own gods. And through this one act, Solomon's heart – once fully devoted to the Lord – began to wander away from the Lord. Solomon chose to disregard the ways of God.

I realize that intermarrying between cultures and races is very common these days. I don't want us to get all hung up on the intermarrying regulations that God imposed upon Solomon, because if we do, we will miss the truth that *The Story* can speak to our lives today.

The real question to ask ourselves is this: "What thoughts or actions are we allowing into our life that is causing us to be slowly but surely pulled away from the ways of God?" Do we hang around with friends who see no value in living a Christian lifestyle? Do we participate in activities late into Saturday night that makes us too tired to honor the Sabbath on Sunday morning? Do we think long and hard about giving more money to the mission and ministry of Christ's church, only to end up spending our money on more stuff, buying into the lie that more stuff will make us happy?

Do we understand "faith" only as a Sunday thing, and don't see the need to talk about or live out our faith during the rest of the week? Do we justify our lack of participation here at Trinity by saying, "I did that for so many years; it's someone else's turn?" or "I would have

helped out but no one ever asked me personally?" What thoughts or actions do we let in to justify not fully living as God has called us to live?

The Story says that the Lord became very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away. Knowing full well what the Lord desired and commanded, nonetheless Solomon chose his own path. Does this sound familiar? Not only familiar to other biblical characters we have met, but familiar to our own lives?

Solomon's story is much like our own. Yes, God has blessed our lives beyond measure. God, through the Holy Scriptures, has graced us with divine wisdom and understanding. And yet, we take our blessings for granted and disregard the wisdom of God. Despite God's warning that if we disregard his ways, we will end up getting cooked, we still choose our own way over God's way.

None of us, I don't think, wakes up one day and says, "You know what? Today I want to ruin my life! I want to get cooked like a frog!" But what ends up happening is that we jump into a pot of seemingly harmless lukewarm water. It looks safe at first. Little do we know that one act of disobedience strikes a fire underneath us that starts the pot boiling. That first drink or puff. That first sexual encounter. That first criminal act. That first lie or gossip. That first hateful word. That first justifying attitude. These seem so innocent at first, but they all start the pot boiling.

So I want to give you some very practical steps of how to keep from jumping into lukewarm pots water in daily life. First, we need to *desire* to finish strong. Or to use biblical language, "we need to run with perseverance the race of faith that God has set before us."

Here's the truth: Faithfulness is not about how we start; it's not about how many times we stumble and fall – no, faith it's about finishing strong. We should wake up every day of our lives asking God to be with us, to keep us on the right path, to give us the desire to make biblical choices. And then throughout the day we should remind ourselves, "How I live my life matters. I want to finish strong, so I must make wise choices along the way that will allow me to do that."

Second, just as Solomon did, we should ask God for wisdom. In fact, the New Testament writer James tells us that God is willing to give us the same gift of wisdom that he gave to Solomon. All we have to do is ask. "Ask our generous God," James says, "and he will give wisdom to you." (James 1:5) God will gift us with the wisdom of applying his Word to our daily lives, to keep us on the right path, to fill our lives with blessings and peace.

But as we have learned, wisdom is not enough. It wasn't enough for Solomon. We also need a community of people, other believers, who will hold us accountable by speaking the truth in love when necessary. We must invite accountability into our lives. Now I'm not talking about mean spirited people who vindictively point out our every fault. No, I'm talking about close personal family or friends who love you, people you respect and trust.

We should go to those people and flat out say to them, “If you ever see me falling into a pot of lukewarm water, I want you to call me on it.” A choice that might seem relatively harmless to us might actually be igniting that fire under the pot of our life, and so we need someone to speak the truth in love to us so that we don’t end up getting cooked. We often don’t recognize the small incremental changes happening in our lives that is veering us off course. This is why we need accountability partners in our life that help us recognize our unhealthy choices. Accountability is never an easy thing, but it is necessary in order to keep us walking in the ways of the Lord. If you don’t have someone in your life who can take on this role for you, then find someone, because accountability partners are so important in our journey of faith.

These are the life truths that jump off the page for me in the story of Solomon. May we contemplate these truths this week, and find a way to live them out in our daily lives.

Let it be so, in your life and in mine. Amen.