

But the thing David had done displeased the LORD. (v.27)

The children's chorus goes 'Be careful little eyes what you see; be careful little ears what you hear; be careful little hands what you do; be careful little feet where you go; be careful little mouth what you say'. David could have done with knowing this chorus. It's spring time – the time when kings usually go to war. David decides to send his men out to battle and he stays at home. At home, alone, he goes out at night and wanders around the palace roof.

In this down time David encounters temptation which leads him to sin. Struggles, temptations, battles can come at places where we think we ought to be safe. We might think that the battles are always going to be at work with the obnoxious atheist who is always calling you names. But sometimes the battle is going to come when you come to church, or when you're in a place where you let your guard down.

David was in a place he felt safe – his own palace. As he walked around the roof his eyes caught the wrong sight. He looked and saw a beautiful woman bathing. As his eyes beheld the beauty of Bathsheba the temptation was too much for him. He wanted her and it didn't matter she was another man's wife. The temptation before him led him to commit adultery and then on to murder as well. One sin led to another.

We have to be careful what our eyes see on the television, at the movies, on the internet, in the newspapers and magazines and looking out the window. There is nothing wrong with seeing beauty and admiring it but as Billy Graham once said "The first look is free. It's the second look that kills you." Sometimes we have to turn the television off, move from the web page we find ourselves on and turn our gaze away from what we see.

We have to be careful that we do not give into temptation. And we have to be careful not to put ourselves in the place of temptation as well.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for times you have given into temptation.

Reflect: what kind of things do I let my eyes dwell on?

I have sinned against the LORD. (v.13)

Try this brain teaser. Imagine that you are a school bus driver. A red-haired student gets on the bus and begins combing her hair with a green brush. At the next stop two more students get on and say in passing that they like the colour of the driver's new blue cap. As they walk to the rear of the bus, the shorter of the two shouts back, "I wouldn't let that red-head stay on the bus if I were you. Her brush clashes with your hair!" What colour is the bus driver's hair? Think about it. Remember, you are the bus driver. (Answer: your hair colour.)

If you didn't see yourself in that story until I told you, you're not alone. King David made a similar mistake with another story. He became furious when a prophet of God told about a rich man who stole a poor man's pet for his dinner. Yet it became very clear as Nathan bluntly said to David, "You are the man!" (verse 7).

Nathan was not afraid to lay it on the line to David. David may have been king but Nathan was a prophet of the King of kings. As Nathan lays David's sin bear before him, David repents and acknowledges that he has sinned against the Lord. Sometimes we need people, trusted friends, to point out sin in our lives. At times we get so lost in what we are doing that we don't realise how the sin in our life has spiralled out of control. It takes a brave and loyal friend to point that out to us. Let's work on having friends like that in our lives – and being a friend like that to others.

As you read the Bible do you see yourself in its pages? The Bible was written for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:11). We can read the Bible but fail to see ourselves in the picture. Pray that God by His Spirit would open our eyes to the truths of His word. May we see ourselves and our sin, and may we see the Saviour who died to save us and forgive us. And then may we glorify Him and live for Him.

Pray: thanking God for good friends who hold us accountable and spur us on towards love and good deeds.

Reflect: do I recognise myself as a sinner? Do I see the love of God revealed in Scripture?

In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. (v.15)

David has committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah killed at the front line of battle. He has sinned and has had it pointed out. There are always consequences to sin...and sometimes they are not seen until later. At times we reap what we sow. We are seeing the consequences in this chapter of David's sins begin to appear. David's sons have learned from their father. David committed adultery. Amnon raped his sister. David killed Uriah. Absalom killed Amnon.

Amnon is in love, or so he thinks, with his half-sister Tamar. He is so obsessed with her that he looks ill and forlorn. His friend notices and asks what is wrong. This friend, Jonadab, then gives Amnon a suggestion as to how to get close to Tamar. It's not good advice. This is not what I would call a good friend. We ought to be careful about what kind of influence our friends have on us. Do they encourage us to follow the Lord, or do they encourage us to follow the flesh?

Amnon listens and Tamar comes to him on his pretend sickbed. He is so obsessed with Tamar and so in love so he thinks, that he tries to bed her. Tamar suggests they wait and speak to their father, the King. It is almost as if she is suggesting they wait and get permission to marry. When she has none of it, Amnon rapes her. Having gotten what he wants he discovers it is not actually what he wanted. Having had his wicked way he grows to hate Tamar rather than love her. The lesson here for us is not to let lust rule our lives. We ought to be careful what we lust after for we might get it and it might not be what we thought it would be.

And there is a lesson about waiting. True love waits. Lust doesn't. If a guy or girl is pressuring you to go to bed with them, tell them that if they really love you, they'll wait.

Pray: asking God to help you choose friends wisely.

Reflect: what influence do my friends have on my life?

And the king kissed Absalom. (v.33)

One day a visitor leaned on the old fence around a farm, while he watched an old farmer ploughing with a mule. After a while, the visitor said, “I don’t like to tell you how to run your business, but you would not have to work so hard if you would just say, “gee” and “haw” to that mule instead of just tugging on those lines. The old farmer stopped and pulled a big handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his face. Then he said, “Reckon you’re right, but this animal kicked me five years ago and I ain’t spoke to him since.”

Holding grudges can cause us trouble. David has a problem with Absalom. Joab tries to resolve the situation. He knew that David wanted to forgive Absalom and be restored to him, but needed a push in the right direction. So he got a woman from Tekoa to pretend that she was in a similar situation to David’s. When David showed mercy towards her situation, she pointed out that he was being hypocritical in his own family’s situation. Her encouragement was for him to make things right before it’s too late. We are all going to die, and then it will be too late to be reconciled to people. Don’t let it your pride stand in the way of making things right.

David agreed to allow Absalom back into Jerusalem, but on the condition that he not see him. This was again David’s pride. Either you forgive or you don’t, but don’t try to find some halfway point in between. How many times in life do we say we are forgiving someone but all we do is keep bringing the situation back up again; we keep throwing it back in their face. We have to forgive and move on. That doesn’t mean we forget because we have to learn from these hard lessons, but it does mean we have to move forward and not be casting it up all the time. It took David some time before he allowed Absalom to come to the palace. Eventually they are reconciled here.

Pray: asking God to help you forgive that person who has hurt you and you have been holding a grudge against.

Reflect: who do I need to forgive and be reconciled to?

And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing. (v.12)

You could make a very convincing case for the fact that Absalom deserves to be king. He is after all, the next in line for the throne. What is wrong with Absalom actively going after the throne when it's his in the first place? We aren't told when David made up his mind who would succeed him on the throne, but later David will tell Bathsheba that he had earlier sworn to her that her son Solomon would be on the throne (1Kings 1:17,30). We don't know if that has happened yet within the story of Absalom. But the real problem is that Absalom doesn't have any respect for authority. It's not Absalom's place to choose the next king. It's David's place.

And so we see Absalom conspiring to make himself king. Absalom was doing what a king did - having men run in front of his chariot. He was exalting himself in the eyes of the people; making himself impressive, acting like the king. Then he used to position himself to run into people coming to the king for judgment. He would hear their case and say, "Oh, if only I were judge, I'd certainly decide in your favour. Too bad the king won't listen to you." And then he would show affection for the people, being a good politician, shaking hands and kissing babies. Instead of going about things properly, Absalom was conspiring to get what he wanted.

The conspiracy did gain strength and some people did come to follow Absalom. But it was no to last. God's ways always work out and man's ways often fail.

Watch out for Absalom – we find him in the workplace and sometimes even in the church. He's the one who criticises the boss. He's the one pushing his own agenda. He's the flatterer. He's wrong. In church circles people like this don't want to lead you to God - they want to lead you to themselves. Be on your guard.

Pray: for the pastor and leaders in the church.

Reflect: am I guilty of trying to get my own way?

Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. (v.11)

David is fleeing from Absalom. He fears for his life. He encounters a man called Shimei who curses him and throws rocks at him. Why? He was angry because he blamed David for Saul's death. Of course, David was completely innocent of the death of Saul. When Saul was on a murderous rampage to kill David for no reason, there were many times that David had an opportunity to kill Saul. But he never did. He always refused to touch the Lord's anointed king. Saul was injured in a war with the Philistines and committed suicide by falling on his sword.

As a Christian, you will find out (if you haven't already) that there are always people that will falsely accuse you of all sorts of evil; people who will accuse you of saying or doing something you didn't; saying that you're this way when you're not; alleging that you deserve something that you don't. Christ suffered. He was falsely accused. Now it is our turn. If we really want to be identified with Jesus, we must accept every aspect of that identification. We will also be falsely accused. How do we respond? Endure it with patience.

Unlike David, we often want to silence our critics, insist on fairness, and defend ourselves. But as we grow in our awareness of God's protective love, we become less concerned with what others say about us and more willing to entrust ourselves to our Father. Like David, we can say of each critic, "Leave him alone; let him curse" (verse 11). This is humble submission to God's will.

We may, of course, ask our opponents to justify their charges, or we may meet them with steadfast denial if they charge us falsely. But when we have done all we can do, the only thing left is to wait patiently until God vindicates us. In the meantime, it's good to look beyond the words of those who vilify us to the will of the One who loves us with infinite love. We need to say that whatever God permits is for His ultimate good in us or in others - even though our hearts break and we shed bitter tears.

Pray: for endurance and patience in your daily life.

Reflect: am I trusting God is in control of the situation I am in just now?

For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom. (v.14)

Absalom asks Ahithophel for advice. David and Absalom often did this because his advice always seemed right. They did not question it. I would encourage us all to be careful about taking a person's advice without question. Be careful about making a person's advice to be at the same place as if God has spoken. It may be that Ahithophel was indeed a very wise man. But that doesn't mean that everything he speaks will be good. We need to always test the things we listen to.

Ahithophel asked Absalom to send an army to pursue David. His plan was that those around David would flee, and the king would be left standing alone. Although Absalom was pleased with Ahithophel's plan, he also called to hear Hushai's ideas. Hushai actually gave Absalom another great plan - one that would certainly wipe out David; a plan that would severely outnumber David, and overwhelm him. But the difference was that this plan bought David much needed time - time to cross the river to safety.

Absalom liked this plan better. Why? Because David had prayed earlier, 2 Samuel 15:31 *'O LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness.'* David was probably thinking that the Lord would make Ahithophel give bad counsel. But what the Lord decided to do was to make Ahithophel's counsel sound foolish to Absalom.

The first thing that God did to answer David's prayer was to bring Hushai to David (2Samuel 15:32). The next thing that God does to answer David's prayer is to use Hushai's counsel and stop Ahithophel. Don't underestimate the power of prayer. It may be that God would use a "non-supernatural" means like Hushai's counsel, but God is still at work. Pray. God doesn't always answer our prayers in the manner we expect Him to. But when we submit to God's plans, rather than our own, He does a much better job than we.

Pray: asking for God's guidance in your life.

Reflect: do I listen to other's counsel rather than taking it to God in prayer?

Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. (v.16)

A knight and his men return to their castle after a long hard day of fighting. “How are we faring?” asks the king. “Sire,” replies the knight, “I have been robbing and pillaging on your behalf all day, burning the towns of your enemies in the west.” “What?!?” shrieks the king. “I don’t have any enemies to the west!” “Oh,” says the knight. “Well, you do now.”

Sometimes we need to fight the right battles and know when to stop before causing more trouble rather than good. Joab knows this and we see his wise actions here. David is advised to stay away from the battle that day and his men defeated Absalom’s army with twenty thousand being killed. Absalom ran into David’s men and as he was riding his horse his head got stuck in the thick branches of a tree and he was left hanging there. Joab went and finished him off. As a little aside you will remember back in 2 Samuel 14:26 that he had a thick head of hair that he only cut when it got to heavy. It would seem that thick head of hair was his undoing here – maybe it is time for a hair cut!

Joab stops his army from pursuing the remainder of the army of Israel, the real battle is over. Joab doesn’t want any further complications. He doesn’t want to cause the nation to resent David. The lesson for us is know when to stop. It’s not always appropriate to keep fighting. There are times when we can find ourselves in “battle-like” confrontations. Sometimes as we’re sharing our faith, we can find ourselves in an argument rather than a discussion. There is wisdom in knowing when to stop fighting. Don’t forget what you’re really trying to accomplish. It’s not about wiping the person out; it’s about leading them to Jesus. Time to calm down and then re-engage at a later point is often the wise step.

Pray: asking God to give you wisdom in sharing your faith this week.

Reflect: do I confront others with the gospel and end up in a battle or am I wise enough to know when to stop? Pray for God’s wisdom.

For I your servant know that I have sinned. (v.20)

Here we begin to see David's heart once again. He is returning to Jerusalem after the rebellion and death of his son Absalom. As David nears the city, he is met by a man named Shimei. Shimei had wronged David and if anybody deserved David's hatred and wrath it was Shimei. But, when David came face to face with Shimei, David did not react in anger or malice. David reached out to Shimei with compassion and forgiveness.

This encounter begins with Shimei coming before David and he falls at his feet in humility. This is a far different attitude than he displayed the last time his path crossed that of David. Perhaps Shimei has had time to contemplate his mistakes. Shimei said the three hardest words known to man: '*I have sinned.*' He made a full and complete confession of his wrong in his attack on David. Shimei hopes that David won't hold the past against him. He seems genuinely sorry for what he has done and is hopeful that David will offer him forgiveness. It took a real man to do what Shimei did! How often do we admit our sins and confess them before the one we have sinned against (as well as before God).

When David hears this, he responds to Shimei in grace and not in retaliation. Abishai wants to kill Shimei, but David prevents his violent nephew from killing the humbled man. In other words, David stood as a protector of the very person who had wronged him. That is grace! David promised forgiveness and amnesty to Shimei. Why? It had not been many days since David himself had sinned against Uriah, Bathsheba, the nation of Israel and the God of Heaven. When David had bowed before the Lord and confessed his sins, God had freely forgiven him. Now, David extends that same grace to one who had wronged him greatly.

What a lesson for us in confessing sin and seeking forgiveness, as well as exercising grace in granting forgiveness.

Pray: thanking God for his grace and mercy in your life.

Reflect: do I need to straighten things out with someone else?

He provided for them but did not lie with them. (v.3)

The first thing David does after arriving in Jerusalem is deal with the ten wives (or concubines) he left behind to keep the house. Absalom has slept with these women in public; there is no way David can go back to the way things were. He will never sleep with any of these women again. He appoints a place for them to stay and provides generously for them, but he does not sleep with them again. They have been defiled by Absalom. On his return David sets things in order. There is the challenge for us to do likewise in our lives – to make sure we take responsibility for everything that is ours.

David then has to deal with the rebellion of Sheba. Amasa, as you recall, was the leader of Absalom's army that rebelled against David. When David was victorious, one of the forgiving things he did was to place Amasa in charge of his own army. David now commands him to rally the men of Judah together within three days, but for whatever reason he had, it took longer than that. He never showed.

This is something to note about forgiveness: when someone betrays you and you forgive them and restore them, that doesn't mean that they're not going to hurt you again. It doesn't mean that they won't let you down again. It doesn't even mean that they won't turn on you and betray you again. What it simply means is that you were imitating Christ and forgave them.

Is your faith large enough to handle forgiving someone over and over every day? This isn't just the standard; it's a warning; a promise. Some people that you forgive will need to be forgiven over and over and over and over.

Pray: asking God for the grace to keep forgiving someone who has let you down.

Reflect: is my faith large enough to handle forgiving someone over and over every day?

So David sought the face of the LORD. (v.1)

Shortly after David had become king, a famine struck the land. This was a judgment from God against the land for what Saul had done to the Gibeonites. Now, we have a tendency to look at passages such as this, and come to the right conclusion that God judges sin, often through natural difficulties placed on people. However, our problem comes when we put God in a box and say therefore, “Every difficulty that comes about is the judgment of God on a sinner.”

This is most definitely not true. Jesus was told about some Galileans who’d been killed by Pilate while they were sacrificing to the Lord. Luke 13:2-3 *‘Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”’*

We can’t make the blanket statement “good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people,” because it’s just not true. Jesus also said, Matthew 5:45 *‘He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.’*

David complained frequently in the Psalms that the righteous suffered and the wicked prospered. There is no way to categorise the source of difficulties. The only way to know what the reason for problems is to do as David did here in 2 Sam 21:1 *‘David sought the face of the LORD.’* It is only through seeking the Lord that we can discover whether something is an attack of the devil, a judgment from God, or just a difficulty in life that we must overcome.

Pray: asking God’s help in understanding a present difficulty you are facing.

Reflect: what am I struggling with just now? Have I sought the Lord’s face?

In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears. (v.7)

This is David's song of praise to God. David is quite good at expressing praise to God. His praise doesn't just consist of a few words, like, "God you are good, yeah, yeah, yeah". I'm grateful that our worship songs are a little broader than that. I think it's a good thing to enlarge our vocabulary of praise. And it is good to simply praise God for all that he has done in our lives. David recognises that God is his rock, fortress, and deliverer. Whatever situation David has found himself in God has always been there. He knows that it is God who has helped him have the great victories. He knows it is God who has rescued him from his enemies. He knows that it is God who walks with him through life. And so he expresses that in this song of praise to God. When was the last time you sat down and praised God for he has done in your life? Sit down today and think on that – and then maybe you will want to write down all that comes to your mind and turn it into a song of praise.

In the midst of all this David recognises that whenever he calls out God hears and answers. David speaks highly of prayer. And prayer ought not to be a last resort for us. It should be a regular dialogue between a child and their father in heaven.

Three preachers sat discussing the best positions for prayer. A telephone repairman who was working nearby happened to overhear the conversation. "Kneeling is definitely best," claimed the first minister. "No," the second pastor contended. "I get the best results standing with my hands outstretched toward Heaven." "You're both wrong," the third preacher insisted. "The most effective prayer position is lying prostrate, face down on the floor." The repairman could contain himself no longer. "Hey, fellas," he interrupted, "the best prayin' I ever did was hangin' upside down from a telephone pole after my safety strap broke."

Pray: thanking God for the gift of prayer and for hearing and answer specific prayers of yours in the past.

Reflect: what has God done in my life? Thank him for it all.

Is this not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives? (v.17)

President Harry Truman was once asked to speak at a fund-raising project to help the children of a White House guard who was slain in the line of duty. With great emotion he said, “You can’t imagine just how a man feels when someone else dies for him.”

David must have had a similar experience in response to his three mighty warriors. When he expressed a longing for a drink from the well of Bethlehem, Josheb-Basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah voluntarily broke through the Philistine camp and got it for him. They were so devoted to their leader that they risked their lives to fulfil his wish.

We all need other people in our lives. We need people to help us and support us, people to encourage us and to challenge us, people to spur us on. David was not a loner. He was a leader. And as a leader he had good people around him to help him. We need to surround ourselves with good people as well.

The courage of these three mighty men so moved David that he would not wet his tongue with one drop of that precious liquid. Instead, he poured it out as an offering to the Lord, saying, ‘*Is this not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?*’ (verse 17). Their act was as noble as if they had died for him.

Most nations set aside a day to remember those who have fought in their wars, especially those who have sacrificed their lives to defend freedom. We do that on Armistice Day – 11 am on the 11th day of the 11th month. They deserve to be honoured and respected.

It is also good for us to remember the one who ultimately gave his life for each one of us. Jesus died on the cross in our place. He gave up his life that we might take up our lives. He died that we might live.

Pray: thanking God for all who have given their lives in the name of peace.

Reflect: do I have good friends around me? Give thanks to God for them.

I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing. (v.24)

A doctor was working in a remote area of Minnesota many years ago when a Native American family begged him to come and help their elderly grandmother who was gravely ill. He went, diagnosed her condition, and then gave them detailed instructions for her care.

The woman recovered, and a few weeks later the entire family made the journey to the doctor's office in town. They ceremoniously presented him with a 150-year-old pair of moccasins made by a great-great-grandfather. When the doctor protested because the gift was cherished and valuable, the head of the clan replied, "You saved my mother's life. We insist that you accept these moccasins. We do not express great appreciation with a cheap gift."

We see this same principle in 2 Samuel 24. A plague has been on the land and David recognises his sin and wrongdoing and confesses it to God in verse 17. Gad comes in verse 18 and tells David to offer a sacrifice to God on land owned by Araunah. As king, he could have taken the piece of land and the animals to make the sacrifice, but instead he purchased them. Araunah tried to encourage David to accept his land and possessions as a free gift but David had none of it. He could not bring himself to offer sacrifices to God which had cost him nothing.

Due to David's sacrifice and prayer the Lord heard and answered and the plague was stopped. David was willing to pay a cost in order to sacrifice to God.

By definition, a sacrifice has a cost. I wonder how we give to the Lord of our time, talents and treasure. Is it the leftovers; is it our spare change; is it a little portion; or do we sacrificially give to God out of gratitude for all he has done for us?

Pray: asking God to forgive us for the times we have short-changed him.

Reflect: do I give cheerfully and sacrificially to God?

I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me. (v.30)

The president of a company in Michigan had suffered a minor stroke, and he was not spending much time at the office. He didn't know that one of his sons, with the help of two vice presidents, was scheming to take over the firm. He learned of their plot just in time, though, and was able to retain control.

In some parts of the world, power struggles result in assassinations, bloody coups, or civil wars – we have seen it over recent months across the Middle East. We see power struggles in politics all the time. They also occur in neighbourhoods, families, and even in churches.

Here in the first chapter of 1 Kings we see Adonijah making a play to be king. David is well advanced in years and is struggling to keep warm. He is failing. David had not made known who would succeed him to the throne so Adonijah makes his own intentions known. He began to act like the king, having chariots and horsemen with fifty runners running before him, just as his half-brother Absalom had done (2 Samuel 15:1). Unfortunately, David's policy regarding these matters was inaction. He did nothing to confront Adonijah about this rebellious spirit. Parents have a responsibility at times to speak into the lives and situations of their children. They have to help them act appropriately. They have to lead them and guide them into God's ways. Don't be afraid to help your children.

God has all this in hand. Bathsheba and Nathan were able to stop the takeover and God's chosen, Solomon, would be crowned king. God is the one who raises up leaders and brings them down. If God has chosen and called someone to pastor a church our responsibility is to support them and follow their lead – not to try and undermine them and take over.

Pray: thanking God for godly leaders and praying for his continual hand of guiding and blessing upon them.

Reflect: do I support and encourage my pastor? How can I show it this week?

So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires. (v.2)

David was ready to die. We will all die. It happens to everyone. The question we need to ask ourselves is not, “Will I die?” The question we need to ask is, “Am I ready to die?” David had written Psalm 23 earlier in his life. ‘*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*’ He wasn’t afraid of death because of God’s presence in his life. David expected to live with God forever. Are you expecting the same? In order to be sure of this you have to have a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

When David was about to die, he gave instructions to Solomon. He told him to be a man and to keep the Word of God. Today, many men believe it is not manly to follow the commandments and live a godly life. For many, manhood is rated on how you hold your booze, how immoral you can live, how coarsely you can speak. But in reality, living the Christian life according to the Word of God is what makes a real man’s man. And the same is true of women as well.

To be a godly man is not to be a geek - it is to be struggling and persevering, keeping your strength under control, being a righteous husband and father. These things are not easy. They take effort, strength, and self-control. Any idiot can get drunk. Any fool can curse. But it takes a real man to live a life of discipline and set an example.

David tells Solomon to walk faithfully before God. He advises him to observe what the Lord requires. How do we know what the Lord requires of us? By reading the Bible and learning from it, and by praying and seeking God’s face. A loving parent shares words of wisdom with their children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Are we in the business of doing the same?

Pray: asking God to help us be the men and women of God that he desires for us to be.

Reflect: am I ready to die?

So give your servant a discerning heart...I will give you a wise and discerning heart. (v.9, 12)

Pantomimes are great fun. I think one of my favourites has to be Aladdin. In the film a young boy comes across a dirty old lamp and he cleans it up. As he rubs it out pops a genie who says your wish is my command. I've often wondered what I'd ask for if I had a genie in a lamp. Solomon does not encounter a genie in the passage today but God appears to him in a dream and says '*ask for whatever you want me to give you.*'

Solomon was a young man charged with the responsibility of governing one of the most prosperous kingdoms in the ancient Near East. Israel was a significant power then, her domain extending from the Euphrates River to the border of Egypt. Responsible for so much, Solomon knew he needed help. So when God asked the young king what He could do for him, Solomon did not ask to be healthy or wealthy. He asked to be wise (verse 9). This request pleased the Lord.

I do not believe that God would have given Solomon anything he asked for. I do believe that God was testing Solomon. God was looking to see what Solomon's heart was like. Maturity in the Christian life is all about learning to live according to God's will, not about getting God to do things your way. God's purpose for your life is to get you to conform your life towards His ways.

God answered Solomon's request and gave him so much more beside because his request had been a wise and godly one. Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived (verse 12). If you want wisdom, ask God for it. The apostle James said, '*If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*' (James 1:5).

Pray: asking God for wisdom.

Reflect: is my life conforming to God's ways or am I still rebellious?

God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. (v.29)

There was a story that took place during the time of the British occupation of Israel. The British soldiers often marvelled at the wisdom of these people and their intelligence. They would talk among themselves, of the secret of these people's intelligence. One day they were standing in the railway station in Jerusalem, and they saw this old Jewish man eating fish heads. Having heard somewhere that fish was brain food, one British soldier thought to himself, "I'll bet that's the secret. You know, we don't eat the heads of the fish, but look at that guy eating the fish heads. That's probably the thing that makes them so smart!" So he came to the Jewish man, and he said, "I'll give you a schilling, for one of your fish heads". He says, "Oh, no, no, no". He said, "I'll give you five schillings for one of the fish heads". He says, "No". He said, "I'll give you a pound for the fish head". So the old man gave him a fish head, took the pound. The British soldier began to eat it, and it was horrible. He began to spit it out. He said, "You cheated me! That fish head isn't worth a pound!" He says, "Ei, yi, yi! Already it's working!"

Our wisdom comes from God as we thought yesterday. We can read books all day, and study at the feet of great teachers for hours, and we can even eat food that helps our brains function a bit better, but real wisdom only comes from God. Solomon, having asked for wisdom, continued to grow wiser by the day. Verse 29 tells us that God gave Solomon wisdom and '*a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand of the seashore.*' It appears he was wiser than all the wisest people in Israel. Some are listed in verse 31. Apparently, these were the brightest minds of the day, but Solomon outshined them all. He also was a poet, a songwriter, a scientist, and a biologist. People would travel great distances just to hear him speak.

Ask God for wisdom, then keep reading His word and following his ways.

Pray: thanking God for the wisdom and understanding he gives.

Reflect: am I seeking God's wisdom or trying to find it in the ways of the world?

My men will work with yours, and I will pay you for your men whatever wages you set. You know that we have no-one so skilled in felling timber as the Sidonians. (v.6)

Solomon's wisdom is shown in 2 ways in this chapter. Here he is preparing to build the temple that David wanted to build for the Lord. The Lord had said that David would not build it but his son Solomon would. Hiram, the king of Tyre, was the man that had sent his own carpenters and stonemasons with supplies to build David's house (2 Samuel 5:11). Now that Solomon is king, Hiram sends some envoys to bless Solomon and to ask what they can do to help. Solomon quickly asks for cedars and for the skilled men to help. Solomon knows how good the Sidonians are at cutting timber – they are the people he needs. Wisdom picks the right person for the job. Solomon has been charged by his father David to build a temple for God. He wants it done right. He knows he needs to put the right person in charge.

The other way we see the wisdom coming through is in the preparation we read of at the end of the chapter. The people work together and prepare the timber and stone that will be needed in the building process. A great work requires preparation. Sometimes we get a glimpse of some of the things that God has for each of us. Paul wrote, Ephesians 2:10 *'For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.'*

All great works require preparation. Sometimes we wonder why God allows us to go through such difficult times. He is cutting timber and squaring stones. Romans 8:28 *'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'* Philippians 1:6 *'being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.'*

Pray: thanking God for the right people in the right roles within the church.

Reflect: what preparation work is God doing in my life right now?

In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built. (v.7)

Solomon has been king now for four years. It's been almost 500 years since the Israelites were led by Moses out of the land of Egypt. After seeing him gathering timber and stone to build the temple of God, he now begins the project.

We are given the dimensions of the temple and then all the main parts are explained for us. The measurements given here are in cubits. A cubit was the length measured from a man's elbow to fingertip, about 18 inches. The porch is mentioned first and it will become known in New Testament times as Solomon's porch. This porch was where Jesus was walking when the Jews confronted Him in John 10:24. It is also the place where Peter and John ended up after healing the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. Then we come to the nave which is the main part of the temple - what we would call the sanctuary of the church. This is what was called the Holy Place in the tabernacle, where the altar of incense, the lamp stand, and the table of show bread were kept. The inner sanctuary is the Holy of Holies, also called the Most Holy Place. This is the room that housed the Ark of the Covenant. The temple was surrounded on three sides by a three-story building. This building contained side chambers that were accessible by winding staircases.

Interestingly no sound was heard from tools in the building site – the preparation work had been done in advance. I like to see this as a picture of how ministry ought to be done. When you come to do ministry, you ought to have the “stones” prepared ahead of time. If you teach a Bible Study, you shouldn't be making it up as you are standing in front of the people. They shouldn't have to listen to the pounding of the axes and the grinding of the saws.

Pray: asking God to help you prepare well for the work that you do.

Reflect: do I come prepared to hear from God Sunday by Sunday or do I simply rush in and sit down?

It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace. (v.1)

While the temple took seven years to build, Solomon's house took thirteen. It was also a costly undertaking, with impressive architecture and handiwork. It was not just his house, but also his palace, for it included his hall of judgment, from which he would rule. Notice though that Solomon puts God first. Solomon builds the Temple first, and then builds his own house. We know he doesn't build them at the same time because we are told that in total he was building for twenty years (1Kings 9:10). Solomon sets an example. Put God's things ahead of your own.

The Israelites in Haggai's day were the ones who were responsible for building the second Temple after the return from Babylon. But they were rebuked because they built their own houses before building God's house. Haggai 1:4 *'Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?'* Do we put God first in our lives? Does his will and his work take precedence over our own desires?

The chapter concludes with Solomon taking all this wealth that his father David had amassed over the years, the spoils of war, and places them inside the Temple, giving them to the Lord. The treasures before him belong to the Lord and are placed in the Lord's temple. Where are your treasures? Jesus said in Matthew 6:19 *'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'*

Pray: thanking God for all his good gifts and putting your trust afresh in him.

Reflect: do I put God first or do other things crowd and control my life?

Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. (v.56)

A man who lived in northern Michigan went for a walk in a dense forest so immense that a person could easily get lost. When darkness began to settle in, he decided it was time to head home. He was used to being in the woods and had a keen sense of direction, so he didn't bother to look at his compass. After walking for a long time, however, he decided he'd better check to make sure he was going in the right direction. He was surprised when the compass indicated he was going west - not east as he had thought. But the man was so sure of his own sense of direction that he thought there must be something wrong with the compass. He was about to throw it away in disgust when the thought came to him: 'My compass has never lied to me yet - maybe I should believe it.' The man eventually found his way out of the woods and arrived home safely because he trusted his compass and didn't rely on himself.

The work of building the temple complete and the Ark brought in, Solomon stands and lifts his hands in prayer, and begins to worship the Lord. In humility, he acknowledges that although this was a huge building project, it is nothing in comparison to a true dwelling place for God. But he knows that God will hear their prayers, and that He will judge before this altar. He knows that this is a place that a sinful people can meet with the Lord to repent of their sin.

Solomon tells the congregation of Israel that '*not one word has failed of all the good promises*' of God. That assurance still stands. What God promises, He performs. His instructions are always trustworthy. He will never lead us astray. If we think so highly of our own judgment that we refuse to rely on God's sure word, we are asking for trouble and will only become more confused. His words have never failed, and they never will.

Pray: thanking God for his faithful to us.

Reflect: do I stand on every promise of His Word?

As for you, if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did, and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel for ever. (v.4)

I remember well one of our family conversations as I prepared to give up my job and go to college to train for ministry. I promised the kids if we supported each other through these years at the end I would take us all to Disneyworld on holiday. We supported each other and I kept my promise. We make all kinds of conditional promises don't we – if you do the ironing I'll give you some pocket money; if you tidy your room, we'll go to the cinema.

God lays before Solomon a conditional promise here in chapter 9. The temple is built and dedicated and God comes to answer Solomon's prayer. He blesses the temple and then he makes a promise. The promise that God gave to Solomon was a repeat of what He'd promised his father David. That is, if he walked right before God and man that there would always be a descendant upon his throne. But the flip side was also true: if he or his descendants turned away from following the Lord, then God would bring curses. Not only on the house of the king, but upon the nation, even upon the temple.

James tells us, James 4:8-10 *'Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.'* The Scripture exhorts us from beginning to end: repent, turn from our sin, turn to God, follow Him and walk in His ways, obey His commandments. We are foolish to expect presents and rewards from our Father if we are in constant rebellion against Him.

As we shall see as we continue on through the book of Kings, Solomon and his descendants did not take the road of blessings. Will we learn from their mistake?

Pray: asking for God's help in walking in his ways.

Reflect: do I follow God or do I still try and do things in my own strength?

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. (v.1)

Have you ever met someone who just left you in awe? I mean, they were so great and so wonderful that you were left shaking your head and saying, "There's nobody else like that!" We come across just such an incident here in 1 Kings 10. The Queen of Sheba has heard of Solomon. She doesn't believe it for herself and has to come to meet him in person. She has heard of him but she wants to know him. That's a bit like us and Jesus. It's better to know Jesus than just hear about Him. It's better to be in a living relationship with him than just to know some facts in our minds. It's better to know him in our hearts than know of him in our heads.

Notice that as she meets Solomon all the things she has heard are confirmed. She had heard about his wealth (verse 7), his works (verse 6) and his wisdom (verses 7-8) and now she has seen them and so much more with her own eyes. What impressed her more than his position, more than his power, more than his prosperity and more than his prestige though, was his relationship with his God (verse 1). When she learned that Solomon's God was the One responsible for his glory, she wanted to know more! She wanted to know about this connection he had with God. She was interested in meeting the God of Solomon!

We have one who is greater than Solomon. In fact Jesus refers to this very encounter in Matthew 12:42. He reminds His listeners that He was even greater than Solomon. Friends, we might have wealth and works and wisdom but greater than all of those we have Jesus. He is our Lord and Saviour; he is the one who died to save us; and he is the one who is coming back to take us to be with him forever. It's important that we let our friends and family know this. Let's point them to the one whom no-one else is like.

Pray: thanking God for Jesus and our salvation.

Reflect: am I known for my love of Jesus?

So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely. (v.6)

Under the category: “Too Stupid,” here is a true story out of San Francisco. It seems a man, wanting to rob a downtown Bank of America, walked into the branch and wrote “This iz a stikkup. Put all your munny in this bag.” While standing in line, waiting to give his note to the teller, he began to worry that someone had seen him write the note and might call the police before he reached the teller window. So he left the Bank of America and crossed the street to Wells Fargo. After waiting a few minutes in line, he handed his note to the Wells Fargo teller. She read it and, surmising from his spelling errors that he was not the brightest light in the harbour, told him that she could not accept his stick up note because it was written on a Bank of America deposit slip and that he would either have to fill out a Wells Fargo deposit slip or go back to Bank of America. Looking somewhat defeated, the man said “OK” and left the Wells Fargo. The Wells Fargo teller then called the police who arrested the man a few minutes later, as he was waiting in line back at the Bank of America.

You don't have to be stupid to do stupid things. Here in 1 Kings 11 we have the wisest man on earth doing stupid things. He has disobeyed God and is suffering the consequences of his actions. Solomon's first mistake was marrying Pharaoh's daughter. The Israelites had been told not to intermarry. Then he marries not just one but many wives. Did Solomon find pleasure in all these women? Later in life, Solomon wrote a simple proverb, Proverbs 18:22 *'He who finds a wife finds what is good.'* Notice the singularity of the statement! Men are much happier with only one wife. That is, after all, the way God created us.

Due to his many wives Solomon is led astray. They turned his heart after other gods and he was no longer fully devoted to God. We would do well to remember the simple basics. As the writer to Hebrews says (12:3) *'Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus...'*

Pray: thanking God for the one true love in your life.

Reflect: are my eyes constantly fixed on Jesus?

But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him. (v.8)

Growing Opinions of Dad:

4 years: My daddy can do anything.

7 years: My dad knows a lot, a whole lot.

8 years: My father doesn't know quite everything.

12 years: Oh, well, naturally Father doesn't know that, either.

14 years: Father? Hopelessly old-fashioned.

21 years: Oh, that man is out-of-date. What did you expect?

25 years: He knows a little bit about it, but not much.

30 years: Maybe we ought to find out what Dad thinks.

35 years: A little patience. Let's get Dad's assessment before we do anything.

50 years: I wonder what Dad would have thought about that. He was pretty smart.

60 years: My Dad knew absolutely everything!

65 years: I'd give anything if Dad were here so I could talk this over with him. I really miss that man.

It's too bad that we have to go through those years where we don't value the opinions of older people. Sometimes older is wiser. I think at times we need to pay a bit more attention to the grey heads.

Rehoboam is going to get himself into big trouble because he is going to ignore the best advice being given to him. The advice given by the elders was to be a servant to the people. This was sound advice, especially since this was Jesus' method of leadership (Mark 10:42-45).

We would do well to listen to our parents. And we would do well to listen to our elders in the church at times as well. As with all advice it is best tested against God's Word.

Pray: thanking God for older, wiser people in your life.

Reflect: do I value the opinions of everyone?

But he was lying to him. (v.18)

The young prophet was deceived by the words of the old prophet. How? The man claimed to have a revelation - a word of God that contradicted the word of God. Millions have been deceived over the generations with this same ploy. People who claim to have a revelation that contradicts the given word. This is what has birthed the cults, and what has led so many into aberrant doctrines. Saints, it is so important to check what is said against the given Word of God. There are so many people out there saying, "God told me this! God showed me that! God has revealed this new truth in these last days! God's Spirit is doing something different than before!" And they sound so spiritual, they sound so right. But they are contradicting the given Word of God. The young prophet believed the old prophet's deception, and he violated the commandment - he ate bread and drank water.

I'm glad we don't have to wonder whether or not this old guy was lying, the writer clearly tells us he was. But what troubles me here is that we have a person called a "prophet", and yet he is a liar. We will see that this man is actually able to speak for God because he will later prophesy and his words will come true (vs. 21). I think the worst kinds of lies are the ones done in God's name. We would like to think that everything said and done at church is a good thing. But there will be people who will abuse the authority of the Lord. Jesus warns us of wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15).

Whenever someone claims to have a word from God we have to test it. We test what we hear by putting it up against the words of Scripture. If Scripture agrees with it, then it is sound to follow. If it is contrary to the word of God then leave it alone and have nothing to do with it.

Pray: asking God for wisdom in discerning the truth.

Reflect: do I test matters against Scripture?

So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretence? I have been sent to you with bad news." (v.6)

Be sure your sin will find you out! Here are some people who were convinced that their sins were hidden:

- The thief was sure that the church was a safe hideout. Just inside he spied a rope hanging. Up he climbed, only to hear the church bell ring out his location.
- In Mexico City a man snatched a woman's purse and dashed into a doorway to hide. It turned out to be the door of a police station.
- Shoplifting in a department store in New York a man picked up an alarm clock and headed for the nearest exit. The clock, hidden under his coat, went off before he could get out to the store.

Jeroboam's wife was discovered as she went to the prophet's house. Their son was ill. It was bad enough to make his parents believe that he might die. Jeroboam decided to send his wife to Ahijah, the prophet that God used years before to tell Jeroboam about His plan to bring judgment on Solomon's house, and that he would one day be king over ten tribes of Israel. Jeroboam figured that the prophet would be able to tell her whether or not the boy would live.

But he wanted her to put on a disguise. After all, Ahijah's prophecy to him last time spoke of the reason that the nation would be taken from Solomon's descendants (1 Kings 11:33-38). Jeroboam had gone the way of the people whom God judged. He had not walked uprightly before the Lord. He knew that if he or his wife came to him, that he would communicate the heart of God to them. And that's what happens here.

You can try and put on a disguise in front of people, but God sees right through you. If He wants to, He has the ability to whisper things in someone else's ear.

Pray: asking God to search your heart and lead you in the way everlasting.

Reflect: do I put on a disguise in front of people? God sees through it.

He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been. (v.3)

Our children watch our lives. They watch what we say and how we act. And they begin to copy that and follow in our footsteps. It has been interesting to watch my son Andrew lead worship in church recently. He has so many of my mannerisms it is a bit disconcerting – he stands like me, speaks like me and has facial expressions just like mine. Fortunately he has taken some of his mum’s great points to balance them out. Our kids look up to us and follow our lead. And that works well if we are following God wholeheartedly and walking in his ways – then they follow and all is well. But if they see bad points, weaknesses and sin in our lives they can copy those as well. And then disaster comes.

While Jeroboam was king over Israel, Rehoboam's son Abijah became king over Judah. He was Solomon’s grandson on his father’s side, and Absalom’s grandson on his mother’s Maacah’s side. If I had to guess at his birth as to his life, I would have suggested that he would grow up to be handsome, but rebellious; wise, but an idolater; a good warrior, but a contentious spirit; a man who spoke of not forsaking the Lord, but would rather pursue many women instead of the Lord.

As it says, there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. In fact, even though Jeroboam’s army outnumbered Abijah’s two to one (2 Chronicles 13:3), they did cry out to the Lord and trusted in the Lord, and because of this, were delivered (2 Chronicles 13:14-18).

However, all in all, he was a terrible king. He was involved in the same sins as his father had been. And he reigned for only three years. He followed his father’s lead...he committed the same sins. He had learned nothing good from his father. And the real indictment comes when it says his heart was not fully devoted to God. Let’s set our kids a good and godly example.

Pray: asking God to help us set a good and godly example for our kids.

Reflect: am I pointing my children to Christ by my life’s example?

I lifted you up from the dust and made you leader of my people Israel, but you walked in the ways of Jeroboam and caused my people Israel to sin and to provoke me to anger by their sins. (v.2)

The Word of the Lord came to the prophet Jehu. Jehu is not the most famous prophet in the Scriptures, but he does appear in this time period of the kings. He ministered the Word of the Lord not only in Israel, but also in Judah. He gave both rebuke and encouragement from the Lord (1 Chronicles 19:3).

What fascinates me is how the prophets received the Word of the Lord. Well over a hundred times the Bible says, *'the Word of the Lord came.'* But the frustration is that it doesn't tell us how it came. Sometimes in dreams or visions, but most often the Bible is silent as to the manner by which the word of the Lord came. We wonder if it was a booming voice from the sky, a letter was dropped from heaven, or if the prophets heard it audibly inside their heads. I don't know how they heard it, but I believe that the word of God came to them in the same way that we hear God's voice. It is not always audible but it is always discernible.

The word here is against Baasha. God made him leader of the people of Israel but he walked in the ways of Jeroboam. You would think that since Baasha has just had a hand in seeing the prophecy of Jeroboam fulfilled, this would strike a little fear into his heart. But it doesn't change any of Baasha's actions. He never repents. He repeats the mistakes of those who went before him.

The call to us is to stop repeating the mistakes. Sometimes we see other people having gone before us, who are involved in certain sins and we get to thinking that it's just inevitable that we will do it too. We don't have to follow the crowd. We can stand against it and seek to follow God fully and completely instead. We don't have to make the mistakes others have done.

Pray: asking for God's forgiveness for following the mistakes of others and for sinning against him.

Reflect: am I repeating mistakes of others?

*The ravens brought him bread and meat...and he drank from the brook.
(v.6)*

The prophet Elijah, who is mentioned frequently in the New Testament, is introduced to us here for the first time. We will find that he is a man who hears from God, and a man of prayer. He is a man who could be incredibly bold, but also could be fearful and short-sighted. Elijah told wicked King Ahab that a drought was coming. A complete lack of rain - even dew - would afflict the land. Only the word of Elijah would change that, and he had no intention of speaking that word. What we find out about this in the New Testament is that this was the result of prayer (James 5:17)

Elijah goes into hiding as the Lord directs him to – presumably because Ahab will be after him when the rain did not come. He is down by a river and the Lord brings ravens to feed him every day. God is the one who feeds the ravens. He consistently provides for them. Now He is using the ravens to feed Elijah. Think about that for a moment. God provides for them, and they provided for Elijah. This is a picture of how the kingdom of God is supposed to work. When God supplies you with provision, whether it is money, food, etc., it is not only for your use. It is not just an exclusive blessing for you. When God supplies you, it is also so that you will obey the command of the Lord to supply others.

After a period of time, the brook dried up because there was no rain. This must have been difficult for Elijah to bear. After all, it was the Lord who directed him to the brook in the first place. God told him that he was being provided for, but now that water was gone. This is a picture of another one of life's strange difficulties. God directed for provision, but then eventually that provision dries up. And we absolutely need to learn this lesson if we are going to walk in faith: God's provision is forever, but His method of provision is temporary. Sometimes he will provide the finances for food, and sometimes He will provide the food itself. Sometimes it is by providing the job for you, other times it is providing for you when there is no job. We need to trust him and seek him for his provision daily.

Pray: thanking God for his daily provision for us.

Reflect: do I use what I receive to bless others also?