

## Solomon: A Time of Blessing and Challenge

1 Kings 2-11  
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Web Description: Times of challenge can be hard to face, but times of blessing can be every bit as difficult. In this message about the ancient King Solomon, we learn to handle our blessings faithfully and to trust the God who keeps his promises even when we don't.

1. Welcome
2. Introduction
  - A. Over the years, you may have noticed that you can tell something about a person by how they handle hard times. People that seem like wonderful people in easy times will sometimes turn really hurtful or rash when the pressure levels go up. Or people who seem confident and strong when things are easy will crack when times are hard. It's like adversity tests us and can reveal cracks in the foundation of our lives that we might not have otherwise seen.
  - B. But do you what's harder than handling adversity well? Our readings from the Bible today suggest that it may be that even harder than handling hard times well is handling good times well. Maybe that sounds strange, but I think it might be even harder to handle blessings successfully and faithfully, especially over the long haul, than it is to handle challenges.
3. Let me tell you the story of King Solomon. This is a guy whose life was full of blessing. He had everything. He became King of Israel at a young age. Son of David, leading a great nation.
  - A. And early in his life, God appears to Him and says, "Ask for whatever you want, and I'll give it to you." Great wealth? It's yours. Good health and long life? You got it. New sports car? Sure, I'll invent 'em just for you. Anything you want. Solomon asks for wisdom. Apparently he already had some. And he prayed for more. This is what the Bible said Solomon prayed, "**So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours.**" **1 Kings 3:9**. I love this prayer. Since I began preparing for this message, I've made it a habit to pray this prayer myself. If any of you find yourselves in positions of leadership anywhere, you might want to make this your prayer. For you leadership in business, in government, in your family, in your community: "God, give me wisdom so that I can be faithful and successful in doing what you've called me to do in this place." This is a great example of how to handle blessing well.
  - B. And God said to Solomon, Since you prayed for wisdom instead wealth or power or even long life, I'll give you those other things too. And he did. He poured out blessing on Solomon. The stories of Solomon tell us that he was fabulously wealthy, that the Kingdom of Israel grew to its largest territorial extent under His reign, that he ruled in peace, and that he was admired by everyone around. Solomon was even an international leader. Hiram was a nearby king who

- admired Solomon and did business with Solomon, and the Bible says that the Queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon and admired his wealth and success.
- C. And Solomon also undertook to make his mark on the world. He didn't just get rich, he also had great achievements. He built two great buildings during his lifetime. First he built the Temple in Jerusalem. King David wanted to build the temple. He asked God if he could build the temple. God said "No," Solomon will build it. So Solomon built the Temple and he also built the royal palace for the Kings of Israel.
  - D. I've known a few people in life where I've thought to myself, "Man, that guy is golden. Everything he does succeeds. He's got everything, and everything goes his way." That was Solomon to the nth degree.
4. But all these blessings were hard on Solomon. And just like times of adversity, times of blessing can reveal cracks in the foundation of our lives. Let me show you a couple examples from Solomon's story.
- A. Solomon's most enduring legacy was the Temple in Jerusalem. Although it had to be rebuilt later because of war, the Temple in Jerusalem is still one of the world's most influential landmarks.
    - i. 1 Kings 6 tells us the basic dimensions of the temple. **The temple that King Solomon built for the Lord was sixty cubits long, twenty wide, and thirty high. 1 Kings 6:2.** A cubit was about a foot and a half, so it was 90 feet by 30 feet or 2700 square feet. And if you skip over to the end of the chapter, 1 Kings 6:38 says, **The temple was finished in all its details, according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it. 1 Kings 6:38.** He built a 2700 square foot temple in 7 years.
    - ii. Then, the very next verse says this: **It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace. He built the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon a hundred cubits long, fifty wide, and thirty high. 1 Kings 7:1-2.** That's a little over 11,000 square feet. He built his own palace 4 times bigger than the temple and spent twice as long on it.
    - iii. This is only one incident. But it becomes part of a pattern. There are cracks in the foundation.
  - B. I mentioned earlier that Solomon had a good working relationship with Hiram, the King of Tyre. Hiram's kingdom supplied the cedar beams that Solomon used on both the temple and his own house, and Solomon paid Hiram for those beams. It was international free trade 3,000 years ago. And the Solomon wanted to give Hiram a generous gift to thank him for this working relationship. And so Solomon gave Hiram 20 cities. Seems pretty generous. Most of us will never be in a position to own and give away whole cities. Surely this was Solomon's intent. He wanted Hiram to think he was a big shot and extravagantly generous. But then Hiram visited those cities, and the Bible says, **"He was not pleased with them. 'What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?' he asked. And he called them the Land of Kabul." 1 Kings 9:12-13** (Kabul sounds like the Hebrew for "good for nothing." And Hiram was insulted. He's like "Really, you're the King of Paris and you gave me Gary, Indiana? Thanks, a lot!")

- C. Do you know what I think was happening here. Solomon was getting too important to Solomon. He really needed to have an 11,000 square foot palace with 30 foot ceilings when the Temple was a quarter of that size and everybody else was living in huts. He was that important, to himself. He could have honored God with those resources, but why? He could have given King Hiram a real gift and displayed real generosity, but Solomon needed to keep the best things for himself. That was more important than blessing a friend or strengthening a relationship. Solomon was very important, especially to Solomon.
  - D. But here's the thing that is to my mind the scariest thing about this whole story. Solomon had no idea this was happening. After he dedicated the temple, he worshiped God there, and he led Israel in prayer. A part of his heart still loved God and wanted to honor God. But parts of him were slipping away, and I don't think he could see it himself. Maybe that's one of things that makes handling blessing so difficult. People surround us in times of adversity, and they support us and pray for us. But rarely does somebody come by your side when you're doing great and say, "Wow, this is going to be really hard. Are you sure you can handle this faithfully?" Solomon could have used that. So could most of us.
  - E. By the end of Solomon's life, the cracks in the foundation crumbled the whole building. As a powerful king in an ancient country, Solomon had lots of royal marriages. And the wives he married from other countries worshiped other gods, and Solomon began to worship those other gods too. And he built temples for them, and offered sacrifices to them, hoping that they too would bless him. And God took the Kingdom away from Solomon, and Israel was divided in the lifetime of Solomon's son.
5. There's an awful lot we can learn from Solomon's story about handling times of blessing, but the first thing we learn is something about God.
- A. Take your eyes off Solomon for a minute, and think about God's work in this story. Solomon was an imperfect guy. Even from the beginning. He asked for wisdom, but he had also been tolerating the worship of false gods in some places in the Kingdom. He did lots of good things, but he was not perfect, as His father David had his stories of disobedience too. But God worked in Solomon, as He worked in David. The Big God Story goes forward because God keeps His promises even when we do not keep ours. God had made promises to bless his people Israel and to bless the world through them. He made a promise to send a King from David's line who would rule the world forever. And when God makes promises, God keeps His promises. As we've learned Solomon's story, maybe you've seen some of Solomon's sins in yourself. And that's not a good feeling, so it's important to know that this story isn't just a moral lesson. This story is the story of a just and yet gracious God who will keep his promises and save His people, even from our worst offenses. He is a God whose plan to redeem His creation is unstoppable.
  - B. But if the story of God is also our story, then we have the opportunity to learn from the characters who have gone before us. We can learn to handle blessing more faithfully than Solomon did.
    - i. Let me ask you, what are the blessings that God has placed in your life, what are you doing with them?

- a. The most obvious place to start is with our material resources, with whatever measure of wealth God has given you. And it's different for different people, but most of us in this part of the world have some measure of blessing. How are you using it? To honor God? To bless others? Or not so much.
  - b. You also have other blessings to consider. Maybe God has given you the ability to mentor and lead other people. Are you good at organizing, raising funds, teaching, singing, writing, building things. How has God blessed you? And how are you doing with the steep challenge of being blessed and using those blessings faithfully to honor God and bless others?
  - ii. Do you see cracks in the foundation? Have you become too important to you? Or is it too hard to see in your own life? Solomon couldn't tell. It just felt normal to him. Are there people in your life that you trust to care about you and tell you the truth that you could turn to and ask for prayer and help in faithfully managing your blessings?
- C. This past spring we did another "Test Me in This" tithe challenge in our congregation, and a group of people signed up to try tithing for 3 months. They gave 10% of their income as offerings to God. It's one of the only commandments in the Bible where God invites us to test him in this and see if it doesn't turn out to be a blessing to manage our blessings faithfully. During that period I got an email from one young woman who participated in that challenge. She works as a waitress, and this is what she said
- i. "I have to be honest, up until the day I heard you or Pastor Angie talk about giving back to God what is already His, I had never regularly (or joyfully) participated in the offering. I know it is not a coincidence that I heard that sermon that day! Since then, I have been joyfully setting aside 10% of my tips each night at work into an envelope for my offering. My intent in telling you this is not to brag, but to remind myself of the MANY blessings that have already come from just giving up a small portion of my money. I am so thankful for your prayers for us all in this area!!"
  - ii. To handle God's blessings faithfully can be hard, but it is also a source of great joy. Tithe is a Biblical guideline for all of us. But it's really just a starting place. It may be a starting place for you today. But sometimes I think we abuse it. We say we can never get there, so we won't try. We won't grow in generosity or handle our blessings more faithfully than we do now because that feels out of reach. Others could be sharing way more than that, but we hide behind a 10% as a limit, and we don't grow in generosity either.
  - iii. So let me pose the question to you differently today. What would be a faithful management of God's blessings in your life? It's not wrong that God has blessed you. He blessed Solomon beyond his wildest dreams, but Solomon became ensnared in those blessings. If the value of generosity grew in your heart, what would your next steps be? If you were going to use your blessings to honor God above yourself and to bless other people, what would that mean for you?
  - iv. Most years, at about this time of year, we do a pledge process. We pledge a certain amount of offerings for the coming year and we work to set our budget

and ministries as a church community. But that's not what I'm talking about now. This isn't about budgets, and we're not collecting any cards. Truth is, those cards aren't all that helpful in the way we plan our budgets anyway. This is about growing as a faithful servant of God in the blessings he has give us. So let me invite you to make a commitment to a next, prayerful step. As I pray for us and for our faithfulness in times of blessing, I hope you'll take a few moments right now to talk to God about this challenge. Maybe there's a new level of increased generosity that God has in store for you. Maybe there's a trusted friend that God is calling to talk to about this. Maybe there's a specific action that God is calling you to take. Please turn your hearts to God and learn from Him how to handle blessing well.