

MAY 2021

- May 1, 2021 HUMAN NATURE
Readings for today: 2 Samuel 17-18, Luke 21:1-19
- May 3, 2021 OUR ONLY HOPE
Readings for today: 2 Samuel 19-23, Luke 21:20-22:23
- May 4, 2021 PRIDE, POWER, AND POPULARITY
Readings for today: 2 Samuel 24, 1 Kings 1, Luke 22:24-38
- May 5, 2021 THE GODFATHER
Readings for today: 1 Kings 2-3, Luke 22:39-71
- May 6, 2021 THE POWER OF WISDOM
Readings for today: 1 Kings 4-5, Luke 23:1-25
- May 7, 2021 BUILDING WITH GOD
Readings for today: 1 Kings 6-7, Luke 23:26-43
- May 8, 2021 THE REALITY OF GOD
Readings for today: 1 Kings 8-9, Luke 23:44-56
- May 10, 2021 THE LOVE OF MONEY
Readings for today: 1 Kings 10-14, Luke 24:1-35
- May 11, 2021 FEAR, DOUBT, AND FAITH
Readings for today: 1 Kings 15-16, Luke 24:36-53
- May 12, 2021 ELIJAH
Readings for today: 1 Kings 17-18, John 1
- May 13, 2021 GOD STILL SPEAKS
Readings for today: 1 Kings 19-20, John 2
- May 15, 2021 STREAMS IN THE DESERT
Readings for today: 2 Kings 1-3, John 3:22-36
- May 17, 2021 OPEN OUR EYES
Readings for today: 2 Kings 4-9, John 4
- May 19, 2021 THE STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD
Readings for today: 2 Kings 12-14, John 5:30-47
- May 20, 2021 WE ARE WHAT WE WORSHIP
Readings for today: 2 Kings 15-17, John 6:1-21
- May 21, 2021 REVIVAL
Readings for today: 2 Kings 18-19, John 6:22-59

May 22, 2021 **LEADERSHIP**

Readings for today: 2 Kings 20-22, John 6:60-71

May 24, 2021 **SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS**

Readings for today: 2 Kings 23-25, 1 Chronicles 1-2, John 7:1-52

May 25, 2021 **CONNECTION**

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 3-5, John 7:53-8:11

May 27, 2021 **GENEALOGY**

Readings for today: 1 Chronicles 8-10, John 8:39-59

May 1, 2021
HUMAN NATURE

Readings for today: 2 Samuel 17-18, Luke 21:1-19

In my devotional reading recently, I came across these words, “Deep in every human life there is somehow that which defiles it.” Written in 1943 in the midst of World War 2 by a prominent pastor in New York City. He saw firsthand the impact “crisis” made on people. He came of age during World War 1. He began his ministry in the Roaring Twenties. He served through the Great Depression until the end of World War 2. He was a national voice. He helped our nation process their pain. And the one thing he kept coming back to over and over again was how all these different crises revealed the “deformation” of humanity’s soul. We just can’t get out of our own way. We keep striving in our own strength. We keep turning to our own wisdom. But it was clear to Rev. Scherer that the world’s resources were now played out. The highest ideals of secularism had descended into the horrors of the Holocaust. Science produced fearful and terrifying weapons of mass destruction. Set free from the shackles of religion, humanity pursued it’s own end with tragic consequences. All that was left was what Nietzsche called, “the will to power.” Millions died as a result. Millions experienced systematic abuse and oppression. Millions suffered the consequences of our collective anger and hate.

Tragically, humanity just seems to hit the “repeat” button every generation. The people of Israel abandon David. The once-great hero is now on the run for his life. All the power dynamics of this particular ancient near east society are thrown up in the air. Allegiances change overnight. Everyone casting their lot with the person they believe will eventually prevail. Ziba makes a play for his master’s wealth. Shimei takes the opportunity to take out all his frustrations. Abishai reverts to type, thinking he can solve every problem with violence. Ahithophel is so ashamed when his advice isn’t taken, he goes home and takes his own life. Joab seizes the opportunity to kill Absalom against specific orders from his king. David weeps over the death of his son. Israel will return to David but nothing will ever again be the same. Violence and suffering and warfare will mark the rest of David’s reign. There is just something dark and deep in our nature that continues to defile us.

Now consider our own situation. A pandemic still rages all over the world. The recent photos of the funeral pyres in India serve as a sobering reminder of the danger so many remain in. Yes, vaccinations are largely available but only in those countries that can afford it. Only in those nations who have the logistical infrastructure to transport and store them safely. And even after COVID fades, the deep political and social divisions it exposed remain. We are more polarized than ever. Those on the other side of the aisle are no longer colleagues with whom we respectfully disagree but enemies we must crush. Those who take a different position socially are no longer friends with whom we can respectfully disagree but hate-filled bigots who must be cut out of our lives. We are all looking for someone to blame. Someone to attack. Someone to degrade. But the sad reality is there is no win here. No way out. We’re engaged in a zero sum game. There is just something dark and deep in our nature that continues to defile us.

So where do we find hope? Only in Christ. Christ gives us the compassion to walk in another person’s shoes. Christ gives us the grace to allow people to make mistakes. Christ gives us love for those with whom we disagree or those who we call our enemies. Christ gives us joy even in the midst of our trials. Christ gives us strength to persevere through our suffering. Christ gives us the humility to ask for help. Christ gives us peace in the midst of the storm. Friends, we have reached the horizon of our lives. We have reached the end of our resources. No amount of government intervention or social engineering can possibly save any of us from ourselves. Only Christ can deliver us. Only Christ can save us. Only Christ can set us free.

May 3, 2021
OUR ONLY HOPE

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 19-23](#), [Luke 21:20-22:23](#)

A few years ago, I attended a prayer luncheon where the keynote speaker shared his testimony. Brought up Communist, he became a rising star and leader in a student revolutionary movement in college. His influence became dangerous which led to him leaving his studies to hide out in the mountains of his country. There he continued to draw followers until he and his small group of friends had amassed an army of 150,000. They engaged in guerilla warfare for a number of years until they eventually invaded the capital city and overthrew their own government. He became Prime Minister. For five years he held his position until he was betrayed by his close friend and imprisoned on crimes of corruption. It's tough to know what's true and what was politically motivated but in the man's own words, "he was the chiefest of the chiefs of sinners." He was a man of violence. A man who lived with a gun in his hand. He was a man of power. A man who enjoyed exercising authority over others. He was a man of great appetites. Using his power and influence to gratify his own desires. His end came as swiftly as his rise to power.

Because of his great influence, he was put in solitary confinement for years. No bed. No toilet. No place even to wash his hands. He suffered tremendously. He was lonely. He was afraid. One night, he had a vision. Jesus appeared to him. Offered him release in exchange for belief. He didn't answer right away. Things got worse. In the depths of his pain and heartache, he cried out for Jesus' return. The next night, the vision came back and this time the man got on his knees. He gave his life to Christ and everything changed.

As I listened to this man's testimony, I was reminded of King David. David too was a man of violence. A man who was raised from a young age to a position of power and influence. A man who used that power and influence to gratify his own desires on more than one occasion. David too was a man of great contradictions. Capable of amazing love and generosity and grace in one moment and brutal, horrifying, seemingly capricious violence in the next. In many ways, he was just like any other ancient near east ruler and yet God still loves him. And he loves God. Even here at the end of his life, he is still finding new and fresh ways to praise God!

What are we to make of such a man? Wrong question. What are we to make of such a God? Much better question! What do we make of a God who would love a man like David? A man like the one I mentioned at the beginning of this devotional? A man like me? The reality is we are all people of great contradictions. All of us are capable of great good and great evil. Capable of great beauty and great ugliness. Capable of amazing acts of generosity as well selfish acts of greed. Perhaps this is why David kept writing his poetry? Perhaps he knew this truth deep down? Despite all his sin. Despite every mistake. Despite the people he had hurt along the way. David knew his only hope was in the Lord.

"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies." (2 Samuel 22:2-4) Where is your confidence today, friends? Is it in the Lord? Is He your rock? Your fortress? Your deliverer? Have you taken refuge in Him?

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Samuel 24, 1 Kings 1, Luke 22:24-38

May 4, 2021

PRIDE, POWER, AND POPULARITY

Readings for today: [2 Samuel 24](#), [1 Kings 1](#), [Luke 22:24-38](#)

More and more studies are being conducted on the impact of social media on our mental health. The results are scary. It is becoming clear that prolonged social media use presents like addiction with similar accompanying symptoms. (Neglect of personal life, mental preoccupation, escapism, etc.) When people attempt to stop using social media, they go through something akin to withdrawal. The more we use social media, the less happy we seem to be and the more socially isolated we become. The comparisons social media invites between our lives and those with whom we are connected is not good for our well-being. Furthermore, social media (which includes all the different apps with a social component to it) is specifically designed to trigger dopamine “highs” in the brain. Dopamine release is triggered by unpredictability, small bits of information that can be digested quickly, and most importantly, reward cues. (i.e. number of “likes” on FB, number of “followers” on Instagram, number of “retweets” on Twitter, streaks on Snapchat, etc.)

I think about the number of people I know who draw at least part of their self-worth off of the number of friends they have on Facebook. The number of times people hit the “heart” button on an Instagram pic. The number of retweets and likes a pithy phrase gets on Twitter or the amount of views on a YouTube video. Especially young people. Especially the young people in my own home. But it’s not just social media. I think of the number of pastors I know who draw their self-worth off the number of people who show up on a weekend for worship. I think of the drive there is in most churches for numerical growth. I know some pastors who seem to live or die based on whether they make OutReach Magazine’s Top 100 list every year. I think of the uncritical assumptions too many Christians make that larger churches must be doing something “right” and smaller churches must be doing something “wrong.” Or the reverse. I once belonged to a denomination where the salaries of all the pastors in each region were published and voted on each year. I remember one older man who came from a very small church standing up to rail against large church pastors whose salaries were more than his entire church’s budget. Never mind the differences in scale or complexities of the job. He just didn’t like big churches and made his opinions known.

Why are we so obsessed with numbers? It does seem to be an American phenomenon. I travel the world regularly. I’ve been to China, South Korea, Mexico, Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda, etc. I’ve interacted with pastors in all of those settings and in my experience, they just don’t seem as hung up as we are on numbers. I think of one young pastor in his early twenties who leads a house church of thousands in China or the village pastor in Ethiopia whose church numbers around 50 of the poorest people in the world. I think of the South Korean pastor whose church is largely made up of teenage refugees from North Korea or the Rwandan bishop whose primary flock is the aboriginal people of the forests near his home. Each of these pastors cares deeply about his people. None of them ignores the numbers. They pay attention to their flock. They evaluate how they are doing especially as it relates to reaching the lost in their communities. They are wise and discerning. But there isn’t the emotional attachment American Christians, and especially American pastors, seem to have with attendance, buildings, and budgets. It’s like we get a dopamine “high” every time the sanctuary’s full.

It’s why I find this story about David in 2 Samuel 24 so convicting. David wants to number his people. He wants to know the size of his army. He wants to measure his power. His influence. His accomplishments. He wants to feel secure. Safe. In control. The images I have in my head are of third-world despots throwing military parades to show off their strength. David is clearly feeling insecure

and in that moment, Satan strikes. He comes along and tempts David according to 1 Chronicles 21 and God allows it to happen according to 2 Samuel 24. The results are tragic. “The word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David’s seer, saying, “Go and say to David, ‘Thus says the Lord, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.’” So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, “Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days’ pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me.” Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.” (2 Samuel 24:11-14) God is going to teach David a lesson in humility. He is going to teach David where to find his true strength. He is going to teach David where true security lies.

70,000 die from the plague. This is horrific and we cannot understand why God would do such a thing. At the same time, we have to remember that such events take place at the mysterious intersection of God’s will and human freedom. David’s decision has consequences and because David is king, the consequences impact his people. The same is true even for today. The decisions our politicians make impact real people in real life and can cause real pain and suffering. David decides to number his fighting men and around the same time, a plague begins. It is brutal. Virulent. And it kills. Somewhere in David’s mind. In the prophet Gad’s mind. Probably in Joab’s mind and the minds of so many others, these events are related. The plague is perceived as God’s punishment on Israel for David’s sinful choices. And perhaps it is. We cannot dismiss the possibility out of hand for God’s ways are not our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He has clearly told His people over and over again that there are consequences...real, life-threatening consequences...for sin. God’s justice and righteousness will not be mocked.

So how do we respond? What does this mean for our lives? First and foremost, it leads us to confession. Repentance. It calls to mind all the times we too have placed our faith in numbers. Or our mental health and well-being in the number of likes we get from social media. I am not immune. Nor are you. So we confess our sin before God. Second, it leads us to the cross. To the place where the penalty for our sin was paid. To the place where God’s judgment was fully and completely and utterly satisfied by the death of our Lord. We am not condemned. We need not feel any shame. For God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. Third, it inspires us to live for Him today. To live from that place of grace knowing God has torn down the dividing wall of hostility that exists between us and made peace with us by the blood of His Cross. We am forgiven so we can forgive others. Grace was extended to us so we can extend it to others. Love was shown to us so we can show love to others. We are secure in God’s hands.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 2-3, Luke 22:39-71

May 5, 2021
THE GODFATHER

Readings for today: 1 Kings 2-3, Luke 22:39-71

Every time I read 1 Kings 2, I think of one of The Godfather. I picture Michael Corleone at the altar taking his baptismal vows as his henchmen settle score after score after score. Carlo. Tessio. Virgil Solozzo. Tattaglia. Cuneo. Stacci. Barzini. It's a classic scene. At the end of David's life, there is yet another struggle for power. His son, Adonijah, sees his opportunity to take the throne. He gathers some of David's inner circle around him. He sacrifices sheep and oxen. He calls all the leaders of the nation to join him with a few notable exceptions. But he miscalculates. He moves too soon. David is not yet dead. The timing is not right. And the results are disastrous.

Solomon is crowned king by David to the acclaim of all the people. But David's not quite finished settling scores. He has a long memory. He knows who has wronged him. He knows who has betrayed him. And one gets the sense that he's been waiting. Biding his time. Getting ready for the right moment to strike. Joab. Shimei. Abiathar. Adonijah. All fall to the sword or are exiled as Solomon works to secure his throne. This is real life in the real world and whereas we may not assassinate our political enemies anymore, we certainly do all we can to discredit them and "assassinate" their character. Things haven't much changed since Solomon's time.

What do we take away from today's reading? Well, the biblical authors make it clear that God is using broken, imperfect people to bring about His righteous judgment. Joab is executed for committing the cold-blooded murders of Abner and Amasa. Shimei is executed for the curse he put on David as he fled for his life. Abiathar is exiled for his treason, thus fulfilling a decades old prophecy about Eli's family being expelled from service at the house of God. Adonijah is executed for his treason and sedition. Though it may make our modern sensibilities squirm, God's righteous judgment is a critical component of His eternal character.

A God without justice is a God who is powerless in the face of evil. A God without justice is soft and sentimental. A God without justice cannot stand against the violence and tyranny of this world. A God without justice is weak. But our God is a God of justice! And He executes His righteous judgment on sin and evil in this world! This is why the Psalmist can declare, "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!...For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land...The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him, but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming...For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the Lord upholds the righteous....But the wicked will perish; the enemies of the Lord are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish—like smoke they vanish away." (Psalms 37:1, 9, 12-13, 17, 20) Though it may not happen in this life, the promise of God is sure! Evil will get its due! Evildoers will not inherit the Kingdom! Satan and his demonic horde will eventually be bound and thrown into the lake of fire! God will make His victory complete! His justice will reign upon the earth!

Until that great day comes, what to make this reading in our own lives? God is a God of justice. He sees our sin. He sees the evil we commit not just with our hands but in our hearts and minds as well. Our evil thoughts. Our evil intentions. Our sinful and selfish ways. Sins of commission and sins of omission. We cannot escape the justice of God! And this should bring us to our knees in worship before the Crucified and Risen Christ who literally stood in our place. Took our punishment. Bore the wrath we deserved. Satisfied God's justice once and for all! Thanks be to God for what He has done!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 4-5, Luke 23:1-25

May 6, 2021
THE POWER OF WISDOM

Readings for today: [1 Kings 4-5](#), [Luke 23:1-25](#)

“At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." (1 Kings 3:5)

Put yourself in Solomon’s shoes as you think about the readings from yesterday and today. You have a glorious vision of God. He literally bends the heavens to come down and enter your dreams as you sleep. He says to you, “What shall I give to you?” “What is it you want?” “Tell me your heart’s desire and I will make it happen.” What would you say? How would you respond? What would you ask for?

Don’t let yourself respond too quickly. Let the Spirit search your heart as you ponder and reflect. As you think, let me encourage you to get in touch with your deepest fears. We all have them. Secret fears we harbor in our hearts that we spend a lifetime running from or protecting ourselves from. So much of how we choose to live our lives is in response to primordial fears we all carry inside. Fear of failure. Fear of not having enough. Fear of being unsafe. Fears for our children or our children’s children. Fear of insignificance. Fear of disease. Fear of death. What do you think Solomon was afraid of? As a young man, he had just inherited a powerful kingdom in the Middle East. (Not the safest or calmest place in the world, especially back then!) He was surrounded by powerful neighbors with powerful armies. He faced enemies both at home and abroad. As fabulous as his wealth was, it was fleeting in the ancient world. It could be here today and gone tomorrow. There was no FCC to guarantee his money. His people were looking to him for guidance and wisdom. What if he failed? What if he couldn’t live up to his father’s incredible legacy? All eyes turned to him as he ascended the throne. Would he be able to hold it? Would he preside over a period of peace and prosperity or would the nation crumble under his leadership? What if famine struck? What if the rains didn’t come? What if harvests failed? Plagues struck his livestock? So much responsibility at such a young age!

I imagine Solomon’s dreams were often filled with anxiety and fear. The pressure to perform had to be enormous. So when the Lord came to him with this question - “What shall I give to you?” - Solomon responds from the depths of his heart. “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?” (1 Kings 3:9) Centuries later, a man named James would encourage God’s people to pray a similar prayer. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5) It’s a potent prayer. Transcending time and place and circumstance. Solomon is clearly not simply focused on the present or even the short-term. He knows the challenges he will face. He knows the years will weigh heavy. He knows there will be trials and tribulations and struggles and heartache. He knows all of this and so he asks for divine wisdom to make good decisions for the sake of God’s people. How selfless! How humble! How insightful!

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches His disciples, saying, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Matthew 7:7) Isn’t that amazing? Essentially, Jesus is asking his disciples the same question He once asked Solomon. What is it you want? Ask and I will give it to you! Seek it out and I will show it to you! Be persistent in prayer and I will open the door for you. I will let you into my presence. I will answer all your questions. I will meet all your needs. I will give you what your heart desires.

Wait a minute, you say! That cannot be true! We've all prayed lots of prayers that were never answered! We've all prayed lots of prayers that just seemed to bounce off the ceiling! We've all prayed lots of prayers and gotten the silent treatment - so we thought - from the Lord. So what's really going on here? What's Jesus really saying?

Jesus is no genie. We're not Aladdin with a magic lamp. Expressing to God our deepest desires and deepest needs is not the same as making three wishes! God probes the deepest recesses of our hearts. Psalm 42:7 describes it like this, "Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me." The Apostle Paul says it like this in Romans 8:26-27, "For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And He who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." This is why Paul can say with confidence that God works all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose! Because God responds to the deepest needs of the human heart. The needs we can't give voice to. The needs we don't want to admit to. The needs are most afraid to express.

The most amazing thing about Solomon is that he's in touch with his needs. He knows he is weak. He knows he is young. He knows he is immature. He knows he is unable to carry the burden that has been placed on his shoulders. He acknowledges all of this and his prayer therefore comes from that deep place within as he asks for divine wisdom to bear up under the challenges that will come. And God answers his prayers. "And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore," (1 Kings 4:29) Are you in touch with your deepest needs? Have you spent time reflecting on your fears? Have you come face to face with your failure? Do you acknowledge your weakness and insignificance and are you willing to bring those needs before God? This, friends, is prayer. Humble. Heartfelt. Authentic. Real. Honest to goodness prayer. And such prayers God will NEVER dismiss or despise! Thanks be to God!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 6-7, Luke 23:26-43

May 7, 2021
BUILDING WITH GOD

Readings for today: [1 Kings 6-7](#), [Luke 23:26-43](#)

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who labor, labor in vain. Unless the Lord establishes our steps, we will stumble and fall. Unless the Lord has commissioned our work, it will fall apart. Unless the Lord is with us, our ways can never be pure.

I think about this Psalm each year when I hit these chapters describing the ambitious building projects Solomon undertook. He spends seven years building the Temple of God. The glorious building that would become the beating heart of Israel for generations. Then he spends thirteen years building his own house which includes these different halls where he will conduct the business of the nation. The people labor for twenty long years to bring Solomon's vision to pass. It is a mighty work. It is a hard work. On some level it is the Lord's work. It would never have come to pass without the Lord's resources and the Lord's gifts and the Lord's blessing.

Reading this passage always causes me to wonder...what work is God doing in my life? What "house" has He called me to build? I distinctly remember a period of time in my own life where I made my own plans. I tried to build my own house without the Lord's blessing. I remember my mentor, Steve Hayner, telling me, "Doug, I want you to remember something as you go to Wisconsin. You are not going to plant a church. You are going to get involved in what God is doing. Whatever church comes out of it will simply be a byproduct of you joining the Lord in His work in your city. Don't ever forget this!" Unfortunately, that's exactly what I did. Steve was trying to keep me from making a massive mistake. He was trying to keep me from putting the cart before the horse. From getting out in front of God. But in my arrogance and pride, I thought I had it figured out. My way was pure in my eyes. How could it get any more pure than planting a church for Jesus? My heart had already put together a plan but I failed to grasp that it would be the Lord who would establish my steps. And when it came time for the Lord to weigh my spirit, I was found wanting.

It is so easy for us to fall into this trap. To "assume" because we are doing God's work. Because we are engaged in ministry. Because we are taking care of our families. Because we are having success. Because everything we touch turns to gold that somehow God must be pleased. So we keep making plans. We keep dreaming dreams. We keep doing our thing and we forget all about God. We rarely consult Him. We rarely ask Him what He thinks. We rarely bring our plans before the Lord in prayer. Except when things go wrong, of course! When we run into barriers. Roadblocks. Failure. Then we cry out to God. What happened? Why me? What went wrong.

There's a wonderful spiritual practice called the daily examen. It is the simple practice of bringing the details of our day before the Lord morning and night. Each morning when we wake up, we take our schedule of activities to God in prayer. We pay close attention to our hearts as we do. What makes us anxious today? What brings us peace? What are we excited about? What causes us fear? As we bring those things to God, we ask Him to bring consolation. To lead and guide us. To give us wisdom. And then at the end of each day, we repeat the exercise as we look back. What went well? What was hard? Where did we sense God's abiding presence? Where did He feel absent? What did we learn? It doesn't take that long and yet it can make a huge difference in helping us understand the difference between asking God for His plan or asking God to bless our plan for our lives.

Readings for tomorrow: [1 Kings 8-9](#), [Luke 23:44-56](#)

May 8, 2021
THE REALITY OF GOD

Readings for today: [1 Kings 8-9, Luke 23:44-56](#)

“And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.” (1 Kings 8:10-11)

The Christian faith is more than a philosophical idea. It's more than a code of ethics. More than a list of moral rules and regulations. At its most fundamental level, it is an encounter with the Living God. The Maker of heaven and earth. The Lord of the universe. Our God is not made with human hands. He is not a cultural artifact. He is no empty idol. He is not made to believe. He is no fantasy or fairy tale. He is no myth. He exists. He is real. In fact, He IS existence. He IS reality. More elementary than any quark or boson. More fundamental than any atom or protein. More foundational than any building block of life. Without Him, creation goes dark. The world grows cold. The universe collapses in on itself. Life shrivels up and dies.

Don't rush by what's taking place in our reading today. God is literally making His dwelling place on earth. God is literally showing up and showing out at the dedication of His Temple. His Holy place. A cloud descends. The glory of the Lord fills the Temple. The priests drop to their knees in wonder and awe. Solomon stands up to pray. He does so in full confidence that the One he addresses is actually present. He prays with the sure and certain knowledge that God sees and God hears and God responds to the heart cries of His people. “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart...” (1 Kings 8:22-23) There is only One God. All other gods are myths and legends. There is only One True God. All other gods are falsehoods and lies. There is only One True and Faithful God. All other gods are capricious and arbitrary and undependable. There is only One True and Faithful and Loving God. All other gods are selfish and greedy and evil. Solomon is making a statement here. A statement based on reality. A statement based on history. A statement based on the record of interactions between his God and his people.

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O Lord my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, ‘My name shall be there,’ that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. And listen to the plea of your servant and of your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. And listen in heaven your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive.” (1 Kings 8:27-30)

The Christian faith is the only faith whose God actually descends to earth. The Christian faith is the only faith whose God condescends to us. Speaks to us in language we can understand. Meets us where we are in the midst of our broken and messed up lives. For the ancient Israelites, God appeared as a glory cloud filling the Temple. For the first century Israelites, God appeared in the Person of Jesus Christ. His glory contained in a human being. His divine nature joined with a human nature, co-mingled in some mysterious way and yet distinct. For 21st century believers, God appears in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Indwelling the heart of each believer. Filling us with His glory so that we might bear it out to the world. As such, we become living testimonies to the reality of God. We are living stones

being built into living temples so that those who do not yet know God might meet Him as He reveals Himself through us.

Will God indeed dwell on earth? It's a crazy idea. Will God indeed dwell in us? Even crazier. Heaven and earth cannot contain Him and yet He lives in you. He lives in me. He will never leave us. He will never forsake us. He will never abandon us. He keeps His promises. He keeps His covenant. His love is steadfast and faithful and true. So walk before Him with all your heart today, friends! And know there is never a single moment when you walk alone!

Readings for tomorrow: None

May 10, 2021
THE LOVE OF MONEY

Readings for today: [1 Kings 10-14](#), [Luke 24:1-35](#)

“Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.” (Proverbs 30:8-9)

We tend to think of wealth as a blessing from God. We rejoice when our ship comes in. We are thankful to live in beautiful homes. Drive nice cars. Take nice vacations. Build plenty of wealth to retire on and enjoy the twilight years of life. What we fail to consider is the very real spiritual dangers that accompany such wealth.

Solomon was fabulously wealthy. During his reign, Israel enjoyed a period of great peace and prosperity. The economy was strong. Unemployment was down. Silver was so plentiful it ceased to hold any value. His annual income was astronomical. 666 talents of gold equals almost 40,000 pounds of gold each year. An ounce of gold on the current market is almost \$1,300 dollars and Solomon was bringing in 640,000 ounces of gold each year! In today’s numbers, his annual income would run into the hundreds of millions. Incredible! No wonder he overlaid everything with gold! No wonder he sat on an ivory throne! But with all that wealth came temptation. The temptation to become self-sufficient. The temptation to become self-reliant. The temptation to forget God as the One from whom all blessings flow. And that’s exactly what happened. Solomon forgot God. Influenced by his foreign wives, he began building shrines to different gods. Trusting in his own strength, he failed to see the danger before it was too late. Unlike his father David, there is no indication in Scripture that Solomon ever repented of his sin. And though he finished his reign in relative peace, the nation would fracture after his son came to the throne.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Timothy 6:10) It is often said that money itself is not evil but only the love of money. That is true. However, we are all sinners so when you place money in our hands, we naturally tend to fall in love with it. We simply can’t help ourselves. Our hearts - without Christ - are enslaved to our passions. The simple truth is we always want more. We always crave more. We all have an insatiable hunger inside us that is never satisfied.

Now consider where I live. Douglas County routinely ranks among the wealthiest counties in the country. The average household income is well above six figures. This places us in the top tenth of a percent of the world’s wealthiest people. Furthermore, when one considers the broad sweep of human history, we are richer than some of the greatest kings and queens the world has ever known. And while there are great blessings that come with such wealth, we have to acknowledge there is also great spiritual danger. We have a tendency to forget God. We have a tendency to be self-reliant. Self-sufficient. Is it any wonder then that our rates of addiction, depression, anxiety, fear, and suicide continue to climb? In our “affluenza”, we have lost sight of God. Our only hope is to repent and turn back to Him. To find our satisfaction only in Christ and be set free from the ravenous hunger that lurks deep inside. To sacrificially and generously give away our wealth so that it loosens its grip on us. We must heed the words of Jesus and seek to store up treasures in heaven for where our treasure is, so our heart will be also.

Readings for tomorrow: [1 Kings 15-16](#), [Luke 24:36-53](#)

May 11, 2021
FEAR, DOUBT, AND FAITH

Readings for today: [1 Kings 15-16](#), [Luke 24:36-53](#)

I love Jesus. I love how Jesus is not afraid to meet us in the midst of our fear. In the midst of our confusion. In the midst of our doubts. In the midst of real life. In our passage today, the Risen Christ is appearing to His disciples. He is making Himself known in all His resurrected glory. And the initial reaction of the disciples is disbelief. They simply cannot wrap their hearts and minds around the fact that Jesus is alive. They cannot believe their eyes. They cannot believe their ears. So Jesus encourages them to touch Him with their hands. “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” (Luke 24:39) He encourages them to watch Him eat. “And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.” (Luke 24:41-43) Jesus knows resurrection was the last thing anyone expected. Jesus knows they have no categories to help them process His rising from the grave. Jesus knows their weaknesses. Jesus knows their doubts. Jesus knows their fears. Jesus knows their disbelief. And rather than judge them or condemn them or dismiss them, He meets them where they are and helps them understand.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His compassion is the same. His love is the same. His tenderness is the same. He meets us in our fear. He meets us in our doubt. He meets us in our weakness. We are such fragile creatures. Yes, we are made in God’s image but that image has become defaced and deformed by sin. Yes, we are beloved by God but we struggle to accept that love, thinking it must be earned before it will be given. Yes, by faith we are adopted as God’s children but we wrestle to accept our new identity in Christ. It seems too good to be true. The grace of God too amazing. The love of God too wonderful. The idea of God dying and rising again in order to secure our salvation too mysterious for us to ever truly understand. So we doubt. We disbelieve. We wonder, down deep, if it’s all just a myth or fairy tale or something we made up to make ourselves feel better.

Thankfully Jesus is faithful. He meets us where we are. When you think about it, God could have saved us in any number of ways. God could have made Himself known through a vapor trail in the sky or some other miraculous manifestation of His presence. In fact, the Old Testament is littered with such appearances. The problem is we struggle to trust miracles. We struggle to trust anything outside our own experience. This is why God made Himself known in Jesus Christ. All of us can understand babies. All of us know what it’s like to grow up. All of us know what it’s like to experience hunger and thirst and heat and cold and pain and suffering. And God experienced it all and more. He came to be with us. He came to meet us. He came to help us cast out our fears, settle our doubts, answer our questions. We can actually walk where He walked. We can see the places He’s been. We know where He died. We can see where His body lay. These are facts of history not stories we make up. They are living reminders that the faith we cling to is not just another human philosophy or code of ethics. It isn’t based on rational thought or warm feelings. It is based on a real, living, breathing Person who became one of us.

So come to Jesus. Bring all your doubts and fears and anxieties and hopes and dreams and questions and frustrations. Jesus is not afraid of these things. He’s a big boy and can handle it! Let Him show you the wounds in His hands and feet and side. Let Him show you the proof of His great love.

Readings for tomorrow: [1 Kings 17-18](#), [John 1](#)

May 12, 2021
ELIJAH

Readings for today: [1 Kings 17-18](#), [John 1](#)

Elijah is one of my favorites. A powerful prophet in Israel. A man with the courage to stand up to kings and queens. A man of conviction who stakes his life on God. A man who has the faith to perform miracles. A man who literally lives not by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. But what makes Elijah truly great is his humility. He knows he is not the hero of this story. He knows he is not the center of attention. He knows his job is to point people beyond himself to the God he serves. The God who desires to make Himself known. The God who reveals Himself to those who love Him and fear Him.

Elijah is such a man. He's a man who loves and fears God. Why else would he leave his home and family and community to obey when God tells him to live by a brook and be fed by ravens? Why else would he leave Israel to go to Sidon and live with a Gentile widow on the brink of starvation in a town called Zarephath? Why else would he have the faith to challenge the widow to trust the Lord for her food and for the life of her son? Why else would he leave Sidon and return to Israel to confront Ahab and Jezebel? Why else would he call for a public demonstration of divine power on the top of Mount Carmel in front of all Israel? Why else would he mock and taunt the prophets of Baal as they cried out to their god? "Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." (1 Kings 18:27) Why else would he leave no doubt by drenching his own sacrifice with water three times before calling out to God? Elijah is truly a man of deep and abiding and courageous faith.

The temptation, of course, is to assume Elijah was graced with special powers. It's tempting to assume Elijah had some kind of special access to God not available to regular men and women. It's tempting to think we could never live like Elijah. Believe like Elijah. Do the things Elijah did or say the things Elijah said. But nothing could be further from the truth. I've met men and women just like Elijah. No one knows their names. They will never go viral on social media. They will never be interviewed on cable news. They are men and women of deep faith just like Elijah who go to unnamed villages all over the Horn of Africa. Places that don't show up on any map. God uses them to perform miracles of healing and resurrection and exorcism. They pray for rain and the rain comes. They pray for an end to pestilence and it ends. Their crops and herds flourish as God blesses them with His divine favor. Like Elijah before them, they call the people they serve to faith. They call them to place their trust in Jesus Christ rather than the pagan or tribal gods they worshipped before. It's truly amazing.

And it begs the question...what about us? What does it look like to have the faith of Elijah in our lives? Here in America? In a place like Douglas County? Where we are blessed with so much and therefore are tempted to trust God with so little? First and foremost, I think it requires us to build space in our lives for quiet reflection. To sit in silence before the Lord and allow the noise of our lives to die down so we can hear from Him. I think it means creating unhurried space in our lives where we are not rushed. God is not on a clock. We aren't expecting God to move according to our schedule. Second, I think it means cultivating a courageous spirit of obedience. Bravely walking in His ways in the midst of an increasingly hostile world. Faithfully clinging to the wisdom of God which will appear as foolishness to those around us. Much like John the Baptist - who is Elijah reborn according to Scripture - we too must be willing to "zig" when the world says "zag." We must be willing to stick to the narrow path while the rest of the world chooses the six-lane highway. We must be willing to hold fast to our convictions in world where such convictions are now considered old-fashioned, out of date, even

dangerous and oppressive. Ultimately, like Elijah. Like John the Baptist. Like so many saints who have gone before us. We must be willing to be a “lone voice crying in the wilderness...prepare the way of the Lord!”

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Kings 19-20, John 2

May 13, 2021
GOD STILL SPEAKS

Readings for today: [1 Kings 19-20](#), [John 2](#)

I love the story of Elijah. I love his faithfulness. I love his courage. I love his passion. I love his heart. What makes Elijah so great was his ability to listen to the Word of the Lord. His sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. His humble submission and willingness to sit in God's presence in silence. As I mentioned in yesterday's devotional, there was nothing great about Elijah. Nothing unusual. Nothing out of the ordinary. He was simply a human being. A human being like any other human being. A man just like any other man. But he was called to play a specific role in God's Kingdom and the life of Israel.

Elijah was a prophet. A man set apart to hear the Word of the Lord and deliver it to God's people. The Word of the Lord came to Elijah, telling him there would be a famine in the land and to go and live by a brook where the ravens would feed him. When the brook ran dry, the Word of the Lord came to Elijah and told him to go to Zarephath where a widow would care for him. When the widow's son died, the Word of the Lord came through Elijah to raise him the dead. The Word of Lord challenged Elijah to risk his life and confront King Arab. Queen Jezebel. 450 prophets of Baal. After a miraculous victory, the Word of the Lord opened Elijah's eyes to see the coming rain. When Elijah ran for his life, the Word of the Lord again came to him bringing comfort and peace.

This one of my favorite stories in all of Scripture. Elijah falling into a deep depression after his greatest victory. He must have wondered to himself, "What more can I do? I literally just called down fire from heaven and still it is not enough to bring Ahab and Jezebel to repentance." But once again, Elijah leaned on the Word of the Lord. He traveled to the mountain of God. The same mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments. The same mountain where God revealed Himself to Israel in fire and smoke and great darkness. On this same mountain, Elijah meets with God. The wind howls. The earth shakes. Fire breaks out. Finally there is silence. God speaks. Whispering His will to His beloved prophet.

I have no idea what life is like for you right now. Perhaps you are feeling buffeted by hurricane force winds. Perhaps you feel the earth giving way beneath your feet. Perhaps fire has broken out threatening to burn everything you've built to the ground. Maybe you've just won an incredible victory. Achieved a lifelong dream. Found professional success. Perhaps you're depressed and lonely and anxious and afraid. Maybe you're even considering taking your life. Let the story of Elijah encourage you. God is not done with you! He meets you in every season of life! He is with you on the mountaintop when everything is going so well. He is with you in the valleys when it feels like you can barely go on. He is speaking to you. He has some things to say to you. You are His beloved and He will never leave you or forsake you.

How can you tune into what He's saying? You have to do what Elijah did. You have to get quiet. You have to build time in your life for silence. Turn off the devices. Turn off the television. Turn off the ringer on your phone. Get by yourself. Find a spot to be alone. It could be in your home. Out on a trail somewhere. Even in your car. God speaks to us in whispers. He will not raise His voice to compete with the chaos of our lives. He will not talk over us. He will not interrupt us. He simply will wait until we are ready. Wait until we slow down. Wait until we get quiet. God wants you to hear Him today. He wants you to hear the things He has to say. Listen, friends. Give Him the space to speak and you will find the peace and comfort your soul craves.

Readings for tomorrow: [1 Kings 21-22](#), [John 3:1-21](#)

May 15, 2021
Streams in the Desert

Readings for today: [2 Kings 1-3](#), [John 3:22-36](#)

On one of my many trips to Ethiopia, we met with a group of denominational leaders in the southern region of the country to launch a new regional training center. The people in that part of Ethiopia are beautiful and industrious. They engage in backbreaking work every single day. They are mainly pastoralists who live a semi-nomadic lifestyle depending on the rains. They herd cattle and sheep. They raise camels and goats. They grow mouthwatering fruit. However, they are located pretty far from Addis Ababa which is the nation's capital. Because of the distance, they do not get a lot of aid from their government or even their denominational leadership. In addition, their remote location and nomadic lifestyle makes it difficult for them to connect with NGO's and Christian non-profits. Different church groups have come and gone over the years but the challenges are too much for them to overcome.

The leaders we met with that day shared all this with us as we talked about what a partnership might look like moving forward. One of them referenced the story we read today from 2 Kings 3. He told us it felt like they've been wandering in the wilderness for years with no water. Their people were tired. Their churches struggling. What little resources they did have were long gone. He said they had been praying for God to do what He did for Elisha and the kings. Fill the dry streambeds with water. Flood their valley and their land and their churches with resources so they could help their people and bring them to Christ. As he listened to us outline the details of our partnership agreement, tears came into his eyes. He let us know he truly believed the Petros Network was an answer to their prayers and he has been right. The partnership God led us to forge with these brothers and sisters is leading to incredible fruit as hundreds of churches are now being planted and thousands brought to Christ. Further plans for education and clean water access are also being made as we continue to pray for God to fill the dry streams with Living Water!

Where do you need Living Water in your life? The prophet Jeremiah warns us not to try to quench our thirst in the broken cisterns we tend to make for ourselves. Instead we are to quench our thirst in Christ! We are to come to Him and let Him refresh and renew us every day. Too often, we make our plans just like the kings did. We do not consult God. We do what we think is best. And we end up in the desert. Wandering in the wilderness. Struggling to survive. Today's passage calls us to "inquire of the Lord" when we find ourselves in those spaces. To seek His will through His Word and in prayer. To engage in worship as we seek His presence. Intimacy with Christ is the only thing that can truly quench our thirst and satisfy our hunger. His abiding Presence is the source of Life itself and our connection to Him is vital if we are to flourish.

Engage in self-examination today. Ask Christ to reveal to you those areas of your life where you are trusting in your own wisdom and strength. Engage in prayer today. Ask Christ to give you a hunger and thirst for His Presence. Meditate on God's Word today. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal His will to you through the text. Most of all, trust Christ is for you. He loves you. Christ longs to become a spring inside you eternally flowing with Living Water so you will never be thirsty again.

Readings for tomorrow: [2 Kings 4-9](#), [John 4](#)

May 17, 2021
OPEN OUR EYES

Readings for today: [2 Kings 4-9](#), [John 4](#)

I have heard it said that the world has yet to see the power that would be unleashed through one man or woman who's sold out to God. I disagree. I think we see such power all the time. Certainly in Scripture. Take the story of Elisha for instance. The dude is a one-man wrecking crew when it comes to Syria. Ben-hadad wanted to destroy Israel. Invaded time after time. He had the best generals. Mighty men of valor like Naaman. He had all the resources. All the men. All the horses and chariots. The odds were surely in his favor. But Israel had one advantage...Elisha. A man who loved God with all his heart. From Elisha's deep faith sprung wisdom and insight and even prophetic utterances. He thwarted the plans of Ben-hadad to such an extent that his counselors believed it was like Elisha was hanging out in Ben-hadad's bedroom!

Elisha posed such a great threat that Ben-hadad sent his entire army on a seek and destroy mission. Find him. Kill him. Destroy whatever city is giving him refuge. So Elisha and his servant wake up one morning only to see the Syrian army arrayed before them in all its might. It must have been an intimidating sight. The servant is immediately afraid. What will we do? How will we survive? But Elisha doesn't miss a beat. He asks God to open the eyes of his servant so that he can see what Elisha sees. Horses. Chariots. The mountains ringed with fire from the army of the Lord.

This is one of my favorite stories in all of Scripture because of the reminder that though my circumstances may seem bleak. Though I may undergo all kinds of trials and tribulations. Though I may suffer and struggle and hurt. Though the enemy wage war against me. Though the government or culture or society grow increasingly hostile to the gospel. No matter what may come, my adversaries - as numerous as they may be - are no match for the armies of the Lord! His sovereign hand continues to lead and guide and protect. His power cannot be measured. His wisdom cannot be fathomed. And if I will simply lift my eyes above the hills, I will see where my true help comes! (Psalm 121)

“Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.” (Ecclesiastes 9:11) I frequently find myself in positions where I am weak. I have no power. No authority. I am not strong or swift or wise or wealthy. In those moments, I am tempted to despair. And that's when God has me right where He wants me! God does His best work when I come to the end of myself. God does His greatest work when I get out of the way. God is at His most glorious when I am weak and afraid and lonely and have nowhere else to turn. All I have to do is open my eyes. See the power He has brought to bear. Sit back and watch Him go to work. Trust Him for the victory.

Readings for tomorrow: [2 Kings 10-11](#), [John 5:1-29](#)

May 19, 2021
THE STEADFAST LOVE OF GOD

Readings for today: [2 Kings 12-14](#), [John 5:30-47](#)

Every time I read through the histories of the Old Testament, I am struck by the same tragic pattern that seems forever stuck on repeat. Humanity has been singing the same sad song since the Fall. Cain and Abel. The state of the world just before the Flood. Tower of Babel. The time of the Judges. Left to her own devices, humanity inevitably descends into godlessness. Violence. Suffering. Pain. God grieves over all He has made and executes His righteous judgment. Humanity drowns. Languages are confused. People scatter. Enemies oppress and enslave. God using all of it to bring humanity to her knees. To bring humanity to repentance. To bring humanity back to a right relationship with Him.

The time of the kings is no different. Good kings turn their hearts towards God and the people are blessed. Evil kings do what is right in their own eyes and the people suffer. God sends prophets like Elijah and Elisha to call them to repentance but they are largely ignored. Finally, God sends judgment. He raises up adversaries both within and without Israel. Rebellion. War. Death. Kings are murdered. Families are decimated. God's righteous wrath over sin on terrible display.

Humanity never changes. No matter how much "progress" we make technologically, scientifically, culturally, intellectually, you name it...we remain morally depraved. Our hearts are hard towards God. Our necks are stiff. We refuse to bend the knee. The world around us is still awash in injustice and violence. We simply cannot escape our corrupt human nature. Our will to power. Our lust for pleasure. Our craving for wealth. The Bible's diagnosis is incisive and true. "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Romans 3:10-12) And just when it seems like all is lost. The end is near. All hope is gone. God relents. God reaches out. God intervenes once more.

"But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and He turned toward them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, nor has He cast them from His presence until now." (2 Kings 13:23) No matter how far humanity falls. No matter how bad things may get. No matter how much violence and suffering and pain may be taking place. God is faithful. God is true. God is steadfast. He will not abandon us. He will not forsake His people. He loves us with an everlasting love. "For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalms 30:5)

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Kings 15-17, John 6:1-21

May 20, 2021
WE ARE WHAT WE WORSHIP

Readings for today: [2 Kings 15-17, John 6:1-21](#)

There are lots of forces in this world that shape a person. Genetics. The environment we grow up in. Family of origin. Socio-economic status. Level of education. Exposure to social media. Peer pressure. But there is one force we often neglect and that is worship. Worship has the power to shape us in profound ways. It can form and de-form. It can build up or tear down. It can purify or corrupt. It can straighten out or warp how we think about God, ourselves, and the world around us.

Throughout the books of the Kings and Chronicles, we read about the high places Israel refused to tear down. Sacred shrines where they often worshipped false gods. Baal. Asherah. Molech. The list goes on and on. Some of these false gods demanded child sacrifice. Some of them demanded sexual orgies. Some of them demanded cutting and self-harm like we saw with the prophets of Baal who Elijah confronted a few chapters back. These false gods and goddesses were capricious and arbitrary. They placed no value on human life. They didn't care at all about the people. And this makes perfect sense because they were not real. They were simply a projection of humanity's worst fears and corrupt fantasies.

Some might be tempted to assume that because such gods are not real that there can be no harm in worshipping them. Not true! Listen to what God says in 2 Kings 17:15, "The people of Israel went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the Lord had commanded them that they should not do like them." You see, we can't help ourselves. We become what we worship. When we worship something false, we become false. When we worship something evil, we justify all kinds of evil in our own hearts. When we worship like the pagan nations of the earth, we lost sight of our high calling to be a "chosen people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession."

A few years back I was talking to a friend of mine who grew up Hindu in India. He now lives and works in the U.S. and is functionally atheist. Over dinner, we talked about a wide range of topics. The state of the world today. The value of human life. Our goals and dreams and aspirations. What emerged was two very different visions of the "good life." For my friend, human life held no intrinsic value in itself but only as one pursued "dharma" or the right way of living. Good and evil were relative terms depending on one's station in life. The goal of existence is to leave the material body behind to join with Brahman. These beliefs shaped how my friend engaged politically, socially, and culturally. They shaped who he voted for, what public policies he supported, and how he perceived others. Especially those who disagreed with him. They even shaped how he understood himself on some level.

After listening to my friend, I had the opportunity to share what I believed. I shared with him my understanding that all human life has intrinsic value because every human being is made in the image of God. I shared with him how good and evil are immutable categories to a great extent because they are defined by God Himself. Finally, I shared with him how much God loves the world and all that is in it. In fact, He loved it so much He gave His life for it so the goal cannot be to escape this world but to redeem it. These beliefs shape how I engage politically, socially, and culturally. They shape who I vote for, what public policy I support, and how I perceive others. Especially those who disagree with me. They even shape how I understand myself on some level.

It was a rich and respectful conversation that validated a fundamental principle for me...we are what we worship. What we believe about God shapes everything. It shapes how we think about ourselves. It shapes how we think about others. It shapes how we think about the world. So who do you worship? Is it the God who revealed Himself fully and completely in Jesus Christ? Or is it a god of your own making? Is it the God who loved and valued you so much, He gave His only begotten Son for you? Or is it a false god on whom you project all your fears and fantasies? If we worship false gods, we become false ourselves. If we worship the true God, we become more truly ourselves. The people God created and calls us to be!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Kings 18-19, John 6:22-59

May 21, 2021
REVIVAL

Readings for today: [2 Kings 18-19](#), [John 6:22-59](#)

“The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him.” - Dwight L. Moody

Hezekiah is a remarkable man. The polar opposite of his father. Where his father was unfaithful, Hezekiah was faithful. Where his father was morally compromised, Hezekiah was pure. Where his father was evil, Hezekiah was good. One wonders where Hezekiah learned such faithfulness. What made him turn from his father’s ways? Who taught him the ways of the Lord? How did he know to cleanse the Temple, reinstitute the Levites, and celebrate the Passover? These things had been absent for decades. The Temple had been desecrated. The priests and Levites forgotten. And yet somehow Hezekiah’s heart was not only stirred to seek the Lord in this pagan environment but God provided faithful teachers along the way to instruct and guide him. They remain nameless. Their identities known only to God. But what an impact they make through this great man!

Hezekiah is a great example of what can happen when key leaders seek the heart of God. God doesn’t need our wealth. He doesn’t need our power. He doesn’t need our influence or position or authority. He simply needs our hearts. If we seek to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; His promise is to use us to make a Kingdom-sized impact on those around us. Hezekiah “trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel, so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him.” (2 Kings 18:5) He dedicated his life to the destruction of idolatry. He tore down the pagan shrines that dotted the hillsides. He destroyed the bronze serpent Moses had made in the wilderness to save the people from poisonous snakes. We know from the Chronicles that he cleansed the Temple. He restored true worship. He sent messengers throughout the length and breadth of the nation to invite people to celebrate the Passover meal. And even though the people had forgotten how to cleanse themselves in preparation, Hezekiah interceded on their behalf, calling on God to honor the intent of their hearts. The impact of this time of celebration was so profound, the people asked to stay an additional seven days to keep worshipping! “And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with all their might to the Lord. And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the Lord. So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the Lord, the God of their fathers. Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness.” (2 Chronicles 30:21-23) Once the feast was complete, the people - inspired by the worship of the True and Living God and Hezekiah’s example - returned to their homes to continue to purge the nation of its idolatry. “Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the Asherim and broke down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, every man to his possession.” (2 Chronicles 31:1) This is nothing short of revival!

I know a lot of Christians who pray for revival. They pray regularly for a fresh movement of God’s Spirit through their lives, churches, communities, and their nation. If that describes you...and I hope it does!...I want to encourage you to follow Hezekiah’s example. Don’t wait! Don’t delay! Simply begin to seek God’s face right where you are! If you are a mother or father, seek God’s heart for your home and children. If you are a student or employee, seek God’s heart for your school or place of work. If you are a business, community, or church leader, seek God’s heart for the people you serve. If you are a

national leader, seek God's heart for your country. The secret to Hezekiah's success had very little to do with his authority as king. It had everything to do with his heart for God.

I want to challenge you to pray this prayer or one like it for yourself. "Father, I want to do what is good and right and faithful before You. Every work I undertake at my job, in my home, with my friends, at my church I do in accordance with Your commands. I am seeking You, Father. I want to serve you with all my heart. May everything I do prosper in order to bring glory to Your great name." Now you try. Insert your name. Insert your situation. Insert your circumstances and seek God with all your heart. Put Him to the test. Call on His faithfulness. I trust you will be amazed at what takes place.

The world has yet to see what God will do with a man or woman fully consecrated to Him. Your spouse has yet to see what God will do with a husband or wife fully consecrated to Him. Your children have yet to see what God will do with a mother or father fully consecrated to Him. Your boss or teacher has yet to see what God will do with an employee or student fully consecrated to Him. Your church or community has yet to see what God will do with a woman or man fully consecrated to Him. Consecrate yourselves, friends, to the Lord! Let Him use you for His purposes and His glory in the world!

Readings for tomorrow: 2 Kings 20-22, John 6:60-71

May 22, 2021
LEADERSHIP

Readings for today: [2 Kings 20-22, John 6:60-71](#)

Everything rises and falls on leadership. Several years ago, I spent time in Rwanda. One of the most impactful moments of my trip was visiting the National Genocide Museum in Kigali. Standing at the mass graves of over 250,000 people was sobering to say the least. In all, the genocide claimed the lives of over 1.1 million people. Most of whom were killed by friends, neighbors, even family members. A national trauma survey by UNICEF estimates that 80% of Rwandan children experienced a death in their family in 1994. 70% witnessed someone being killed or injured and 90% believed they would die. How could such a thing happen? Leadership. An unholy alliance between the racist government of Juvenal Habyarimana and the “Hutu Power” promoting media run by Hassan Ngeze combined to create the conditions whereby such a horror was possible. Aided and abetted by the French government who supplied arms and training, the government worked hard to gain control over the country as they prepared to implement their own version of Hitler’s “Final Solution.” As the international community turned their backs on Rwanda, evil was allowed to flourish and the results were beyond tragic.

Such leaders are not unknown in the Scriptures. Manasseh reigned for over fifty years and in that time, “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.” (2 Kings 21:2) He reinstated pagan idol worship, rebuilding the high places his father had torn down. He defiled the Temple by setting up altars to foreign gods. “He burned his sons as an offering in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and used fortune-telling and omens and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger.” (2 Chronicles 33:6) In short, he did more evil in his reign than all the kings who had come before him and after he died, his son Ammon continued in his ways. It was the darkest period in the southern kingdom’s history and the people were led astray. Everything rises and falls on leadership.

All of us are leaders. Leadership begins with self. Learning to control our thoughts and desire and channel them to godly action. Leadership continues in the family. We lead our families as fathers and mothers and teach our children to walk in God’s ways. We lead at work as we use our influence - whether supervisor or employee - to impact the health and well-being of others and our organization’s future. We lead at church by the way we worship and serve our brothers and sisters in Christ. We lead in every sphere of life so here’s the critical question...what kind of leader are you? When the final analysis is in and the impact of your life is measured, will it be for good or for evil in the eyes of the Lord?

Everything rises and falls on leadership. How are you doing?

Readings for tomorrow: None

May 24, 2021
SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

Readings for today: [2 Kings 23-25](#), [1 Chronicles 1-2](#), [John 7:1-52](#)

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Those words always run through my head when we read about the final days of the Kingdom of Judah and the end of Zedekiah. It's a pretty gory picture. The King of Babylon captures him as he tries to escape the destruction of Jerusalem. Makes him watch while he slaughters his sons and then puts out his eyes. It's that last detail that I find myself pondering yet again. It's just a painful reminder of how utterly broken Zedekiah had become. I also wonder if there wasn't something more symbolic at work as well. After all, Zedekiah had been spiritually blind for years. He reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem but did evil in the sight of the Lord. He did not honor God. He did not walk in God's ways or according to God's commands. He disdained the Word of the Lord and rejected the worship of the Lord. So perhaps his physical blindness is simply the logical consequence of his spiritual blindness and that's why it's mentioned more than once in Scripture. (See Jeremiah 39 and 52)

I remember my own spiritual blindness. I was raised in the church. My parents were faithful to take me to worship every Sunday. I sang in the choir. I hung out at youth group. By all outward appearances, I was incredibly engaged. However, my heart was hard. Selfish. Locked in sin. I was blinded by my own desires. My own fears. My own doubts. I could not see God. Could not hear God. Did not want to follow God. This was all exposed my freshman year of college. Once outside of the protective rhythms and accountability my parents set, I floundered. I was lost. I wandered aimlessly. I drank heavily. Skipped class. Avoided God. When confronted, I blamed others. I blamed my professors. I blamed my friends. I was so blind I could not see the wretch I'd become.

That's when I met Jesus. He confronted me on a sidewalk right outside the UMC on the campus of the University of Colorado in Boulder. He opened my eyes and it was like I was seeing the world for the very first time. The light was blinding. The exposure painful. All my sins were laid bare before Him. There was no escape. I was overwhelmed by sorrow. Overwhelmed by grief. Overwhelmed by the depth of my sin. The road back to health was not easy. It was one tentative step after another. It required facing the consequences of my actions. The brokenness of my relationships. The anxiety of my failures. But Jesus was faithful. He was the light for my feet. The lamp for my path. Because my eyes had been opened, I could actually see the way He laid out for me.

I have no idea where you find yourself this morning. If you are blind or if you can see. Perhaps you are like Zedekiah or like I was prior to receiving Christ. Groping in the dark. Stumbling around in the shadows. Blinded by your desires. Fears. Doubts. Failures. I pray you come to Jesus! The One who specializes in restoring sight to the blind! Let Him open your eyes! Let Him show you His glory!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 3-5, John 7:53-8:11

May 25, 2021
CONNECTION

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 3-5](#), [John 7:53-8:11](#)

There is an old story about a pastor who went to visit a parishioner whom he had not seen for a while. It was a cold morning so when the pastor showed up, the man had the coffee hot and a roaring fire going in the fireplace. They both sat down and the pastor asked how things were going. The conversation ranged from work to family to health to life in general. The man was doing well. Finally, the conversation got around to faith. And the man started to talk about how he didn't need the church to worship God. He was doing just fine on his own. Praying. Reading the Bible. Walking through the woods. As he spoke, the pastor didn't judge. Didn't condemn. He simply reached over and with the tongs, took a coal out of the fireplace and placed it on the hearth. As the man spoke, his eyes kept going to the coal. At first it burned nice and hot but as time went on it began to grow cold. Having lost its connection to the fire, it eventually burned out.

Life with God is like that. Life with community is like that. I cannot tell you the number of people I have spoken with over the years who have experienced this loss of connection. Their lives are so busy. Their feelings of isolation and loneliness so strong. The pain they carry is so great and my heart breaks for them. So many of them have nowhere to turn. Their relationship with God has grown cold. Their connection to community is tenuous at best. They have no one to call when they are in crisis. No one to lean on when times get tough...as they always do.

God designed us for relationship. We are made in His image after all and He exists eternally in relationship with Himself - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As such, we have a deep longing in our souls for connection. Connection with God. Connection with each other. It's why one of the worst forms of punishment is solitary confinement. It's just not good for us to be alone. It's why I've learned to love reading through the genealogies in the Bible. It reminds me I am surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Men and women of God who have walked this road before me. People with a story to share. Each name represents a person and each person represents a connection to God and to the people of God and ultimately, to the promises of God. Maybe it's David, the man after God's own heart. Maybe it's Jabez who prayed to God for protection. Maybe it's Judah who experienced the grace of God covering His sin. Over and over again, these names tell a story. Our story. This is our family history, friends. Our family tree. And as we tap into this story, we experience a deep connection to the One who made us. The One who loves us. The One who has come to rescue us. Even Jesus Christ.

As we emerge from the isolation of this past year, how are you intentionally rebuilding your connection to God and to His people? How are you helping others rebuild their connection? It's not easy. Especially when we've gotten used to being apart. It takes hard work and intentionality to re-introduce ourselves to each other. To shake another person's hand or give someone a hug. It may be uncomfortable at first as we exercise relational muscles that have atrophied over the last year. But it's absolutely essential if we are to thrive moving forward. So if you don't know where to start, let me recommend four spiritual practices that will help...

Daily Devotional Time: Spend time each day in prayer and reading/reflecting on Scripture. Find fifteen minutes or thirty minutes or an hour just to be with God. Use your commute. Use your lunch hour. Use your break time. Accept God's gracious invitation to spend time with Him.

Weekly Gathered Worship : Find a local church and plug in. Gather physically when you are able with God's people for worship each week. Don't approach it as a consumer experience (i.e. what did I "get out" of it today) but rather trust God to create a "cascading" effect in your life on a subconscious level through His Spirit as He draws you to Himself.

Join a small group: Find a few Christian friends and start meeting together intentionally for encouragement, vulnerable sharing, and accountability. Pray for each other. Talk to each other. Intentionally do life together. Will it be messy? Yep. Pursuing authentic relationships always is because we are all "authentically" sinful! ;-) Press through the difficult conversations. Practice forgiveness and grace. You will find deep connection as you do.

Find a place to serve God's Kingdom: Don't just build this "connection" for yourself! Find a way to share it with others. As you go out to serve Christ and His Kingdom, you will become someone else's point of connection to God and to community. Isn't that awesome? God will use YOU to be His hands and feet in another person's life.

Do these four things over the course of a lifetime and I guarantee...GUARANTEE...you will grow a deep, abiding relationship with Christ and with God's people. Will there be disappointments along the way? Yes. Will you feel hurt at times? Absolutely. Is it easy? Nope. Not in our world. But nothing worth doing is EVER easy and that is particularly true when it comes to the most important relationship in our lives! So place your trust and your hope in Christ and let Him lead you to the abundant life He promises!

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 6-7, John 8:12-38

May 27, 2021
GENEALOGY

Readings for today: [1 Chronicles 8-10](#), [John 8:39-59](#)

One key verse from today's reading is 1 Chronicles 9:1, "So all Israel was recorded in genealogies, and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith." Why are all these names important? Why are the generations laid down with such detail and specificity? Why record Israel according to their respective tribes? What's at stake here? Identity. Connection. History. Even their relationship with God. Israel took their history seriously. They took God's Word seriously. Even after they were carted off to exile in Babylon and were faced with the temptation to intermarry and lose their connection to their past, Israel remained faithful. They knew God had set apart the Levites to serve Him as priests. So the Levites remained set apart even in exile. They knew God had given authority to the tribe of Judah to reign and to rule. So the tribe of Judah continued to serve as princes and leaders for God's people. They knew David and Samuel had set apart certain families as gatekeepers, guardians of the Lord's treasury, etc. So they made sure these families retained those roles. And when Israel finally did return from exile, you see the descendents of these great men and women re-connecting to their glorious past.

Many of us have never been carried into exile. We've not had our identities wiped out. We've not had our history erased. We've not had our connection to our ancestors severed. At the same time, many of us have had this terrible and tragic experience. I think of my Native American friends. Their people lived on this continent for hundreds of years before the arrival of the first European explorers. Their land was stolen. Their tribe forcibly relocated. They were compelled to forgo the key rituals and give up the key rhythms that connected them to their history and their tribal identity. Their stories are terrible and heartbreaking. I think of my African-American friends. Their ancestors were brought over on slave ships across the Atlantic. Their connection to their homeland severed. Their connection to their history erased. Their connection to their past lost. They were given new names. They were forced to take on new identities. They suffered in slavery for hundreds of years. Even after the Civil War, they suffered under intense, systematic economic and political oppression. Their stories are terrible and heartbreaking. Sadly, these stories are all too common no matter where you go in the world today.

It's vital for those of us who have not suffered at the scale of others to humble ourselves and listen to those who have endured tremendous pain and loss. It is important for us to become advocates for them and allies with them in their fight to re-connect to their glorious past. We must pluck up the courage to face the difficult and complex issues that arise as a result. Issues such as national repentance, formal apologies, legal and economic reparations, etc. are not easy to tackle. There are no easy answers here. At the same time, we can look back at events like the restoration of the nation of Israel in 1948 for the inspiration we need to work for a similar restoration for our friends of color who've suffered so much right here at home.

I certainly don't pretend to have all the answers. I'm often overwhelmed when I stop to think about all the complexities involved. But I have to believe as we work for the good of one another. As we refuse to resort to guilt and shame and fear to force change but instead allow faith, hope, and love to be our guide. As we celebrate the history and culture and diversity God has created among human beings on this planet. As we help each other re-connect to something deeper. A deeper identity. A deeper story. A deeper truth. I have to believe God will reveal Himself in that process in a powerful way because this "genealogical impulse" exists within all of us. In a very real sense, Israel's story is our story for all of us can ultimately trace our lineage back to the same common source. Adam and Eve. The first man.

The first woman. Made in the image of God by the hand of God for the glory of God. This is truly our heritage.

Readings for tomorrow: 1 Chronicles 11-13, John 9:1-23