

GETTING BACK ON SPIRITUAL TRACK #1 – A HEART FOR GOD

You may be surprised that I am preaching this series through the Old Testament books of First and Second Kings. These books are rich in witness to God wanting to help his people get back on Spiritual track. Five things that God wanted to get across to the people of Israel that would put them back on track with him as their God.

The first is having a heart for God. First and Second Kings has a lot to say to us about the theme related to people’s hearts. If you want to get back on track with God or stay on track with him your heart must be turned towards him. His heart is always turned toward you. He will never divert his gaze; he will never turn his face from you even if he doesn’t like the life, you are living right now.

First and Second Kings are full of direction about keeping your heart turned toward God.⁵⁸ **May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. 1 Kings 8:58.**⁶¹ **And may your hearts be fully committed to the LORD our God, to live by his decrees and obey his commands, as at this time.” 1 Kings 8:61.**

Also, when someone went away from God or got off track spiritually, the heart was always the centre of the problem. King Solomon got off track by deciding to enter into multiple marriages with women from other lands. He allowed them to worship other Gods and false Idols, we read these words: ⁴ **As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. 1 Kings 11:4.** Apparently, getting older and having a great faith that links you with the past is no guarantee that you won’t be tempted to move your heart away from God.

Let’s take a closer look at King Solomon. ²⁸ **Then King David said, “Call in Bathsheba.” So, she came into the king’s presence and stood before him. ²⁹ The king then took an oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, ³⁰ I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place.” 1 Kings 1: 28-30.** Things start really well for Solomon, he has the blessing of Israel’s greatest ever King - David.

Not only did Solomon have his Father, King David's blessing but he answered his prayers about how he should lead as King of Israel.⁷ **“Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ 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?”**

¹⁰ **The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honour—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.” 1 Kings 3: 7-14.**

Solomon is painfully real and honest with God about the magnitude of his role as King. Verse nine, “⁹ 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?” His reign as King would mean he asked for exactly the right gifting from God. He is an eminently successful King renowned for his wisdom and wealth.

Psalm seventy-two is a Psalm attributed to Solomon.¹ **Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.² May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.³ May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. Psalm 72: 1-3.**

Solomon had a great start as King. ¹⁰ **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10.** I like how August Konkel puts it in his commentary on first and second Kings, “**Wisdom is not simply the ability to make right decisions or intelligence to know all the right things. Wisdom begins with the choice of learning to trust God. God in turn makes provision for peace and prosperity.**

²² **Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven ²³ and said: “LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. ²⁴ You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today.²⁵ “Now LORD, the God of Israel, keep for your servant David my father the promises you made to him when you said, ‘You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before me faithfully as you have done.’ ²⁶ And now, God of Israel, let your word that you promised your servant David my father come true. 1 Kings 8:22-24.**

⁵⁸ **May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. 1 Kings 8:58.**

God assured Solomon that he was chosen and that he would be the recipient of incomparable blessing for him personally and the nation of Israel. Surely that would have been motivation enough for him to be absolutely devoted to God. Sadly, his heart is seduced and his kingdom divided, his life that started so well is a spiritual failure. The mighty work of Solomon was not honoured. Faithfulness in his divided life ended in the division of the Kingdom and was the beginning of that great disaster that was to overtake the chosen people.

Also, in First and Second Kings, we see King after King turning their back on God. They had drifted far from God. They were worshipping false gods and idols, giving themselves over to any and every sexual excess, dabbling in the occult – you name it, they were doing it.

King Jeroboam got off track, ⁸ **I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes. 1 Kings 14:8.**

When King Ahijah (rhymes with Elijah) got off track, ³ **He committed all the sins his father had done before him; his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been. 1 Kings 15:3.** When King Jehu got off track, ³¹ **Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit. 2 Kings 10:31.**

This pattern of King after King turning their back on God must have broken his heart. Then King Josiah arrives on the throne. The first thing he did as King was to restore the temple. This was huge, it was the symbolic heart of their faith. It was run down and in need of a major renovation. While this was going on, they found something that had been lost. They found the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament.

¹⁰ **Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, “Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.” And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king. ¹¹ When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. ¹² He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Akbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king’s attendant: ¹³ “Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger that burns against us because those who have gone before us have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.” 2 Kings 22: 10-13.**

King Josiah tore his clothes, which for that day and time was the strongest possible reaction you could have to reading something, learning something, or hearing something, that struck you to the core of your being. Take a look at what happened next:

²³ **Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ² He went up to the temple of the LORD with the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. ³ The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD—to follow the LORD and keep his commands, statutes and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. 2 Kings 23: 1-3.**

²⁵ **Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. 2 Kings 23: 25.**

King Josiah turned his heart back towards God. That resulted in him leading the entire nation to renew their covenant with God. This all began with the discovery, reading, and acceptance of God’s word. Maybe you might need to rediscover God’s word in your life. Maybe your bible stays on the shelf more than it is read.

Maybe the Bible app on your phone doesn’t get opened as much as you would like. God’s word is many things but it is always his heart toward us.

²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2.

Scripture is the primary way we are “transformed by the renewing of your mind”. The traditional evangelical way is to find some space early in the morning to read, reflect, and pray. This is recommended to be a daily practice. If you are not sure where to start. Then start with the Gospel of Mark.

Then, you have to respond to what you read. It’s how you respond to God's word that will get you back on track spiritually. Let me state the obvious. Let me state the response that will reflect a heart for God. Do what it says. Live like it says. Allow your mind to be renewed. Why? because it is God's word to you.

This may be a challenge because we are talking about obedience. If we are honest, obedience can be hard.

⁹This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. Genesis 6: 9. This is a major test of obedience. Noah is commissioned by God to build this huge ark. He must have suffered the ridicule of people around him. Look at that fool, Noah! they must have said. Although, they probably stopped saying that when it started to rain.

What about Abraham? **¹²The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.²“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. Genesis 12: 1-4.** You think it was easy for Abraham to leave his country and head off to where God would lead him. To leave his people and his father behind, probably never to see them again.

I could keep going through the Bible, men and women who answered the call of God and changed their own lives and those around them. As Mark Twain was known to say, **"It's not the parts of the Bible I don't understand that disturb me, it's the parts of the Bible that I do understand that disturb me."**

So how do we give our hearts to God? While we read the word of God, we need to let the word of God read us. Holy Spirit, what is God saying to me as I read his word. Convict me of areas in my life that are preventing me from knowing and following you more.