

This past week—a scratchy throat I first attributed to the dry cold air—turned into a bad cold. So while the humidifier pushed moisture into the air, I padded around the house in slippers instead of braving the snowy roads to Boise. While I kept my germs to myself, I watched a news program describe the need to put our smartphones away more. They cited research that apps designed to keep us more connected and simplify tasks so we have more time—actually prevent us from authentic connection with people and swallow great chunks of time that could be better spent elsewhere.

The commentators bravely “gave up” their social media accounts for a week to test how dependent they were on them. The women and men candidly admitted they were surprised by how much they missed their habitual “checking in” and scanning their friends for updates. But they also enjoyed face-to-face conversations, board games, and uninterrupted work. What is promoted as helpful, may actually be detrimental to deep, authentic connection with people. What is subtly entertaining may distract us from the most important priority God has for us.

Connection.

Before you get nervous, I’m not going to ask you to turn your smartphone into a doorstop. I’m not even going to suggest you delete your social media accounts. (If the Lord prompts you to do any of that... do it. But that’s not my goal.) I am going to challenge us all (I’m included in that “all”) to hear the Word of the Lord and consider how we will strengthen or weaken our connection to the LORD and to one another.

Last Sunday, we returned to The Story series after Christmas, joining King David, later in his rule as king. After serving God and his people well, David took time away from battle to rest at home. What should have been a time of connection with God became a time of tragedy because David surrendered to temptation. Sin had devastating effects on David, his neighbors, Uriah and Bathsheba and David’s household. We have the benefit of learning from David’s tragic choices and today, we’re looking at David’s son Solomon—to see what he learned from David’s hard-won wisdom.

David was near death. Bathsheba reminded David of his intention to crown her son Solomon as king in his place and David did just that. David handed the throne to his son and gave him a solemn reminder of how to govern well.

As the time of King David’s death approached, he gave this charge to his son Solomon:

“I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man. Observe the requirements of the LORD your God, and follow all His ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses so you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go. If you do this, then the LORD will keep the promise He made to me. He told me, ‘If your descendants live as they should and follow Me faithfully with all their heart and soul, one of them will always sit on the throne of Israel.’ **1 Kings 2:1-4.**

It was good advice and Solomon took it. He loved the Lord and devoted himself to serving God and the people of Israel faithfully. He got to work building the Temple for the Lord and put to good use—all of the materials and supplies his father David had gathered for that purpose. One night, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him what he wanted. God told Solomon He would give him whatever he requested. Solomon answered humbly. He thanked God for honoring his father David by putting him on the throne after him. Although Solomon was grateful for the honor of being king after his father, Solomon was young when he was crowned king. Even though he was young, he didn't answer impetuously. Solomon was already aware of the great responsibility assigned to him as king, so Solomon asked for wisdom, an understanding heart and the ability to discern right from wrong.

Wow. What great gifts to request! God gave them to Solomon. And, the Lord also gave much more. At the close of God's blessing, God said something very important.

"Because you asked for wisdom in governing My people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies—I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for—riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! And if you follow Me and obey My decrees and My commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a long life." **1 Kings 3:11-14.**

"If you follow Me and obey My decrees and My commands as your father David, did, I will give you a long life."

To follow and obey, you must remain in close association. 'Following' and 'obeying' is a sign of deep relationship. It's not natural.

When left to our own devices, we go our own way and serve ourselves rather than God.

On the surface, following and obeying sounds limiting; it is instead—liberating. Devoting yourself to God and to other people doesn't restrict your life—it fulfills your life. With all of Solomon's wisdom, he still failed miserably to understand the mystery of serving God wholeheartedly. He started well. Solomon loved God and intended to govern well. He used his wisdom to help his people and he wrote extensively to guide generations after him.

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commands, for they will prolong your life and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil. **Proverbs 3:1-7**

Solomon didn't take his own words of wisdom to heart. He WAS wise in his own eyes. He thought his wisdom could make him above God's law. But Solomon was wrong.

Solomon made a serious mistake. In violation of God's law, he married too many wives. In fact, according to 1 Kings 11:6, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

In the Deuteronomy, Moses warned that a king should not have too many horses or too many wives (Deuteronomy 17:16-17). My dear husband has just one wife, but David is bordering on too many horses... you can ask him about that after church!

God placed limits on wealth (horses) and wives so a king would remain focused on his responsibilities and not be distracted and corrupted by materialism and power. Solomon knew God's law, but apparently felt his great wisdom and devotion to God gave him the ability to handle it.

Why did Solomon have so many wives? It couldn't have been for love. (How could you possible keep up with so many relationships??) Throughout history the overwhelming reason for marriage among royalty was to create political alliances.

The Middle East in Solomon's time is made up of many city-states and all the kings of these city-states sent their daughters to marry King Solomon to form alliances with him. Before the women could marry the king, they would have to convert to the beliefs of Solomon. But they didn't really change. They brought their gods with them and continued to honor the idols of their homeland.

From the Scriptural account, it appears Solomon continued to love God, but he "dabbled" with other gods. He was not disciplined. He knew his wives were going against the law of the Lord, but Solomon didn't stop it. His heart was divided, and it was devastating. Not only did Solomon's poor choices ruin his home, it destroyed his people. Because of Solomon's sin, the kingdom of Israel was about to be torn in two.

When Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. The LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, Who appeared to him twice, and commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD commanded. So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. **1 Kings 11:4, 9-11**

No one sets out to be unfaithful. No one intends to fail. Certainly Solomon desired to serve the Lord with all of his heart. We have the privilege of reviewing Solomon's mis-steps, so we can avoid the same results. A pastor in Pittsburgh, Rev. Jeff Leake, challenged his congregation at the start of 2012 with "four easy steps fail spiritually". I've re-phrased some of his admonitions.

#1 - STAY AWAY FROM GROWING CHRISTIANS

One of the most important factors in the direction of your life is your primary relationships. Passion is contagious. If you get around people who are passionate in their relationship with God, it will impact you. If you choose lukewarm friends and/or hang with people who are ignoring or running away from God you will ensure your downward spiral spiritually.

It's best to stay away from participating in weekly worship with your church, because encountering God and His people will interfere with your path toward failure. Small groups are lethal to backsliding. Stay away from them at all costs.

#2 - TELL YOURSELF WHAT YOU WANT to HEAR

If you're going to fail, stay away from Truth. Self-deception is a skill you can practice and hone into an art form. Live in denial. Minimize the impact of compromise. Develop excuses for why you do what you do and why you can't change. If you don't like one of God's laws—ignore it! Or better yet, change it!

#3 - AVOID TIME in the PRESENCE of GOD

Quiet time is dangerous. Keep the TV on. Distract yourself constantly. Make sure your Bible is hard to find. If you don't, you will hear the Holy Spirit speaking to you about your negligence and calling you to Himself. Noise, entertainment, and distractions are key to eliminating the room necessary for the Holy Spirit to transform your life.

#4 - LIVE ONLY for the MOMENT and GIVE NO THOUGHT to LIFE's MEANING

Reflection will hinder your path to spiritual malaise. If you start to consider eternity and what matters most to God, you will begin to make decisions leading to spiritual health and humility. Be hedonistic. Do what feels good and what provides you with the greatest pleasure right now.

Don't stop to evaluate how pleasure-seeking is affecting your life or the lives of those around you. That would smack of wisdom. Instead, choose foolishness. Foolishness and failure are linked. If you want to fail spiritually, blame God and the people around you for your problems.

(http://jeffleake.typepad.com/the_launchpad/2011/12/four-ways-to-fail-spiritually-in-2012.html)

Just writing these paragraphs makes my heart hurt. But perhaps it will help us all awaken to the subtle voices that weaken our faith and destroy our lives. How do we grow in godly wisdom? What can we do to remain steadfast in our relationship with God? Turn the four easy steps to fail— into the Four Significant Steps to Faith.

#1 - Connect With God and Other Believers

Be faithful to collective worship. Make the community of faith a high priority. Allow people to depend on you and in turn, rely on them. Offer to and be careful to pray for the Body of Christ. Keep growing, learning and trusting. Be accountable to godly brothers and sisters in Christ. Encourage them as they encourage you.

#2 - Let God's Word Rule Your Heart

Allow the framework God has established for your life to bring you joy, peace and health. Embrace the Lord's Truth, and be transformed by His grace. Live within its boundaries. Extend grace to others and trust Him to provide what you need most. Read and study God's Word and let it shape your thoughts, actions and conversations. Practice being content.

#3 - Seek the Lord First

Humbly surrender yourself to Jesus. Put Him before your family, your work and your money. Let God's love reorganize your priorities. Trust Him with every aspect of your life and let God transform it all. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify those things that distract you from Him or distort what is true and then choose Jesus.

#4 - Live for God

Remember the way you live today influences the Body of Christ (all of us!) and either blesses or discourages/harms your family. What is done in secret, really does affect the world. Be blameless. Keep "short accounts" with God and quickly repent from any unloving, self-serving choice. Receive the lavish grace of Christ and enjoy the peace of forgiveness and love. Stay close to God's people. Stay even closer to God.

Remain connected and all of God's promised blessings are yours.

When we consider the gift of Christ, we understand how to live this way. Jesus was Himself God and He gave up His throne, took on flesh as an infant, and endured the Cross - so we can know this profound connection to God. The power of God raised Jesus from the grave, placed Him at the right hand of the Father and sent the Holy Spirit to fill and guide us into all truth. Praise His name.

Today, we approach the Table of our Lord, understanding His faithfulness makes it possible for us to be faithful. His willingness to empty Himself of "all but loss", teaches us to lay ourselves aside and choose faith instead of failure. By His grace, and with His help—we will not fail!

"Jesus Paid It All"

Communion Celebration

Hold the elements in your hand as you are served, so we can eat this meal together.

The Lord Himself ordained this holy sacrament. He commanded His disciples to partake of the bread and wine, emblems of His broken body and shed blood. This is His table. The feast is for His disciples. Let all those who have with true repentance forsaken their sins, and have believed in Christ for salvation, draw near and take these emblems, and, by faith, partake of the life of Jesus Christ, to your soul's comfort and joy.

Let us remember this is the memorial of the death and passion of our Lord; and a token of His coming again. Let's not forget we are one, at one table with the Lord.

Prayer

We're reminded on the same night our Lord was betrayed, He took bread and, when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise, after supper, He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was broken for you, preserve you blameless, unto everlasting life. **Take and eat this, in remembrance that Christ died for you.**

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve you blameless unto everlasting life. **Drink this, in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.**

Benediction. Let's pray with Solomon. After the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the newly built temple, Solomon prayed a prayer of praise to God. He blessed the people of Israel assembled there, and his words are our prayer today:

"Blessed be the LORD, Who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant. "May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, which He commanded our fathers. "And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, so all the peoples of the earth may know the LORD is God; there is no one else. "Let your heart therefore be wholly devoted to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and to keep His commandments, as at this day." **1 Kings 8:56-61**

Amen.