



THE GOOD KINGS OF JUDAH

learning to avert moral failure from eight good men who didn't

. . . give me an undivided heart . . .

Psalm 86:11

Answer Guide



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For information about these or other additional study materials, contact:

Francis Asbury Society
PO Box 7
Wilmore, KY 43090
859-858-4222
800-530-5673
fas@francisasburysociety.com
www.francisasburysociety.com

To follow Stan on his blog, visit: <http://pastorkeynotes.wordpress.com>.

Downloadable PDFs of both student and answer guides for this study are available at www.francisasburysociety.com/stan-key.





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INTRODUCTION TO THE GOOD KINGS OF JUDAH

The Heart of the Matter

I. We want a king!

- A. Once settled in the Promised Land, God’s people were ruled by **judges** (Judg. 2:16). These were Spirit-anointed leaders raised up to deal with national emergencies. The people of Israel however became discontent with this model for leadership and desiring to imitate the nations around them asked God to give them a king (I Sam. 8:4–9). The moral of the story is: **be careful what you ask for** (Ps. 106:14–15).
- B. The United Kingdom. Israel’s first king was **Saul**, who turned out to be a disaster. God rejected Saul and chose a new king, “a man after his own heart” (I Sam. 13:14). **David** was the greatest king Israel ever had and set the standard for all future kings. Next came **Solomon** who led Israel to her greatest splendor. But he also modeled a **divided heart**.
- C. The Divided Kingdom. Solomon’s divided heart made possible a divided kingdom. Israel in the north (10 tribes) lasted about 200 years (930–722 BC) and had 19 kings from many dynasties. **All** of these kings “did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.” Judah in the south (2 tribes) lasted about 350 years (930–587 BC) and had 20 kings, all descendants of David. **Eight** of these kings “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.”
- D. Our study will focus on the “good kings” of Judah.¹ Though they were pronounced “good,” each of these kings had a **character flaw**. They all finished badly. One leak can sink a ship. These flaws are not hidden but highlighted! And their sins cast a shadow over lives otherwise marked by godliness and faithfulness. The race is determined at the **finish line**, not in the starting gate. Our study will focus on these character flaws:

Solomon	II Chron. 1–9	I Kings 1–11	<u>Lust</u>
Asa	II Chron. 14–16	I Kings 15:8–24	<u>Unbelief</u>
Jehoshaphat	II Chron. 17–20	I Kings 22:41–50	<u>Moral compromise</u>
Joash	II Chron. 22–24	II Kings 11:1–12:21	<u>Fickle faith</u>
Amaziah	II Chron. 25	II Kings 14:1–20	<u>Divided heart</u>
Uzziah	II Chron. 26	II Kings 15:1–7	<u>Pride</u>
Hezekiah	II Chron. 29–32	II Kings 18–20	<u>Bitterness</u>
Josiah	II Chron. 34–35	II Kings 22:1–23:30	<u>Spiritual deafness</u>

We have added one other king to our list: Manasseh (II Chron. 33; II Kings 21:1–18). He is of interest because of the contrast he brings. All the “good” kings ended up “bad.” But evil Manasseh repented in the end, and **finished** well!

- E. Hopefully, the study of these “good kings” will help us to better understand:
- 1) **Leadership**. What should we realistically expect from our leaders?
 - 2) **Godly character**. How holy can a man/woman be?
 - 3) **God**. Who is he and what does he really want?
 - 4) **Myself**. Is there a flaw in my character? Will I finish well?

¹ We will include Solomon though he ruled over the United Kingdom, and we have omitted Jotham because so little biblical material is devoted to his reign. We have also included Manasseh.

II. A heart like David's heart (I Sam. 16:1–13).

- A. Why did God choose David? What did God see in this teenager with a guitar? The answer is crystal clear. It wasn't his birth order, height, appearance, pedigree, education, or gifting that mattered to God. God was looking on the inside, at the **heart** (v. 7). When it comes to leadership and character, the heart of the matter is the matter of the heart. David was a man "after (God's) own heart" (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22). The word "after" can mean either a heart "like" God or a heart "for" God... or both.
- B. What kind of heart did David have?
- 1) A **faithful / true** heart (I Sam. 16:11; 17:34–36) (cf. Matt. 25:21).
 - 2) A **hungry / thirsty** heart (Ps. 63:1) (cf. Ps. 42:1–2; Matt. 5:6).
 - 3) A **worshipping** heart (Ps. 9:1–2; 13:5) (cf. Prov. 17:22).
 - 4) A **fixed / steadfast / immovable** heart (Ps. 57:7) (cf. Ps. 112:6–8; Isa. 26:3–4).
 - 5) A **contrite / repentant** heart (Ps. 32:3–5; 51:17) (cf. Isa. 57:15; 66:2).
 - 6) A **pure / clean** heart (Ps. 24:3–4; 51:10–12) (cf. Matt. 5:8; I Tim. 1:5).
 - 7) A **Spirit-filled** heart (I Sam. 16:13–14) (cf. Acts 15:8–9).
 - 8) An **undivided / single / whole** heart (I Chron. 28:9; 29:19; Ps. 86:11) (cf. II Chron. 25:2; Ezek. 11:19; James 4:8). The division in your heart will be the chink in your armor that allows the devil to come in and exploit your character flaw.

III. A Spiritual EKG.

- A. Question: What does God really want? *Answer: For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those who are **wholly devoted / fully committed / completely his / perfect** toward him. (II Chron. 16:9). (cf. Deut. 6:4–5).*
- B. Question: Why can't I give God what he really wants? *Answer: **Heart disease** (Look at the characteristics of David's heart and invert them).*
- C. Question: Can God heal my heart and make it whole? *Answer: The Lord your God will **circumcise your heart** and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with **all** your heart and with all your soul, that you may live (Deut. 30:6).*
- D. Question: How does this happen? *Answer: If my people who are called by my name **humble themselves**, and **pray** and **seek** my face and **turn** from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.(II Chron. 7:14).*

TABLE TALK

1. The key to every leader is not in his gifts and abilities but in his/her heart. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?
2. Has this study brought comfort and peace to you, or has it been disturbing? Explain.
3. Do evangelicals today attempt to justify (normalize) heart disease or cure it?
4. What is your spiritual EKG reading?

SOLOMON
More, More, More!
II Chronicles 1–9

I. Solomon: An overview of his life (II Chron. 1–9).

- A. Off to a great start! (II Chron. 1). *Give me now **wisdom** (1:10).*
- B. Solomon's Temple. (II Chron. 2–7). The house that I am to build will be great, for our God is greater than all gods. (2:5).
- C. A Promise and a Warning. And as for you, if you will walk before me **as David** your father David walked....then I will establish your royal throne...(7:17–20).
- D. The half has never yet been told! (II Chron. 8–9).

II. Character strengths.

- A. His prayer for **wisdom**.
- B. His lavish and passionate **worship**.
- C. His gift of **administration**.

III. The fatal flaw (I Kings 11:1–8).

- A. How to explain Solomon's womanizing ways?
 - 1. Perhaps his **parents** were to blame.
 - 2. Perhaps these marriages were part of his **foreign policy**.
 - 3. Maybe he was **bored**.
 - 4. Perhaps he had an **addiction**.

Four steps to victory over sexual temptation:

- a. Be **alert** (I Cor. 10:12)
 - b. Be **severe** (Eph. 5:3)
 - c. Be **gone** (I Cor. 6:18; II Tim. 2:22; Job 31:1)
 - d. Fight **fire** with **fire** "The expulsive power of a new affection" (Thomas Chalmers). (Acts 15:8–9; I Thess. 4:7–8).
- B. Deut. 17:14–17. How to explain Solomon's flagrant disobedience?
 - 1. Perhaps he justified his behavior as an act of **political expediency**.
 - 2. Perhaps he felt he was **above the law**.
 - 3. Perhaps he found a way to justify his behavior. It was only a little **compromise**.
 - 4. Maybe he felt these activities would make him a more effective **witness**.
 - 5. Maybe he felt he was **immune** to temptation.
 - C. Solomon's flaw.

What then shall we call Solomon's basic fatal flaw? I've chosen to call it **lust** (greed, desire, avarice, cupidity, voracity, covetousness, insatiable appetites). Not just lust for sex/women. But lust for **money, power, fame, knowledge, culture, reputation, the arts**, etc. Solomon was never content. He never had enough. He always wanted **more**.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Gal. 5:22–23).

Solomon suffered from **destination disease**: I'll only be happy when I'm over there! I'll never be happy here. The cure for destination disease is godly **contentment**.

...I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11–13).

TABLE TALK

1. What is the main lesson you have learned from Solomon?
2. Have you known someone who had the same fatal flaw Solomon had? What happened?
3. How could things have been different for Solomon? What should he have done?
4. Is illicit desire the cause or the result of turning from the Lord? Which comes first?
5. Share one area where your desires are threatening your spiritual health?

ASA
Whole-Hearted or Hole-Hearted?
II Chronicles 14–16

I. A Question of Character.

- A. What is God looking for? II Chron. 16:9. A heart that is **wholly devoted** to him.
- B. Isn't **99%** enough?
- C. Partial commitment is no commitment at all! (Luke 9:57–62; 14:25–33).
- D. King Asa started well. He had a whole heart. But partial commitment caused him to end tragically. And as in all marathons, the race is determined not at the start, but at the **finish line**.

II. Asa: A Drama in Four Acts.

King Asa reigned from about 910–869 B.C. (41 years). His reign can be divided into four time periods.

- A. Act I **Seeking** God Brings Peace—about 10 years. (II Chron. 14:1–7)
- B. Act II **Relying** on God Brings Victory—about 5 years. (II Chron. 14:8–15)
- C. Act III **Finding** God Brings Reform—about 21 years. (II Chron. 15:1–19)
 - 1. Asa repaired **the altar** of the Lord in the Temple. (15:9)
 - 2. Asa led God's people in a passionate ceremony of **covenant renewal** (15:12–15).
 - 3. Asa put his devotion to God over his devotion to his own **mother!** (15:16; see Luke 14:26)
 - 4. Although Asa was never able completely to rid the land of idolatry, his heart was undivided in its devotion to God. (15:17). Asa's **performance** was flawed but his **heart** was pure. Contrast this with King Amaziah (25:2).
- E. Act IV **Forsaking** God Brings Calamity—about 5 years. (II Chron. 16:1–14)
 - 1. Conflict with Israel (16:1–10). He trusted in Syria rather than God. When the prophet warned him of his dangerous spiritual state, he refused to listen.
 - 2. Final disease (16:12–13)². Asa apparently died in **unbelief**.

III. Can We Lose Our Salvation? (Ezek. 18:24–25)

- A. Lessons from Asa.
 - 1. A good start does not guarantee a **good finish**.
 - 2. Partial devotion is not enough. Such a state is equivalent to spiritual **adultery**.
 - 3. God is not **to blame**.
 - 4. Asa the **unbeliever???**

² This verse should not be taken to mean that God's people should not seek professional medical help. Rather, it lets us know how far Asa's spiritual condition had fallen. He no longer trusted God.

B. Blessed Assurance.

When it comes to the doctrine of the security of the believer, the biblical data is plentiful and intricately nuanced. Some verses seem to say the opposite of what others seem to affirm. Such a reality means that defining doctrine in this matter is a delicate affair. To remain on the narrow path of biblical truth, two ditches must be avoided.

1. **Cheap** grace.
2. Eternal **insecurity**.

C. What the Bible says.

1. Some verses imply that the covenant with God, once made, can never be unmade:
 - John 10:27–29.
 - Romans 8:35, 38–39.
 - Philippians 1:6.
 - II Tim. 1:12.
2. Some verses imply that the covenant with God can be broken, like a divorce:
 - John 15:1–2, 6.
 - I Tim. 1:18–20.
 - Heb. 6:4–6.
 - Heb. 10:26–27.
3. A biblical synthesis:
 - Matt. 24:12–13.
 - I Cor. 10:12.
 - II Cor. 6:1–2.
 - I Cor. 9:27.
 - II Pet. 1:10.

*It seems to me that the path of truth is to believe them both; to hold firmly that salvation is by grace, and to hold with equal firmness that the ruin of any man is wholly and entirely his own fault; to maintain the **sovereignty of God**, and to hold the **responsibility of man** also; to believe in the free agency of both God and man; neither to dishonor God by making Him a lackey to his creatures' will, nor on the other hand, to rid man of all responsibility, by making him to be a mere log or a machine. Take all that is in the Bible to be true. Never be afraid of any text that is written by the sacred pen. When you turn the pages over, I do hope you never feel as if you wish that any verse could be altered; I trust you never desire that any text might be amended so as to read a little more Calvinistic, or a little more like the teaching of Arminius. Always stand to it that your creed must bend to the Bible, and not the Bible to your creed, and dare to be a little **inconsistent** with yourselves, if need be, sooner than be inconsistent with God's revealed truth. (Charles Spurgeon).*

TABLE TALK

1. Do you believe that Asa was finally saved? or lost? Why?
2. Why is the doctrine of the security of the believer so important?
3. Give an example of someone who has fallen into the ditch of cheap grace.
4. Give an example of someone who has fallen into the ditch of eternal insecurity.
5. How should a true shepherd preach the doctrine of assurance? Security of the believer?

JEHOSHAPHAT
When Compromise Is a Dirty Word
II Chronicles 17–20

I. The Family Tree.

A. The Three Chairs.

CHAIR ONE	CHAIR TWO	CHAIR THREE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment (whole heart) • Spiritual • God first, self second • Has a relationship with God • Shaped by the Word • Firsthand faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compromise (divided heart) • Carnal • Self first, God second • Has a responsibility to God • Shaped by other believers • Secondhand faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict (hard heart) • Natural (unbelieving) • Self only • Has a religion (?) • Shaped by society • No faith

In the Bible, we see the outline of this **generational slide** in various places (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Joshua, the elders, and the elders’ children; David, Solomon, and Rehoboam). But is this downward progression inevitable? Are our lives determined by our past? Or by our **future**?

B. Tree of Knowledge.

1. Jehoshaphat’s family tree.

- a. Great-great-great-grandfather David. **whole-hearted** devotion to God.
- b. Great-great-grandfather Solomon. **partial** devotion.
- c. Great-grandfather Rehoboam had an **evil** heart (II Chron. 12:1, 14).
- d. Grandfather Abijah (Abijam). His heart was **not wholly true** devoted (I Kings 15:3).
- e. Father Asa. Began well, but ended badly. (II Chron. 14:1; 16:12).
- f. Himself, Jehoshaphat. He walked in the way of **Asa his father** (II Chron. 20:32).
- g. His Son Jehoram. He did **evil** in the sight of the Lord (II Chron. 21:6).
- h. His Grandson Ahaziah. He too did **evil** in the sight of the Lord (II Chron. 22:3–4).
- i. His Great grandson Joash. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord (II Chron. 24:2).

2. Think about your family tree: both those who came before and those who are coming after you. Does your family fit in the “three chairs”? Why? Why not? See Ps. 71:18.

II. Good King Jehoshaphat.

Like Solomon and Asa, Jehoshaphat had many godly qualities that characterized his life at the beginning of his reign. We will summarize these qualities under two headings:

- A. He had a **heart for God**. He sought God in everything (II Chron. 17:3–4; 18:3–4; 19:2–3; 20: 2–4; 20:12; 22:9). (See II Chron. 7:14; Ps. 34:10; Jer. 29:13; Matt. 7:7).
- B. He had a **heart for people**. We see this in his efforts in:
 1. Educational reform (II Chron. 17:7–9).
 2. Judicial reform (II Chron. 19:5–7).

III. Moral Compromise.

- A. Marriage alliance with Israel (II Chron. 18:1).

Jehoshaphat arranged a marriage between his son (Jehoram) and the daughter of the king and queen of Israel (Ahab and Jezebel). The daughter's name was Athaliah. (See I Kings 16:30–33; 21:25 for a character reference on Ahab and Jezebel). Why would he do this? Perhaps:

- **POLITICALLY** it was a wise move. It could re-unite the divided kingdom.
- **MILITARILY** it was brilliant. No longer would Israel be an enemy.
- **ECONOMICALLY** it opened new markets and increased trade.
- But **SPIRITUALLY** it was a disaster! Bringing Athaliah into the royal family of David was the moral equivalent of swallowing poison (II Chron. 22:10–12). Jehoshaphat's compromise almost snuffed out the **Messianic line**.

- B. Military alliance with Israel (II Chron. 18:2–3).

One compromise leads to another! However, seeking perhaps to mitigate his dance with the devil, Jehoshaphat pauses to ask what the Lord thinks about his alliance with Israel against Syria. *Inquire first for the word of the Lord* (18:4–8). One true prophet against 400 false prophets! (18:9–27). In blatant disregard of the prophet's warning, Ahab and Jehoshaphat went forward with their battle plans. Ahab was killed (18:33). Only by God's grace did Jehoshaphat survive, but he received a stern rebuke upon returning to Jerusalem: *Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?* (19:1–3).

- C. Economic trade alliance with Israel (II Chron. 20:35–37).

IV. When Compromise Is a Dirty Word.

- A. Jehoshaphat's fatal flaw.

- B. Choices have consequences. Look at some of the horrific consequences that were the result of good King Jehoshaphat's moral concessions: his children turn out badly, the messianic line is almost destroyed, needless wars are fought, ships are destroyed, and his witness and legacy are tarnished. When compromise lowers God's standards or mixes truth with error, the motives may be "noble" but the consequences are deadly. The consequences of moral compromise are sometimes **worse** than the consequences of blatant immoral behavior!

- C. Application: What can be done to prevent moral compromise?

1. Train your **powers of discernment**. (Heb. 5:12–14).
2. Be **bold & courageous**. (I Cor. 16:13).
3. Be **holy!** (= be different). (I Pet. 2:9; II Cor. 6:14–18).

TABLE TALK

1. What did you learn from “the three chairs” and what do you intend to do differently because of this knowledge?
2. When is compromise a good thing? When is it a bad thing?
3. Do you know of a situation where a good person with good intentions compromised with evil and the results were disastrous? Discuss.
4. In what areas are you most susceptible to moral compromise? What steps are you taking to insure that your legacy is not tarnished like that of Jehoshaphat?

JOASH
Fickle Faith
II Chronicles 22–24

I. Thermometer or Thermostat?

A. What's the difference?

A thermometer **reflects** the temperature while a thermostat **regulates** it.

B. Good King Joash.

Joash behaved like a thermometer when God had designed him to be a thermostat. Although he was the king, he was a **follower** more than a **leader**.

II. The Life and Times of “Good” King Joash.

A. Ascendency: Turning to God. (II Chron. 22–23)

1. The Family Tree: Dysfunction Junction. (II Chron. 21–22)

a. Grandfather Jehoram (Joram). (II Chron. 21:4–6)

b. Father Ahaziah (Jehoahaz). (II Chron. 22:2–4, 10–12)

2. Ding, dong, the witch is dead. (II Chron. 23:1–15)

3. Jehoida rules as regent (II Chron. 23:16–21)

B. Faithfulness: Living for God. (II Chron. 24:1–14)

When Joash came of age, he assumed the reins of power for himself. For over two decades, he lived for God. The Temple was restored and the nation was called back to the worship of the one true God. It appeared that Joash was going to be one of the great kings of Judah and leave **a legacy** of godliness and justice.

C. Apostasy: Turning from God. (II Chron. 24:15–27)

1. When Jehoida dies....

Up until this point in the story everything appears to be wonderful. However, the careful reader may have discerned a subtle hint in the text about what was coming. Once you know how the story ends, this verse takes on great significance. *And Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD **all the days of Jehoida the priest*** (II Chron. 24:2).

Suddenly we are introduced to a question of vital importance: What will happen to Joash once the influence of godly Jehoida (uncle, high priest, adviser, and confidant) disappears? Will he continue to walk in faith and lead wisely? Jehoida's death will **reveal the truth** about who Joash really is. The next verses give the tragic answer to our question (24:15–19).

God gave Joash multiple opportunities to repent. Perhaps Joash would reconsider his ways if the son of the man who had done so much for him spoke to him. But alas! (24:20–25). Some 800 years later Jesus referred to Joash's treachery in a speech to the Pharisees who, like Joash, were guilty of **refusing to listen** to the voice of God (Luke 11:47–52).

III. Fickle Faith.

Whether Joash had genuine faith and lost it, or whether he never had it at all and only “pretended” to be a “good” king, we see in his story a classic illustration of fickle faith. He couldn’t make a commitment and stick with it. In his life we find three characteristics of fickle faith.

- A. **Second-hand** faith. Is faith dependent upon the presence of friends, family, or key leaders? Until a person has his own personal experience of Christ his faith is on a shaky foundation. (John 4:42)
- B. He never learned how to **feed himself**. As long as Jehoida was there to tell him what he needed to know, interpret the Bible, discern God’s will, Joash was “fine.” (Heb. 5:12–6:6)
- C. An obsession with **pleasing other people**. First, Joash wanted to please Jehoida. But when Jehoida died, he then wanted to please his new advisers. He learned to adapt to his social context like a **chameleon** adapts to his. (Gal. 1:10)

IV. The Art of Self-Leadership. (from Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*)

Joash was a thermometer when God expected him to be a thermostat! The reason he could not lead others is because he had never learned to lead himself.

- A. Is my **calling** sure?
- B. Is my **vision** clear?
- C. Is my **passion** hot?
- D. Am I developing my **gifts**?
- E. Is my **character** submitted to Christ?
- F. Is my **pride** subdued?
- G. Am I overcoming **fear**?
- H. Are **interior issues** undermining my leadership?
- I. Is my **pace** sustainable?
- J. Is my **love** for God and people increasing?

TABLE TALK

1. How do you react to Joash? With sympathy? Or with anger? Why?
2. What makes a person a thermometer, a follower (like Joash)?
3. What makes a person a thermostat, a leader (like Jehoida)?
4. Are you a leader or a follower? Discuss.
5. Look at the three characteristics of “fickle faith.” Do any of these describe you? What do you plan to do about it?
6. Look over the ten questions on the art of self-leadership. Zero in on one question that seems designed for your current situation. Discuss it with a trusted friend.

AMAZIAH
A Divided Heart
II Chronicles 25

I. Meet Good King Amaziah.

- A. A general statement about his life (vv. 1–2).

Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not with a **whole heart** (vv. 1–2)

Reading the account in II Kings 14:1–20 helps us to better understand what is meant.

And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet **not like David** his father. He did in all things **as Joash** his father had done. (II Kings 14:3)

- B. Godly and victorious (vv. 3–13).

1. Obedience to the law (vv. 3–4). Even though he was the king, he knew he was still **under the law**.
2. Able to receive correction; teachable (vv. 5–10). Even good kings make mistakes. The point is not perfect performance but rather to be able to receive correction and amend your ways. Amaziah was **teachable**.

- C. Idolatrous and defeated (vv. 14–28).

1. The danger of success (vv. 14–16). Notice that Amaziah is no longer teachable. His heart is hard. What would prompt Amaziah to take the gods of the people he had just defeated in battle and bring them home to worship as his own?
 - **Desire to imitate the life-style of others.**
 - **Desire to appear tolerant, broad-minded.**
 - **Desire to show off.**
 - **Stupidity.**
2. God uses surprising channels to communicate his truth (vv. 17–19). But when a man is proud and his heart is hard, he becomes deaf to the words of God, regardless how they are packaged. *Pride goes before **destruction**, and a haughty spirit before a **fall**.* (Prov. 16:18)

Christian beware! If we turn a deaf ear to the **normal channels** God uses to communicate his truth (Bible, preaching, Christian counsel, etc.), then God may choose to speak to us in unorthodox ways: a talking donkey, foreigners, unbelievers, etc. The **medium** is (at least part of) the message.
3. When our ears are deaf and our heart is hard the results are always tragic (vv. 20–28).

II. Heart Disease.

Amaziah's problem was heart disease. His heart was not wholly devoted to God (v. 2). He was a **double-minded** man and therefore unstable in all his ways (James 1:8).

Here is the general character of Amaziah: He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, worshipped the true God, kept the temple service going, and countenanced religion in his kingdom; but he did not do it with a perfect heart (v. 2), that is, he was not a man of serious piety or devotion himself, nor had he any zeal for the exercises of religion. He was no enemy to it, but a cool and indifferent friend. Such is the character of too many in this

Laodicean age: they do that which is good, but not with the heart, not with a perfect heart. (Matthew Henry's Commentary)

A. The heart of the matter is the matter of the heart.

In Hebrew, "heart" refers to more than a muscle in the chest that pumps blood. It denotes the **governing center** of a person's life (Prov. 4:23). Modern terms that reflect this meaning are character, will, mind, personality.

B. Three diagnostic methods.

1. **Self** examination (I Cor. 11:27–28; II Cor. 13:5).
2. **Word** examination (Heb. 4:12–13).
3. **Spirit** examination (Ps. 139:23–24).

C. Heart disease.

1. An **evil** heart (Gen. 6:5).
2. A **hard** heart (spiritual arteriosclerosis) (Ex. 8:15; Matt. 13:15; Heb. 3:7–11).
3. A **deceived** heart (Jer. 17:9–10). The only heart disease that is incurable is the heart that doesn't know (or refuses to know) that it is sick!
4. A **divided** heart (Amaziah's disease, II Chron. 25:2). (I Kings 11:4; II Kings 17:33, 41; Matt. 6:24; 22:37; James 1:8).

D. Characteristics of a divided heart.

1. A divided heart has **divided loves**. Such a heart loves God truly and sincerely. The problem is not really "hypocrisy" but rather mixed appetites, confused desires, and multiple passions. The Great Commandment is to "love the Lord your God with **all** your heart." The mystery of divine love is that when we love God wholeheartedly we don't love others less; we love them in the right way.
2. A divided heart has **two (or more) masters**. Such a heart is constantly trying to please, appease and satisfy multiple masters. Jesus said this was impossible (Matt. 6:24). Such a person has spiritual schizophrenia, a split personality.
3. A divided heart is a **tormented** heart. Inner division means inner turmoil, a walking civil war, spiritual bi-polar disorder. Which part of my heart is going to control my life today? *The desires of the **flesh** are against the **Spirit** and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other to keep you from doing the things you want to do (Gal. 5:17).*
4. A divided heart is an **unpredictable** heart. *A double-minded man is **unstable** in all his ways (James 1:8).* You never know what such a person is going to do or say. When the person with the divided heart is a king (or father, pastor, boss, president, etc.), then the entire nation lives in constant uncertainty.
5. A divided heart has great difficulty distinguishing **good** from **evil**. Such a heart is fertile soil for both good and for evil, thus the person with a divided heart is unable to make moral distinctions, frequently redefining good as evil, and evil as good (Gen. 2:17; 3:1–7; Isa. 5:20).
6. A divided heart will eventually **destroy you**. This heart disease is always deadly. If your eye is **single**, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is **evil**, your whole body will be full of darkness. If the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matt. 6:22–23).

E. Is there a cure for heart disease? If so, how does it happen?

1. **Ask.** Give me an undivided heart.... (Ps. 86:11).
2. **Believe.** The Lord your God will **circumcise** your heart so that you will love the Lord with all your heart.... (Deut. 30:6). I will remove the heart of stone and give you a new heart.... (Ezek. 36:26).
3. **Receive.** Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you **completely**, and may your **whole** spirit and soul and body be kept blameless... He who calls you is faithful; **he will surely do it.** (I Thess. 5:23–24).

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is whole/entire/blameless/complete/perfect toward him (II Chron. 16:9).

TABLE TALK

1. What did you learn today about the heart?
2. Does evangelical theology today tend to justify and even normalize heart disease or cure it? What are the results of such a theology?
3. What about your own theology? Does it tolerate heart disease?
4. Look again at the symptoms of heart disease and those of a healthy heart. What is your spiritual EKG indicating?
5. Has this study brought comfort and peace to you...or has it been disturbing?

UZZIAH
Pride
II Chronicles 26

I. A Drama in Two Acts.

A. Act I. The blessings of seeking the Lord. (vv. 1–15)

1. Uzziah's godly character. (vv. 1–5)

- a. The defining characteristic of Uzziah's early years is his **seeking** heart. In the Bible it almost seems that seeking God is more important than finding him! Those who seek God are richly **blessed**. (II Chron. 7:14; Ps. 34:10; Jer. 29:13; Matt. 7:7; Rom. 3:10; Col. 3:1; Heb. 11:6).
- b. He had a godly mentor (Zechariah). Uzziah illustrates the importance of surrounding oneself with godly counsel (mentor, discipleship leader, spiritual director, accountability partners, godly friends, etc.).

2. Blessings and prosperity (vv. 6–15).

As long as Uzziah sought the Lord, blessings flowed to everyone everywhere: militarily, economically, respect, building programs, technology, agriculture, etc. Uzziah is an illustration of the truth of Matt. 6:33.

B. Act II. The dangers of spiritual blessings (16–23).

1. The cause of his sin was **pride**. (v. 16). His fall was caused by a wrong response to God's blessings. God blesses us, not to make us proud but:

- a. To **humble us**. (Deut. 8:11–18).
- b. To lead us to **repentance**. (Rom. 2:4).
- c. To enable us to **be a blessing** to others. (Gen. 12:1–2; Ps. 67:1–2).

2. The nature of his sin (v. 16). Assuming the role of priest. He felt a sense of entitlement and began to think that he was above the law.

3. The consequences of his sin (vv. 19–21). Leprosy and isolation. God has **zero tolerance** for presumptuous pride.

II. Pride: The Most Deadly Sin.

A. The origin of pride.

1. Ezek. 28:12–17. Two things stand out in Satan's fall:

- a. All of his blessings were a gracious **gift** from the God who created him.
- b. Something in his **heart** caused him to draw the wrong conclusion from these blessings. The biblical word to describe this heart attitude is pride.

2. Isa. 14:12–15. In this passage, Satan's fall is attributed to three things:

- a. **Egotism**. I... I... I... I... I...
- b. **Self-will**. I will... I will... I will... I will... I will.
- c. **Presumption**. I will make myself like the Most High....

B. The cause of pride.

1. Spiritual **amnesia**.
2. Self-**absorption**.

3. Becoming my own **god**.
 4. Self-**will**. *Better to **reign in hell** than to serve in heaven* (Satan, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*).
- C. The consequences of pride. (I Pet. 5:5; Prov. 16:18)

No sin is more satanic in its nature than this one. No sin is more anti-God and anti-Christ than this. *God opposes the proud.... (I Pet. 5:5; James 4:6)*. No sin will send us more certainly to hell than this! Pride always leads to destruction (Prov. 16:18)

D. The cure for pride.

1. **Confess** the truth.
2. Know **God**. It is impossible to know God and be proud at the same time! Anyone who claims to be Christian and yet is proud either is a liar or is worshipping an **imaginary god**.
3. Know **yourself** (Rom. 12:3). Humility comes naturally when we remember that:
 - We are created beings. We are not **self-created**.
 - We are **sinner**s.
 - Everything good that we have is a **gift**. (Rom. 12:3).
4. **Remember** God and his blessings. (Dan. 4:30–33, 37; I Cor. 4:7).
5. **Humble** yourself. Don't wait until God humbles (humiliates) you! (II Chron. 33:23; 36:12). Humble yourself! (II Chron. 7:14; 33:12; James 4:10).

THE PROUD PERSON	THE HUMBLE PERSON
It's all about me.	It's all about God and others.
Gets joy from promoting self.	Gets joy from promoting others.
Gets angry and defensive when confronted.	Is responsive when confronted.
Loves to talk.	Loves to listen.
Cocky about what they know.	Humble about all they don't know.
Seeks to place blame.	Seeks to take responsibility.
Compares self to others.	Compares self to God.
"Lord, change them."	"Lord, change me."
Covers up sin.	Confesses sin.
Concerned with image.	Concerned with truth.

"If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed" (C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*).

TABLE TALK

1. Which do you consider to be more dangerous spiritually: affliction or prosperity?
2. The Bible says that God's blessings are intended to make us humble, repentant, and generous to others. Is this what usually happens? Why or why not?
3. Without mentioning names (!) describe someone you know who is proud. What do they "smell" like? Now, describe someone you know who is humble. What is their "aroma?"
4. What are some specific things you can do to "humble yourself?"

Invictus

by William E. Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

My Captain

by Dorothea Day

Out of the night that dazzles me,
Bright as the sun from pole to pole,
I thank the God I know to be
For Christ the conqueror of my soul.

Since His the sway of circumstance,
I would not wince nor cry aloud.
Under that rule which men call chance
My head with joy is humbly bowed.

Beyond this place of sin and tears
That life with Him! And His the aid,
Despite the menace of the years,
Keeps, and shall keep me, unafraid.

I have no fear, though strait the gate,
He cleared from punishment the scroll.
Christ is the Master of my fate,
Christ is the Captain of my soul.

HEZEKIAH
Bitterness
II Chronicles 29–32

I. Introduction.

- A. A Life Worthy of Notice. Hezekiah was one of the few truly great kings of Judah! A surprising amount of space is devoted to his life and reign: II Kings 18–20, II Chron. 29–32, Isa. 36–39. For a while it almost seemed that a new **David** had arisen! (II Chron. 29:1–2)
- B. Meanwhile, Up in the North. Hezekiah's reign came just after the Assyrians defeated Israel in 722 BC and took many of its inhabitants into exile. This disaster serves as the backdrop for all that Hezekiah sought to accomplish in Judah. Would God's judgment fall on Judah too? The only hope was **repentance, revival** and **reform** (II Chron. 7:14).

II. First Period: Revival and Reform (II Chron. 29–31).

There is great significance in the fact that the first official act of Hezekiah as the new king was to restore worship in God's Temple. He opened the doors of the Temple that his father Ahaz had shut (II Chron. 28:24; 29:3). Several steps were involved in leading the nation back to God:

- A. Empower **godly leaders** (II Chron. 29:4–11).
- B. Clean out all the **filth** (II Chron. 29:15–19).
- C. Offer **atonement for sin** (II Chron. 29:20–24).
- D. Rediscover **worship** (II Chron. 29:25–30).
- E. **Reformation** (II Chron. 30–31). It takes more than revived hearts to restore the nation. There must be a re-formation of structures, theologies, and practices.
 - 1. The Passover restored (II Chron. 30).
 - 2. Organization of Priests and Levites... with financial support (II Chron. 31).

III. Second Period: Deliverance from the Enemy (II Chron. 32:1–23).

- A. The Assyrian attack (II Chron. 32:1–19). He inspired the nation to courage and faithfulness (vv. 7–8). In the face of threats and psychological warfare, Hezekiah and the people kept trusting in God.
- B. Deliverance! (II Chron. 32:20–23)

IV. Third Period: A Chink in the Armor (II Chron. 32:24–33 and II Kings 18–20)

- A. A Prophetic Announcement (II Kings 20:1).

Hezekiah was 39 years of age. He had walked in obedience and faithfulness and had led the nation in revival and reformation. There was much work still to be done. Think how you might have responded in a similar situation. What might your response have been?
- B. A Bitter Response (II Kings 20:2–3).

It was his bitter spirit that revealed the true condition of his heart. This was the chink in his armor that permitted the enemy to come in like a flood. We get an even greater insight into Hezekiah's emotional state in the hymn of thanksgiving he wrote after his recovery recorded in Isa. 38:9–20 (note vv. 15, 17).

C. A Compassionate Reply (II Kings 20:4–11).

God heard Hezekiah's cry and healed him, overlooking (?) the bitterness that lay behind his prayer. Although he had just announced that Hezekiah was about to die (II Kings 20:1), God **changed his mind**(?). He allowed him to live an extra 15 years.

D. A Sobering Consequence.

The consequences of getting what he wanted were sobering. Two tragic events occurred during the 15 years of extended life that were granted to Hezekiah.

1. The visit from the Babylonian envoys (II Kings 20:12–19). About 115 years later, the Babylonians would return... and destroy Jerusalem!
2. During those 15 extra years, a son was born (II Chron. 33:1–6, 9). Reigning longer than any other king in Judah's history (55 years), Manasseh **reversed** the reforms of his father and led the nation into idolatry... and the judgment of God.

E. Application: How do I apply this story to my life?

The story of Hezekiah's healing challenges our theology at numerous levels. Reflection on his life will cause many to re-examine their basic assumptions about the sovereignty of God, prayer, predestination, freedom, etc.

1. Be careful **what you ask for** (see Num. 11; Ps. 106:15).
2. Be alert to the poison of **bitterness** in your own heart (See Heb. 12:15).
3. Steps to victory over bitterness.
 - a. **Confess** bitterness as a sin (I John 1:9).
 - b. Ask God to help you tear down **strongholds** (II Cor. 10:4–5).
 - c. **Forgive** the offender (Eph. 4:31–32).

V. Does god change his mind/repent?

A. God's character never changes.

*¹⁹God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should **change his mind**. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?*

²⁰Behold, I received a command to bless: he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it (Num. 23:19–20 ESV).

B. But sometimes God's actions do indeed change.

1. The flood.

*⁵The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the LORD **regretted** that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart (Gen. 6:5–6).*

2. The golden calf.

*¹¹But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and **relent** from this disaster against your people. ¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they*

shall inherit it forever.”¹⁴ And the LORD **relented** from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people (Ex. 32:11–14).

3. Making Saul king.

¹⁰ The word of the Lord came to Samuel: ¹¹“I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the Lord all night. (I Sam. 15:10–11).

²⁸ And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. ²⁹ And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or **have regret**, for he is not a man, that he should **have regret**” (vv. 28–29).

And the LORD **regretted** that he had made Saul king over Israel (v. 35).

4. A plague.

¹⁵ So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. ¹⁶ And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD **relented** from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, “It is enough; now stay your hand.” (II Sam. 24:15–16).

5. A prophetic announcement.

¹²“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he **relents** over disaster. (Joel 2:12–13).

6. God’s plan for Nineveh.

⁶ The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. ⁷ And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, ⁸ but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may turn and **relent** and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.” ¹⁰ When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God **relented** of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. (Jonah 3:6–10).

TABLE TALK

1. What is the difference between a revival and a reformation? Why is this distinction important?
2. Does the story of God “changing his mind” and healing Hezekiah fit into your theology? Why or why not?
3. Has God ever answered a prayer of yours that you came to regret? What did you learn?
4. Is there an area in your own life where bitterness has taken root? What are the consequences? What are you going to do about it?

JOSIAH
Spiritual Deafness
II Chronicles 34–35

I. The Last Best Hope of Judah.

Though few recognized it at the time, Josiah's reign was God's **final offer** of hope to his people. For three centuries God had been giving his people the opportunity to repent and reform their ways so that their fate would be different from that of Israel. With Josiah, God gave his people one last and glorious opportunity to get it right (II Kings 23:25). II. Long Live the King! (II Chron. 34:1–2)

- A. At age 16, Josiah began to seek the God **of David** (34:3). Describe what a seeking heart looks like. What are its characteristics?
- **Hunger for god.**
 - **Desire to pray, Bible worship.**
 - **Humility—teachable.**
 - **Burden for others to know God.**
- B. At age 20, Josiah began to **purge** the land (34:3–7 and II Kings 23:4–20). Josiah transformed his “seeking heart” into national policy! He knew that if Judah was going to be restored to a right relationship with God, the first thing to do was to rid the land of idols.
- He had to **rid** the land of bad things before God good fill it with good things.
 - He had to **destroy** before he could build.
 - He had to deal with **sin** before it was possible to walk in righteousness.
 - He had to cut out **the cancer** before health could be restored.
 - He knew that **repentance** must precede revival.
- C. At age 26, Josiah **restored** true worship.
1. The Temple is **repaired** (34:8–13). Now that the land had been purged of idols, Josiah began to do the most essential work of all: repairing the Temple and restoring it to its proper function. Proper worship is foundational in everything!
 2. The Book is **(re)discovered** (34:14–18). The most significant event that occurred during the renovation of the Temple was the discovery of “The Book.” It is ironic that the Book of God was lost in the Temple! The rediscovery of a God who speaks changed everything!
 3. Spiritual counsel is needed (34:19–22). The king calls for Huldah, the prophetess. One wonders why he sought counsel from a woman! Jeremiah and Zephaniah were also contemporaries. Why didn't he call them? This shows both the humility of the king and the spiritual stature of Huldah.
 4. Huldah's counsel (34:23–28).
 5. The fruit of obedience.
 - a. The **covenant** with God was renewed (34:31–32).
 - b. The **Passover** was celebrated (35:1–19).

III. Revival and the Word.

- A. Revival leads to the **Word** and the Word leads to **revival**.
- B. When God's Word is neglected... spiritual life **languishes**.

- C. Revival not based in God's Word is **wild fire**.
- D. God's Word is **creative**.

IV. Josiah's fatal flaw.

- A. What went wrong? (35:20–27).

Like the other “good” kings of Judah, Josiah did not **finish strong**. If the outcome of a football game is determined in the fourth quarter, then Josiah's final chapter leaves a big question mark over his life. Of all the good kings of Judah, Josiah's flaw is the most difficult to understand. The text does not explain Josiah's motivation for going to battle but the result of his decision was disastrous for him and for the nation!

- B. Three attempts to “explain” what happened.

1. Josiah did not pause to **inquire of the Lord** (Prov. 3:5–6).
2. He naively assumed that God's promise made him **immune to defeat**. Compare II Chron. 34:28 to 35:23–24.
3. He was **spiritually deaf**. It appears that Josiah missed God's message because he couldn't stomach God's messenger! (35:21–22) All of his life Josiah had listened for the voice of God. He heard God speak through the Book discovered in the Temple. He heard God speak through a woman prophetess. But hearing God's voice through the mouth of a pagan Egyptian was just too much! But God is not **proud**. On other occasions in Scripture, strange as it may seem, he chose speak through very unorthodox messengers!
 - a. **Cyrus**, king of Persia (Isa. 44:28; 45:1)
 - b. **Nebuchadnezzar**, king of Babylon (Jer. 25:9; 27:6; 43:10)
 - c. **The Magi** (Matt. 2:1–12)
 - d. Balaam's **donkey** (Num. 22:28–30)

- C. God Speaks.

1. Through **creation** (Ps. 19:1–4).
2. Through our **conscience** (Romans 2:14–16).
3. Occasionally through **unorthodox sources** (donkeys, pagans, star-gazers, etc.).
4. Through **Scriptures**. While other sources of God's word may be ambiguous and unclear, the written Word is inerrant and authoritative.
5. Through **Jesus** (John 1:14; Heb. 1:1–2).

TABLE TALK

1. Josiah was 16 when he began to seek God. How old were you? Do teens have a special capacity to hear God's voice?
2. Does the story of the woman prophetess Huldah bother you? How hard is it for a man to take spiritual counsel from a woman?
3. Have you ever "lost" the Book? Did it happen "in church"?
4. How do you account for Josiah's tragic demise?
5. Describe a time in your life when you missed a message God had for you because you didn't like the messenger (a nagging wife, a preacher with poor grammar, a Bible-thumping neighbor, a liberal democrat, a teenager with a guitar, etc.).
6. Can God make a promise that doesn't come true? In what sense are his promises conditional on our response? Why is this question important? What is at stake in how we answer?

MANASSEH
A Wretch Like Me
II Chronicles 33: 1–20

I. Good King Manasseh?

A. Troubling Contrast.

At first glance, Manasseh seems to be just another “bad” king in Judah. But on closer look, his life is unique in two respects:

1. The **worst** of the worst. Both the length of his reign (55 years) and the depth of his sin are unparalleled in Judah’s history (II Kings 24:3–4; II Chron. 33:9; Jer. 15:4).
2. His **conversion!!!** At the end of his life (the 4th quarter) he humbled himself, repented, and found favor with God. We could say that he thus joined the list of the “good” kings of Judah. What a dramatic contrast this makes with the other “good” kings of Judah. They all started out well but ended badly. Manasseh started out badly and ended up being blessed by God!

B. A Wretch Like Me (II Chron. 33:1–20).

1. Idolatry (vv. 3–5, 7).
2. The occult (v. 6).
3. Child sacrifice (v. 6).
4. Violence (II Kings 21:16).
5. Refusal to listen (v. 10).

C. Amazing Grace (II Chron. 33:11–13).

Just as Saul was perhaps the most unlikely candidate for conversion in the New Testament, so Manasseh was in the Old Testament. Who could have imagined that this wicked king would humble himself and pray and seek God’s face? And even more astounding, who could have imagined that God would have accepted a scoundrel like this? The prodigal son had come home and the Father had welcomed him! **Elder brothers** everywhere still struggle to accept this!

D. Fruits of Repentance (II Chron. 33:14–20).

1. He sought to make **restitution** for the evil he had done (v. 15).
2. He **restored** the altar of the Lord and re-established true worship in the Temple (v. 16).
3. He sought **to influence** those he had once misled, in the right path (v. 16).
4. The Scriptures twice assert that God was **“moved”** by Manasseh’s repentance (vv. 13, 19).

E. Yet Even Forgiven Sin Has **Consequences**.

Though God forgave Manasseh and restored him to favor, the consequences of his reign of terror could not be erased. The people continued to practice idolatry (v. 17). His influence continued to cast a dark shadow on future generations. His son, Amon, imitated the evil ways of his father (II Chron. 33:22). Judgment and destruction still came on Jerusalem (II Kings 24:3–4; Jer. 15:4).

II. Application Today.

- A. No sin is **deeper** than God's grace (Rom. 5:20). "Only when grace is recognized to be incomprehensible is it grace." Karl Barth.
- B. The **wages** of sin. Even forgiven sin can sometimes carry very heavy **consequences!**
- C. God's megaphone. God had tried to speak to Manasseh through the prophets, the Scriptures, and the Temple; nothing seemed to get through. So finally God "spoke" to him through **suffering**. When he was in distress, he turned to God (II Chron. 33:12). (Contrast II Chron. 28:22).
- D. The key that unlocks the door (II Chron. 7:14).
 - 1. Manasseh **humbled** himself (II Chron. 33:12, 23).
 - 2. He **prayed** (II Chron. 33:12–13, 18–19).
 - 3. He sought God's **face** (no specific reference but the reality is present).
 - 4. He **turned** from his wicked ways (II Chron. 33:15–16).

III. Severe Elder Brother Syndrome (SEBS)—Luke 15:11–32

A few years ago a deadly virus caused sickness and death in parts of Asia and threatened to sweep across the entire world. It was called SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). Similarly, a deadly spiritual virus is sweeping through the church, which has the capacity to cause sickness and even death to the soul. It is called SEBS (Severe Elder Brother Syndrome). These are the primary symptoms:

- A. **Judgmentalism**. "This son of yours squandered your property on prostitutes..." (v. 30). And yet there is no actual mention of "prostitutes" in the prodigal son's behavior, only "reckless living" (v. 13). People infected by this virus build themselves up by tearing others down. Beware: the same standards of judgment you use on others will be used on you (Matt. 7:1–2).
- B. **Comparison**. People with SEBS are constantly comparing themselves to prodigals, not to saints. How do I look? Their goal is not to be like the Father, only to be better than the brother. The question is not "Am I holy?" but rather, "Am I holier than *you*?" Erma Bombeck once prayed, "Lord, if you won't make me thin, then make all my friends fat."
- C. **Performance-based religion**. For people with SEBS, what counts is hard work, performance. All these years I've been "slaving for you" (v. 29). These people keep score! But everything in the Father's house is free and undeserved. Nothing is earned. "Everything I have is yours" (v. 31). They forget that the Gospel is grace-based not performance-based.
- D. **Anger**. The older brother was "angry and refused to go in" (v. 28). Think about it: at whom was he angry? At his brother or at his father?
- E. **Grumbling**. "The Pharisees and scribes grumbled, saying 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15:1–2). "When they received their wages, they began to grumble against the landowner, saying 'These last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat'" (Matt. 20:11–12). I deserve better than this!

Is there a cure for SEBS? Prodigals can be healed of sin but is there hope for the Pharisee? Yes!!!

- A. **Confess your sin.** Name it. And sing with gusto “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!”
- B. Make things right with your **prodigal brother.** “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness” (I John 2:9).
- C. **Join the party!**

TABLE TALK

1. How do you respond to the fact that all eight “good” kings finished badly? What is God trying to say through this?
2. How do you respond to Manasseh’s conversion? Do you find this story comforting? Or does it disturb you? Why?
3. If you were God, would you have forgiven Manasseh? What does your answer reveal to you about your concept of God?
4. Tell of a personal experience you may have had when you discovered that though sin may be forgiven...unfortunate consequences yet remain.
5. Describe a time in your own life when pain and suffering enabled you to hear more clearly what God was trying to say to you.

ROYAL LESSONS FROM THE GOOD KINGS OF JUDAH

I. A Summary.

A. The Good Kings.

Over a period of about 350 years (930–587 BC) the Southern Kingdom of Judah had 20 different kings, all descendants of David. Only eight of these kings “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.” The rest were evil. The stories of these kings introduces us to the historical reality that God’s people have always been led by leaders who are a **strange mixture** of good and evil.

1. The summation of a person’s life in the Scriptures is based not upon professional success, wealth, or power but rather upon **moral character**.
2. Though all of these kings were a composite of good and evil, Scripture dares to give a summary statement of their life. Ultimately a person’s life will be deemed either “good” or “evil.” The Bible speaks in terms of **either/or**.... not both/and.
3. A person’s moral character is ultimately measured not by some human standard of conduct but rather **“in the eyes of the Lord.”**

B. The Moral Flaw.

Each of these kings had a moral flaw that brought pain and hardship into both the king’s life and the life of his family and nation. Rather than glossing over these faults, the Bible **highlights** them! Amazingly, no two kings had the same moral flaw. Each one had his own unique issues.

1. Solomon. **Lust**.
2. Asa. **Unbelief**.
3. Jehoshaphat. **Moral compromise**.
4. Joash. **Fickle faith**.
5. Amaziah. **Divided heart**.
6. Uzziah. **Pride**.
7. Hezekiah. **Bitterness**.
8. Josiah. **Spiritual deafness**.

II. Lessons Learned.

A. The heart of the matter is **the matter of the heart**.

- *For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is **blameless** toward him. You have done foolishly in this, for from now on you will have wars. (II Chron. 16:9)*
- *Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; **unite** my heart to fear your name. (Ps. 86:11)*

B. Being **humble** and **teachable** are perhaps the best qualifications for a godly and fruitful life.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3)

- C. The only spiritual condition that is incurable is **self-deception**.
If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:8–9)
- D. Godly counsel is indispensable. We are the sum total of the **voices** we heed and the **books** that we read.
Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Ps. 1:1–2)
- E. Each of us has an area where we are particularly vulnerable to temptation: a character flaw, a weakness, a predisposition to failure, **a besetting sin**. Can you name yours?
*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and **sin which clings so closely**, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...(Heb. 12:1)*
- F. Though moral failure may be common, it is not **inevitable**.
*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide **the way of escape**, that you may be able to endure it. (I Cor. 10:12–13)*
- G. How we **end the race** is more significant than how we begin. The game is over or lost in the 4th quarter.
But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matt. 24:13)
- H. Though God understands our human frailties and fallen nature, he never **lowers his standards**.
 - You therefore must be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:48)
 - Strive for peace with everyone, and for the **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord. (Heb. 12:14)
- I. Thank God for **adversity** and **suffering**!
 - Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives... For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb. 12:5b–6, 11)
 - Count it **all joy**, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2–4)
- J. It ain't over till **Gabriel blows his trumpet**.
*For you have need of **endurance**, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (Heb. 10:36–39)*
- K. Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Jesus is talking about a perfection of **love** (see context: Matt. 5:43–48). See I John 4:7–21 for commentary.

TABLE TALK

1. List the two most important lessons you have learned from this study of the Good Kings of Judah:
 - a. _____

 - b. _____

2. Think over the Good Kings and their character flaws (lust, unbelief, moral compromise, fickle faith, divided heart, pride, bitterness, spiritual deafness). With which flaw do you most easily identify? Name three things you intend to do to seek the Spirit's power to get victory over this area of weakness in your life:
 - a. _____

 - b. _____

 - c. _____

3. If you are willing, share your responses to the above two questions with your neighbor and ask him/her to pray for you.



Smoke

By: George MacDonald

*Lord, I have laid my heart upon thy altar
But cannot get the wood to burn;
It hardly flares ere it begins to falter
And to the dark return.*

*Old sap, or night-fallen dew, makes damp the fuel;
In vain my breath would flame provoke;
Yet see-at every poor attempt's renewal
To thee ascends the smoke!*

*'Tis all I have-smoke, failure, foiled endeavour,
Coldness and doubt and palsied lack:
Such as I have I send thee!-perfect Giver,
Send thou thy lightning back.*

