

SOLOMON

A MAN LURED AWAY
FROM GOD'S OWN HEART

A Faith Group Study
From Faith Lutheran Church

Spring 2023



Guidelines for Faith Groups Discussions

Each session is designed for about one and a half hours, but let the flow of the conversation determine how long each one lasts.

The Bible texts and devotions are provided so that participants may read them before their Faith Group meets each week. They may also be read together at the beginning of each meeting.

We encourage each Faith Group to begin and end each session with prayer. Invite participants to lead or join in the prayers as they feel able to do so.

Each week, look back to how God has been working in your life in light of the previous Faith Group discussion.

Be gracious and supportive of one another in your Faith Group. Remember to keep any personal information that may be shared confidential.

God will be present as you meet! Jesus promised, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." – Matthew 18:20

"King Solomon Recalls: A Legendary Beginning"

An Imaginative Devotion by Dick Lennes

(I Kings 3:1-15)

As I remember my early childhood, my mother, Bathsheba, was my loving caregiver in the royal palace where she and my father lived. I got to run around in this gigantic space with many servants, caretakers, and, of course, often encountered the presence of my father's other wives, concubines, and their children. My father, David, was absent often leading his army in battles and tending to his responsibilities as King of Israel. My father was sometimes not the nicest person to my mother. That bothered me, because I looked up to him as the most important man in Israel. I often felt mistreated or ignored by him, too. At birth, my father and mother named me Solomon, but Nathan, the prophet, who was a close friend of the family, called me Jedidiah, which means "beloved of the LORD." I could always count on Nathan to be on my side.

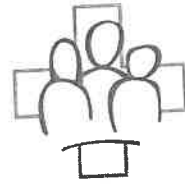
Growing up, the LORD was the focus of our prayers and lifestyle. I loved the feeling that He was our protector and comforter. My father was completely committed in his faith that the LORD was the one and only God of the Israelites. I remember some of the prayers before he led his army into battle. He was a man after God's own heart. My father mentored me to love the LORD. Possibly a bad thing, I don't remember my father ever disciplining me or any of my brothers. Yes, you could say we were spoiled. We grew up having anything we ever wanted.

I was about 20 years old when my mother and Nathan prompted my then-failing father, King David, to name me as his successor to the throne. My father agreed and I was anointed King of Israel by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet in Gihon. It was a celebration to behold. All the people were playing musical instruments with great joy and shouting, "Long live King Solomon!"

It was an over-whelming day, but it was also a little intimidating. At the least, I knew the responsibilities and expectations that surrounded this honor. Soon after, the LORD came to me in a dream. Can you imagine the only God of the universe saying, "Ask what I shall give you?" Aware of my inexperience, I asked for wisdom, a discerning nature to act prudently with the decisions I would have to make as king. The way it worked out, the LORD honored me with wisdom, wealth, and the promise of a long life. The only condition was that I was to walk in His ways and keep His statutes as did my father, David. Following my father's example, **I can do this!**

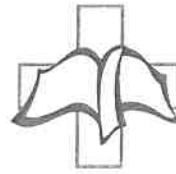
From The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your gracious gifts in our lives and help us to walk in your ways. Amen.

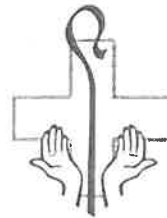


Sharing... Do you prefer meat and potatoes or soup and salad? Share what meals were like growing up.

1. When the Bible first introduced him, Solomon showed tremendous _____.
2. God clearly _____ of Solomon's request.
3. So in the end, it almost seems as if _____ to Solomon was more of a character test.
4. So it's important that we don't just _____ to the end of Solomon's story.

**Growing...**

1. Do you recall feeling unprepared for a position of responsibility you had? Do you still feel that way at times?
2. If God gave you a "blank check" as He did to Solomon, what would you request? What you would most *want* to request? What do you think you *should* request?
3. If God's blessings on Solomon were something of a character test, how do the blessings God has given you serve that same purpose? How do you do on that particular "exam"?
4. How does the unconditional promise God made to David (II Samuel 7:16) differ from the conditional promise He made to Solomon (I Kings 3:14, 9:4-5)?
5. Which kind of promise does God make to you in Christ? What difference does that make for you?



Serving... Pray that God would give you the opportunity to tell someone about Jesus and do it.

"From Where Does Wisdom Come?"

By Jan Kreie

(Based on I Kings 3:16-28, 4:29-34 & 10:1-10)

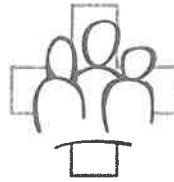
When I think about having wisdom, I often wonder if I have really "developed" any. A dictionary definition says that wisdom is the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment; the quality of being wise. I associate wisdom with old age, gray hair, and time to slow down and ponder before acting. I also feel that wisdom has come from the hard knocks and experiences of "been there, done that." I started out thinking that God gave Solomon wisdom, and he really did not have the experience or knowledge. After reading I Kings 1 – 2, however, I suspect that he experienced a lot of his father's wisdom as he grew. One who lives in a ruler's political hotbed, a power-seeking court, survives only with God's mercies.

About King Solomon's wisdom ... It is always refreshing to hear about his pragmatic solution to cut a child in half to make both mothers happy. Our readings also give us some details about all the gifts that the Queen of Sheba gave. It makes me wonder how the King lost his wisdom. Did he feel the peer pressure of the surrounding nations to take their women as wives? How could he "love" all of them? Did he simply compromise the laws that God gave or did he become prideful as the world showered gifts on him? Scripture does not give us the details we often crave. It does give us the consequences of failure to follow God's laws and His guidance.

What does this mean for me? It is a reminder to keep my eyes focused on Christ and His Word. I see it as a warning not to bend my knee to the popular culture and peer pressure. I haven't read the end of Solomon's story; I do not know if he repented and turned away from his sinful nature. I do know his nation fell apart and God's presence left them. For Solomon, the Gospel was a promise yet to come. The Gospel of God's mercies abounds for us and He will provide wisdom and guidance in our lives!

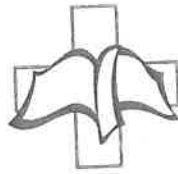
Dear God, please forgive us when we fail to follow You and try to go our own way.

Amen.



Sharing...What is your favorite summer memory? Talk about it.

1. More accurately, wisdom _____ Solomon, and was granted to him by the Lord.
2. So many Proverbs and literature is _____ to Solomon, the wise king, but it's possible that much of it (through not all) was written by others.
3. There is a _____ to wisdom because even wise people sin.
4. Our wisdom is _____ than God's wisdom. What we think is wise, He makes look foolish.
5. Sometimes wisdom leads us in the _____ direction.



Growing...

1. Who is the wisest person you know or have known?
 - A. What makes/made you consider him or her as being so wise?

2. How does one acquire more wisdom or grow in wisdom?

3. Read the following selections from Scripture—all attributed to Solomon—and discuss the wisdom in each:
 - A. Proverbs 6:1-11 (pick one proverb and discuss the wisdom in it)
 - B. Ecclesiastes 2:1-3,9-11
 - C. Song of Solomon (sometimes called "Song of Songs") 8:6-7

4. How would you define or describe "the wisdom of this world"?
 - A. How would you define or describe the "wisdom of God"?

5. What are the limits of wisdom?
 - A. How can wisdom get you in trouble?



Serving... Look for ways to share your wisdom with those of the younger generation.

"Our Bad Tendencies; God's Forgiveness"

By Pr. Paul Knudson

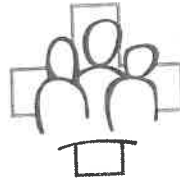
(Based on 1 Kings 6:9-14, 8:10-11)

We gather to worship in our Lord's house to be met by Him through word and sacrament. We gather to be met by our heavenly Father, his beloved Son, through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Yes, we sing, we pray, we are together in human community, but we are promised that in gathering in God's house we will come into the very presence of the Triune God. This was the primary word God gave to Solomon in building the magnificent house of worship.

Solomon, however, had a penchant to be full of himself. Yes, he built this temple over seven years, a marvelous accomplishment. It is not in our devotional text, however, but it should be noted that he took fourteen years to build his palace adjacent to the temple. He also had literally hundreds of wives and concubines and he later built shrines for his foreign wives to worship as they saw fit.

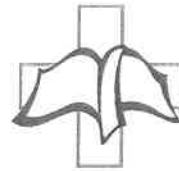
Solomon, and we also, have this penchant to be blind and deaf to the warnings given in I Kings 6. We are both too full of ourselves and impoverished by our moral failings. Thankfully, we are still invited and called to worship in our Lord's house. We come rightly as sinners as we cry out for our Savior's grace and mercy. Forgiveness is given and new life is ours for another day.

Lord Jesus, come to us unworthy sinners. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us. Amen!



Sharing...What was one of your favorite childhood family traditions?

1. Crucially, I Kings 8:10 reports God _____ and _____ the temple.
2. The temple was _____ to Israel's whole identity. It was revered by the Israelites as the assurance of God's presence among them.
3. The temple may not have been Solomon's top priority. He _____ more time and effort on building all his palaces.
4. Most significantly, _____ confirmed the prophets' rejection of the temple.

**Growing...**

1. Solomon built the temple, then confessed that God cannot be contained in a temple. So what was the purpose of building it?
2. Why do Christians still become attached to church buildings as Israel was to the temple?
3. Israel was devastated when the temple was destroyed in 587 B.C. and again in A.D. 70. How would it strike you if a fire or tornado destroyed Faith Lutheran's building?
4. Why do you think that God sounds so ambivalent about the temple in I Kings 9?
5. Look up the sharp critiques of the temple in Amos 5:21-24, Jeremiah 7:4-11 and Micah 6:6-8. What had gone wrong with Israel's worship?
6. What cautionary tale can Christians learn from Israel's experience with the temple?



Serving... This week, make a point to pray daily for those in your Faith Group.

"True Happiness"

By John Langins

(Based on I Kings 10:14-22, 4:22-28)

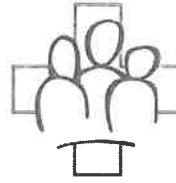
Most of us have an understanding that wealth in terms of money is superficial. God's wealth is much different, and He provides us with wealth in different ways. Wealth is not a sign of God's favor. It is a responsibility for those who do have wealth beyond their needs to share with the less fortunate in some form or another, but not just monetary wealth.

God provides us with wealth in other fashions. Knowledge is a form of wealth, and if he provides us with this, we have the same responsibility to share this with others as Solomon did. Solomon's knowledge was what really made him wealthy. His gold and ivory might be gone in an instant, but knowledge is something that would last forever. Some say that this makes knowledge more valuable than gold.

No others in Solomon's world were as wealthy as he was. Just as in today's world, not many are rich. If you were to poll who is happiest, it may not be those who have the most wealth. Instead, the happiest people are those who don't find their joy in wealth, but in God's blessings. Having a loving family and spouse are the things that make me feel truly happy and wealthy. As a teacher, knowing I can make a difference in someone else's life because of what God has chosen for me to do for a career truly makes me feel wealthy. It's not the everyday items God provides, but the people He puts in our lives that make us feel rich.

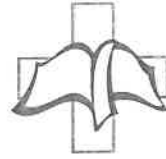
Material wealth could ruin you and your family if you allow it to do so. We all need constant reminders about what's most important in life. It's not the house you live in or the car you drive. It's not the boat you purchased or the lavish dinners you go to. Although Solomon had immense wealth, the woman who came to visit him did not admire what she saw; it's what she heard from his knowledge and wisdom. That was what stuck out to her as valuable. The best way to determine how wealthy we are is to look at what we have given and done with God's gifts that He has provided for us. Knowledge and wisdom are worth far more than gold and valuables in the eyes of our Savior, and this should bring hope to those who have far less than Solomon.

Lord, forgive us for those times we try to find happiness in "things". Amen.



Sharing...Name one thing about yourself that might surprise us.

1. Solomon _____ that wisdom to lead Israel to the height of its power.
2. Wealth is a _____ of authority.
3. We buy things we _____ with money we
_____ to impress people we _____
_____.
4. Our wealth and comfort, and our pursuit of it, can slowly _____
away at our lives, at our families, and at our faith.



Growing...

1. What would you do if you won the lottery?
 - A. How would your life be better?
 - B. How would your life be worse?

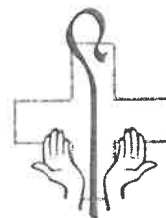
2. Why do we buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like?

3. How did Solomon's wealth benefit himself and his kingdom?
 - A. How was Solomon's wealth a detriment to him and his kingdom?

4. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10.
 - A. How does "the love of money is the root of all evil" make you feel?
 - B. How have you seen or experienced that?
 - C. Is it bad/sinful to want money? Is it bad/sinful to want to be rich?
 - D. How much is enough?

5. How can we resist the temptation to love money?

6. What lessons have you learned from giving?



Serving... Buy an extra item or two to share for the Blessing Box (drop off in the church office).

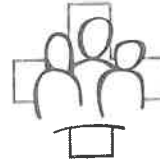
"Temptations to Stray"

By Isabelle Dressen

(Based on 1 Kings 11:1-8)

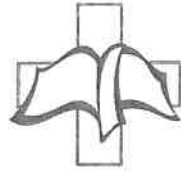
Solomon had many wives and many concubines. These women often led Solomon to abandon his God and follow their gods. While we may look on Solomon as a bad example, we also abandon God for many reasons. Temptations lead us to skip church on Sundays. Fear and anxiety keep us from being involved with church projects. We make for ourselves idols of celebrities and hobbies. When we push God to the side, we start to feel as though He is leaving us, when in reality we are leaving Him. God, however, stays faithful to us. Regardless of our tendencies to wander, God pulls us back in. When our hearts are led astray as Solomon's was, we should seek out God as much as possible, instead of feeling ashamed. Shame for leaving God doesn't help us at all. God wants us to come back, no matter how many times we stray.

Dear God, please lead us to seek you out, instead of hiding from you. When idols and temptation steal us away, lead us back into your loving arms. Thank you for all that you provide for us, and bless all those who have become prodigals to your kingdom. Help us to lead other Christians in love to you. In your Son's name, Amen.



Sharing...What is the strangest thing you've ever eaten?

1. The _____ of the Depression had built character, strength, perseverance, and grit.
2. If Solomon had had to struggle the way his father David did, would that have _____ him?
3. Solomon's marrying and clinging to all these women not only ignored the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," but it was brutally _____ treatment of these women, even if they did live in luxury.
4. Sadly, there is a resurgence today of people claiming to be _____ and worshiping pagan gods.
5. As its end drew near, Solomon's life became very _____, but very ironic.

**Growing...**

1. Do you think Solomon would have remained more faithful to God if he had endured more of the hard struggles that King David had?
2. Solomon could hardly have avoided the "diplomatic marriages" that led him astray. Do you think he could have kept his huge harem *without* being led astray into idolatry?
3. Do you face similarly unavoidable cultural expectations which conflict with your faith? How can you navigate them without being led astray by them?
4. In our day, pride in oneself is promoted as a great virtue. Why does Christianity warn instead that pride is the first and worst of the deadly sins? How can Christians balance positive self-confidence over against sinful pride?
5. By the end of his life, what had happened to Solomon's God-given wisdom? What warnings can Christians today draw from his tragic example?
6. What is your favorite word, or phrase, for God's redeeming and forgiving work?

**Serving...** Look for a way to give back to the community by volunteering.

“When Sin Enters In...”

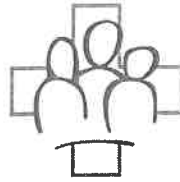
By Virginia Brodd

(Based on I Kings 11:9-25)

Adam and Eve in the garden, King David in the royal palace, the Prodigal Son enjoying all the comforts of the farm, Judas and Peter, both spending every day around Jesus and the other disciples, listening to the teachings and seeing the miracles of Jesus. What do all of these familiar characters of the Bible have in common? Like Solomon, they all had life pretty good, at least by our standards, until sin came into their lives. They were tempted by earthly things just like we are. Judas failed to ask for forgiveness and he came to a tragic end. We do not know if Solomon repented of his sin, but the others prayed for forgiveness and received it. Was life perfect again after forgiveness was granted? I’m assuming not, because no matter how hard they tried, or in today’s world, we try, sin is a constant.

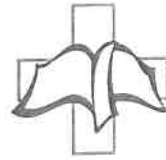
Trials continued to happen to our Biblical friends as they continue to happen to us, but if we ask God to forgive, not only will He grant forgiveness of our sin but, in Jesus’ name, He will forget them. What a blessing that is!

Gracious God, our sin consumes us. We thank you that when we repent of our sins, You forgive us. Amen.



Sharing... Tell us about your favorite high school memory.

1. It's a shame that Solomon didn't take his own advice or heed his own _____ here! Why is it that pride so often results in destruction?
2. Pride is a feature of that Diabolical self, It is the manifestation of the original sin described in Genesis 3, that we might be " _____," puffing up ourselves.
3. That eventually led to Israel's destruction and Judah's _____.
4. "When pride comes, then comes _____;" (Proverbs 11:2)
5. For all that Solomon had going for him; all his riches, all his fame, all his wisdom, in the end he becomes a _____ - a cautionary tale.

**Growing...**

1. What do you hope your legacy is?
2. How has your pride gotten you in trouble?
3. Why does C.S. Lewis say that “Diabolical sin,” like pride, is worse than sexual sin?
4. How do we remain faithful, especially as we accumulate power and authority?
5. Read Proverbs 29:23. What does it teach us about pride and humility?
 - A. Read Philippians 2:1-4. What does that contribute to the conversation?
6. What has been the most important take-away for you throughout these six sessions about Solomon?

**Serving...** Write a note of encouragement to someone in your life this week.