

Solomon

I am old now, but I remember vividly how it felt to be the son of a famous father. He was king and so he was always busy with important things. People came and went all the time and he was constantly preoccupied. As a child all I knew was that he was not there for me... or all my brothers and sisters. We were a large family and we all had different mothers who also lived in the same palace.

We fought like all brothers and sisters, but I think I began to learn about politics by watching how our mothers tried to position us to be noticed by our father. I was not the oldest, not by a long shot, but my father was not the oldest in his family either and yet was selected to be king by God himself. There was something about him that made him a great leader.

But there were other sides to him that I only began to understand as I grew older. I was astounded to hear that the songs sung by the choirs on the Sabbath and Feast days, were written by him and that he was actually quite an accomplished musician. When he was younger, his playing had calmed the temper of the man he replaced as king. And he recorded his thoughts and feelings in a poetic journal that held back nothing. But when all was said and done, although he was alternatively sad, mad or glad, he always came back to an unshakable loyalty to the LORD God, who chose him as king and gave him the ability to carry on.

I learned the truth about my mother and the circumstances of my birth from my older brothers, who, of course, told it to hurt me. My mother's first child with my father, conceived out of wedlock, died at birth and her first husband died under questionable circumstances. I began to see a dark side to my father, but also a tender, aching heart. He was truly sorry for what he had done and – after a little prompting from a prophet – took full responsibility. It made him compassionate for the fallen but also fully aware of the consequences of sin.

When he told me that I was to be the next king, I was terrified. First it was just the possibility that my brothers would kill me – and that was not an idle fantasy for there had already been murder in the family. But most of all it was the frightening responsibility of leadership. Because of the example of my father as both flawed and devout, I knew that my only hope was to be given the ability to rule by the God who had specially chosen this people as his witness to the nations.

I humbly prayed and that great Creator God actually appeared to me in a dream. I had asked for wisdom and I really meant it. Not only had I been given responsibility to rule, but to build a Temple in which God would be worshipped. God blessed me beyond my wildest dreams. I had my father's artistic nature and God enhanced it not only with knowledge, but with spiritual power and wisdom. He threw in prosperity and peace as well.

Now let me tell you of the wisdom that came only too late for me. God uses imperfect people to accomplish His will on earth. That is good news because it means that despite our imperfections, we can be used by him. Yet it is bad news if we think that because we are being used by God, we are actually perfect. I had not inherited or emulated my father's humility and tender heart.

When God appeared to me, I had already eliminated some of my enemies and entered into a politically expedient marriage. And afterwards, things went so well that I began to truly think I could do no wrong. After the Temple was built, God appeared to me again and brought a double edged message of both blessing and warning. I ignored the warning and focused on the blessing. My eloquence at the dedication ceremony had impressed everyone and I received visitors from the entire world and even wrote books of wisdom and poetry. There was peace with our neighbors, not in small part because of my marriages to the daughters of many kings, whom I allowed to worship their own gods in my palace. I knew about the dangers, but also considered myself too wise to be affected. God had appeared because pride was stalking me but I took it as an endorsement.

While I had seen humility and brokenness in my own father, my children saw something quite different. I wore God's blessing as a badge and used his gifts as if I deserved them. I became a bitter old man. "Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" is what I wrote. My father had been angry at God and depressed about the apparent triumph of evil, but he always came back to a relationship with his God.

I found no joy in all my accomplishments, because I had forgotten that they were not really mine. I still knew the truth but when I pointed people to the only source of joy, it was correct but without enthusiasm, because I had missed it and could not go back. I missed the lesson of my father's repentance – there can be restoration despite consequences, if the heart is right.

Remember this and never stray from the path of wisdom. Do as I say, not as I did.

“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this are the whole duty of man.”

I Samuel 16, II Samuel 11 and 12, I Kings 2 and 3, I Kings 9, I Kings 11 and 12, Song of Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, especially 12:8 and 13