

Devotions for July 25 - July 31, 2011

Monday, July 25, 2011: The Man Daily reading: 1 Kings 3:16-28

The son of King David and Bathsheba, Solomon rules Israel from about 960 to 922 B.C. and builds a magnificent temple in Jerusalem housing the Ark of the Covenant. Solomon has hundreds of wives and concubines, including the Egyptian pharaoh's daughter. He also has a famous meeting with the Queen of Sheba who, after observing his wealth and wisdom, showers him with gifts. Solomon is credited with authoring the Bible's Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, though many scholars believe the latter was written after his death. Solomon's wisdom is often illustrated in a famous incident in which two women come before him with a baby, each claiming to be the mother. Solomon orders the child be cut in half and, by observing each woman's reaction, determines the true mother. Where are you in need of wisdom? Ask God to give you a listening heart.

Tuesday, July 26, 2011: Downfall Daily reading: 1 Kings 11:1-10

Later in Solomon's story, his wisdom is overshadowed by great displays of non-wisdom. The legitimate high place at Gibeon and the magnificent temple he builds for Yahweh are overshadowed by the pagan shrine he eventually constructs. His skills for military strategy are overshadowed by the forced labor he drafts. His great wealth is overshadowed by the money and land he lavishes on his allies to the detriment of his people. Solomon's personal sin and idolatry leads to the downfall and destruction of his kingdom. Do you understand that it's one thing to have wisdom, and quite another to live life wisely? Ask God to help you live wisely.

Wednesday, July 27, 2011: Motives Daily reading: 1 Kings 11:11-13

Like Solomon, most of us are a mix of good and bad motives and intentions. We have our own realm of influence (as a parent, worker, leader, etc.) and the potential to do much good and much harm. The power that we are given by God is both a gift and a responsibility. It is exactly within the unresolved tensions of Solomon's story, mirroring the messiness of life that God acts. It is significant that it is God who approaches Solomon, regardless of Solomon's failures and frailties as a human being. God calls us to be motivated toward wise living and listening to God for guidance and direction. Our motives can be shaped by God's voice. Are you listening for God's voice to shape you? Ask God to guide and direct your listening.

Thursday, July 28, 2011: Initiative Daily reading: 1 Kings 9:1-5

God's initiative suggests that God's grace breaks into the everyday realities of our lives and offers us support and guidance. It is our choice how we use both the gift of power we have been given, and the gift of grace. How is this reflected in our prayer life? Has God become a vending machine in the sky to whom we direct our requests for "stuff," or someone with whom we have an ongoing relationship? Someone we can ask for wisdom and a listening heart? It's one thing to ask for wisdom, and quite another to actually live out your life wisely. It's one thing to ask for help in prayer, and quite another to approach life with a listening heart. How can we develop a listening heart? How can we develop discernment? Ask God to break into your life with grace in the midst of your everyday realities.

Friday, July 29 2011: Forgetting Daily reading: 1 Kings 9:6-9

As Solomon gets older and gains more experience, he forgets about his dream encounter with God. He forgets about his servant stance. He loses track of his humility and gratitude, and spends less time listening to God. We, too, tend to forget these things. We need guidance and direction from the One who doesn't forget: Jesus, the ultimate example of humility and servitude. Jesus spends much time in prayer; not just talking to God, but intently listening for guidance and God's will. How can you listen more intently for God's voice? Ask God to help you never forget God's faithfulness to you.

Saturday, July 30, 2011: Barriers Daily reading: 1 Kings 9:15-28

Solomon is a very busy guy. When it comes to listening to God, Solomon has a lot to overcome. Possibilities of barriers in Solomon's relationship with God (and in ours) are ego and a tendency to escape. When you listen to someone, how often do you find yourself thinking about your response rather than intently listening to what they have to say? Our egos get wrapped up in our own needs and wants. Our focus on our own desires is one thing that keeps us from listening to God. Another barrier that blocks us from listening to God is our tendency to escape; to escape from stillness, from slowing down, from feeling our feelings. We escape all of these things by staying busy. Busyness on its own is not a bad thing, but when it becomes an escape from a relationship with God and ourselves, it can be detrimental. What barriers are blocking you from a true listening heart? Ask God to break through these barriers today.

Sunday, July 31, 2011: A Listening Heart Daily reading: 1 Kings 3:5-12

Here are two simple steps toward developing a listening heart. First, prioritize spending quality time with God on a regular basis. It may be helpful to actually schedule an appointment with God in your planner, and then don't let anything get in the way of keeping your appointment. Second, and most important: practice listening. Practicing the skill of listening is easier said than done. It requires slowing down, being still, opening up to our feelings, and being receptive. If we haven't spent much time practicing these things, we may feel challenged and even resistant. You may want to start by joining a prayer class, where you can spend time practicing these skills with others and with some guidance and direction. Prioritize and practice; two steps toward a listening heart. What step will you take today? Ask God to guide you in this step of faith.