

## **“On A Pinnacle Or A Precipice?”**

2 Chronicles 6-7

*Series: The Story Chapter 13: The King Who Had It All*

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April 19, 2015

It's the second to last day of the year. As he cruises along Highway 59 near La Verkin, Utah, the driver takes in a magnificent view of the Hurricane Cliffs. It's so thrilling that he presses the pedal of his GMC pickup to 80 miles an hour. Careening around the tight mountain curves he feels on top of the world – for about the length of a heartbeat. Then, taking the next turn too tightly, he slips off the right side of the road, overcorrects, crosses the white line, crashes through a cement barrier on the left, vaults over a large drain pipe and lands facing the opposite way. All those automobile acrobatics are impressive enough. But the real miracle of this story is his truck missed a 200 foot plunge by about twelve inches. One moment he is at the pinnacle of delight. The next minute he stands on a precipice – literally one foot from death. The headline of this true story reads: “I bet this guy will be in church on Sunday.”

Life is like that sometimes. One minute you are on top of the world. Next you are at the bottom of the heap. There are a lot of pinnacles in life: you score the points to win the game, you ace the test, you get into the college of your choice, you land the job, you get the promotion, you marry the person of your dreams, you hold your newborn child or grandchild. These are the high points of life. Yet at these moments pride can mess with our minds. Pride puts the spotlight on you. It feeds and inflates your ego. It lifts you up above everyone else. “You're faster, stronger, smarter, better than them.” “You're right and they're wrong.” “You don't need anyone. You did it all yourself.” “The rules don't apply to you. Go ahead and do whatever you want.”

Pride can so blind us that we don't notice when a pinnacle becomes a precipice. Pride blinded Tiger Woods into thinking he could do no wrong...until he did. He confessed to Newsweek:

My life was out of balance, and my priorities were out of order. I made terrible choices and repeated mistakes. I hurt people whom I loved the most. And even beyond accepting the consequences and responsibility, there is the ongoing struggle to learn from my failings. Golf is a self-centered game, in ways good and bad. So much depends on one's own abilities. But for me, that self-reliance made me think I could tackle the world by myself. It made me think that if I was successful at golf, then I was invincible. Now I know, that no matter how tough or strong we are, we need to rely on others.<sup>1</sup>

Above all, we need to rely on God.

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<sup>1</sup> Tiger Woods, "How I've Redefined Victory," Newsweek (November 17, 2010)

In the Story we now reach the very pinnacle of the Old Testament. King David is succeeded by his son Solomon. His forty year reign is the zenith, the summit, the pinnacle of Israel's history.

The people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life. During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, everyone under their own vine and under their own fig tree. (I Kings 4:20-21,25)

All God promised Abraham has finally come to pass. Abraham's children are as numerous as sand on the seashore. They live in the Promised Land. They are peaceful and prosperous. David was a warrior. Solomon is a master of diplomacy and trade. Wealth flows into the country. There is now just one final crowning achievement.

Solomon receives the honor of building the Temple in Jerusalem. Since Moses, the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, has traveled about in a tent called the Tabernacle. Now Solomon constructs a Temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. It takes 180,000 workers seven years to erect. It is built with cedars of Lebanon and covered with gold. Outside is a massive altar where sacrifices are performed. Inside is the Holy Place which only priests may enter and deeper in is the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant rests. Only the High Priest may enter this sacred room one day a year – the Day of Atonement. On Dedication day there is a spectacle worthy of Raiders of the Lost Ark.

The priests then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. There was nothing in the ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt. When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever." (I Kings 8:6-7, 9-13)

How is Solomon able to rule so well? Early in his reign the Lord makes an unbelievable offer. "At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, 'Ask for whatever you want me to give you.'" (I Kings 3:5) Now what if the Lord made a similar offer to you? What's your wish? Wealth, power, fame, kids who behave? Solomon asks for wisdom.

So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do

what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. (I Kings 3:9-12)

In the same chapter we see the famous case in which Solomon must decide between two women who each claim to be the mother of a baby. To determine who is the real mother, Solomon suggests they cut the child in two. Since the real mother would never allow this, she willingly surrenders her right to the child. Solomon, of course, awards the child to her. When Randy Frazee tried this method it backfired.

When my boys were small, they came to me fighting over who had the rights to a Hot Wheels car. Seizing the opportunity to have a Solomon-sized teaching moment, I asked them to go get my hacksaw so we could cut it in two. They both yelled, “Cool, Dad! Awesome!” and ran to get more Hot Wheels. Not quite what I had in mind. It takes wisdom to know how to use wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

So what is wisdom? It’s not the same as knowledge. A highly educated person can be unwise. It’s not book smarts but it’s also not street smarts. You don’t get it from the school of higher learning any more than from the school of hard-knocks. Solomon wrote and collected hundreds of wise sayings into a Bible book called Proverbs. From these we learn that wisdom is applied knowledge. It’s practical. Wisdom helps you avoid the precipice. In his prayer of dedication over the Temple Solomon reveals the wisdom that helped him lead, the wisdom that is available to us.

**Wisdom Humbly Follows God.** At the Dedication of the Temple Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in front of the whole assembly of Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said: “LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. (I Kings 8:22-23)

Pride tells us we are in charge or it makes us run after gods and idols here on earth. Pride whispers we don’t need God. The CEO of a Fortune 500 company pulled into a gas station to fill up. He went inside to pay, and when he came out he saw his wife talking to the gas station attendant. It turned out that back in high school, before she met her husband, she used to date this man. The CEO got in the car, and the two drove in silence. He was feeling pretty good about himself when he finally said: “I bet you are thinking you’re glad you married me, a Fortune 500 CEO, and not him, a gas station attendant.” “No,” she replied, “I was thinking if I’d married him, he’d be a Fortune 500 CEO and you’d be working at a gas station.” Without God, we’d be nothing. Humility is not having an inferior or superior view of ourselves. To be humble is to have an honest, accurate self-image. Solomon wisely declares that the only one to follow is God. One of his wisest sayings from the book of Proverbs is: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

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<sup>2</sup> Randy Frazee, *The Heart of the Story: God’s masterful Design to Restore His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 121.

**Wisdom Doesn't Put God in a Box.** In his prayer Solomon asks,  
But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! (I Kings 8:27)

No matter how magnificent the building, Solomon is wise enough to know you can't keep God in a box. There are lots of ways we try to put God in a box. We act Christian within this building and act like everyone else at school or work. We call on God when we are in trouble but forget about Him when things are going well. Most of all, we keep God in a box when we doubt His power, demand our way or dictate our will. We cannot put God in a box. It is easier to pour all the oceans of the world into a Starbucks cup. God's power is stronger. God's thoughts are higher. God's love is deeper. God's grace is greater. God's plans are better. When a situation has you bothered, baffled or bamboozled, the wise person says, "Lord, not my will but Yours be done." So how do you know His will?

**Wisdom Follows Instructions.** Solomon prays,  
Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses. May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our ancestors; may he never leave us nor forsake us. May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, decrees and laws he gave our ancestors. (I Kings 8:56-58)

I had an uncle who used to say: "There are three ways to do something: The Right Way, The Army Way and The Hoglund Way." Needless to say he was not a Hoglund. He was an outlaw. When we asked him what's "The Hoglund Way" he said, "First thing you do is throw away the instructions." I took that as a personal challenge from him. So now, whenever I get something new – I always read all the manufacturer's instructions...even the ones in Spanish, French and Chinese.

Why does Solomon tell the people to follow God's instructions, to keep His commands, decrees and laws? The Lord keeps His promises. We can trust Him to lead us the right way. Plus the Lord is our manufacturer. He formed each one of us with His hands. He knows how we work best. That's why it is essential to keep reading and following His Word. So if you are reading the Story, stay with it and if not, make sure to pick up the instruction manual and join us.

**Wisdom Prays.** After Solomon finishes praying, God responds.  
If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Why do we pray? For one thing, God knows we will get off the path and wander into sin. We stop following the instructions, we stick Him in a box on the shelf, we start following other gods. Before we know it, the pinnacle on which we stand suddenly becomes a precipice. One step more and we will go over the edge. Prayer is the pathway back to God. We confess our sin and clear the air between us. Prayer gets us back on track.

Prayer is also the way we receive guidance from the Spirit. We need both God's Word and God's Spirit to know God's Will. If you have the Spirit and not the Word or the Word and not the Spirit it's like watching a foreign movie with no subtitles. You can guess what's going on but you may get it wrong. Prayer is the way the Spirit translates God's Word into our lives so we can live it.

We all need wisdom to avoid falling off the precipice. Solomon, the wisest of all kings, learned that lesson the hard way.

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. (I Kings 11:4-6)

Because Solomon refused to follow his own wise advice, the pinnacle Israel reached during his reign soon turned into a precipice. As we shall see next week, the Golden Age of Israel ended with him. Perhaps pain and regret flowed through Solomon's pen when he wrote, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18)

It doesn't have to be that way for you and me. Centuries later, a son of Solomon named Jesus faced all these same temptations. When Satan tempted Jesus to satisfy his hunger, Jesus replied, "I follow God's instructions." When Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for a prayer, Jesus said, "I worship and pray to God alone." When Satan put Him on the pinnacle of the Temple and said, "Jump and see if your Father saves you" Jesus shot back, "I won't put God in a box. I refuse to test my Father's love." That day, Satan took the fall.

The wisdom of God will help you see and avoid the precipice. This week I received the following note from a member of Woodside who gave me permission to share it with you. When this couple came to Woodside they looked good on the outside. Two great careers, a house, the typical American dream scene. Yet behind the scenes their marriage was coming apart. They came here hungry and searching for help. Thankfully, they grabbed on to God's wisdom and didn't let go. They took what they learned and humbly applied it to their lives. They write,

We both reflected how far we have come in our marriage when just a few years ago we were on the brink of dissolution. Over the past few years I have had many opportunities to witness God working through those around me to guide me toward His loving and gracious embrace. I believe I am living proof that if you can keep your relationship with God, first and foremost, you can emerge from sin to redemption through sincere repentance. I still struggle, but with God's help and the Holy Spirit in me, the struggle is manageable. Feeling "blessed" is a much better feeling than "abandoned". "Gratitude" feels better than "regret", "envy", and "bitterness".

The note simply ends

One of your flock that was lost and now found.

If you are living on the edge, grab hold of God's wisdom. Let Him lead you to higher ground.