



Last week, we met David when he was still a boy who killed a giant. We learned that God calls us to be the person he created us to be, not someone else. Today, let's explore that theme further, when we meet David's son and heir, Solomon.

Let's start with an honest question: what place does God occupy in your life? Not church attendance. Not prayer or reading the Bible or any of the other things that people who love God do. But God. What place does God occupy in your life?

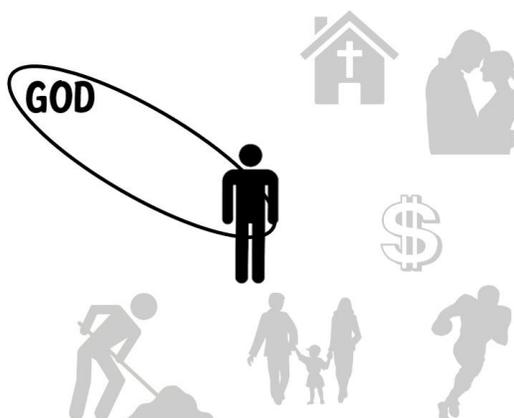
For a person who grows up in our culture, the most important thing is finding yourself, being happy and content with the life you have. That's why we like messages like we heard last week. "Do what you know", be the person God created you to be, can easily sound like "Do what makes you happy" or "Do what feels right."

And that sort of mindset isn't necessarily anti-God or anti-Church. In fact, Church can be a really good thing. God can be a source of fulfillment and happiness. But where we go wrong is that we assume God is another one of those good things. We mix God in with all the other good things that help you be you. Your job gives you the money you need. Your family - spouse or kids - can be a source of fulfillment and meaning. Your friends, maybe your hobbies. Maybe your work ethic.



These are things we pour ourselves into, commit our lives to, bind ourselves to, in hope that they will fulfill us, help us be the best versions of ourselves. And they pull us in all directions, so we're pulled this way and that depending on who's demanding my attention at the moment. So I'm a good father or loving husband or star employee or master craftsman or true friend or faithful Christian or whatever.

We're constantly trying to figure out the right arrangement of our schedules, the right investment of our energies that keeps us balanced, keeps our Selves centered.



What no one tells us is that none of these good things is worthy of our Selves. None of these is strong enough to define our persons. If we bind ourselves to them, if we make them the source of our Selves, if we look to them for meaning and fulfillment and identity, they will fail us. Every time.

The Scriptures teach us that only God is infinitely

enough to be the ground of our identity. Only God can offer us meaning and fulfillment. Only God can bring us freedom and life. Only by binding our Selves to God enables us to be truly who we were created to be. Only God makes us the best versions of our Selves.

That means all these other things are dangerous. And they're dangerous not because they're not actually Good, but because they're Good. If I said, Hey, don't smoke crack! It keeps you from being the best version of your Self!, your brain wouldn't exactly be exploding.

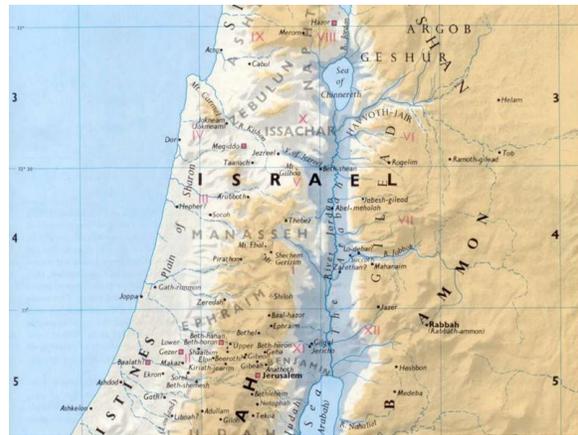
But if I say, Hey parent, your kid shouldn't be the center of your world. Or Hey wife, your Husband shouldn't be the person you draw your meaning from. Or Hey man, your job shouldn't be consuming the best energies in your day!

Now suddenly we have a problem. Now suddenly I'm stepping on toes. Because all of those are Good. It's good to be a loving, attentive parent. Good to be a faithful spouse. Good to model an excellent work ethic. And so on.

Good things deceive us much more easily than bad things, because Good masquerades as Best.

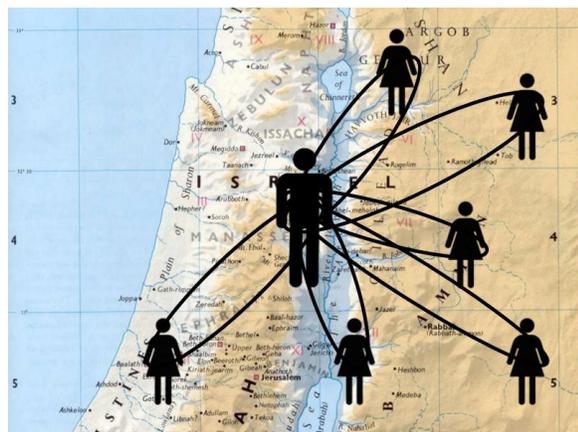
That was Solomon's problem. We meet Solomon in this story towards the end of his reign. He's been king for a lot of years, and his reign has been the most successful, most prosperous that Israel's ever had before - or since.

A big part of Solomon's success has been his political savvy. See, Israel isn't actually a very big nation - and in Solomon's time, it was surrounded by *tons* of other nations big and small. One of the best ways to form political alliances in that world was through marriage. If you and I are kings of neighboring countries, and I marry your daughter, then the idea is that you won't want to come attack me because your daughter is bound to me.



So listen to what 1 Kings 11 tells us about Solomon:

King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. The LORD had clearly instructed the people of Israel, "You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods."



Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the LORD. -- 1 Kings 11:1-3 (NLT)

Solomon made 700 political marriages. That's a lot of treaties. That's a lot of national security. And that's why Israel was so powerful and secure in Solomon's day.

Now, from an outsider's perspective, Solomon was a really good king. He bound himself to nation after nation to secure Israel's safety. He worked his whole life to make Israel prosper, and he succeeded. Any ancient person would've looked at Solomon and said he did the right thing.

But notice what the Scriptures say: That God thought this was a horrible idea, because these foreign wives would pull Solomon away from God.

And that's exactly what happened. When Solomon would marry a woman, he didn't bring them to live in his palace with him - even a place like the White House or Buckingham Palace today wouldn't have enough room for that many queens and all their attendants.

Solomon would build them a small palace somewhere and they'd come with all their attendants from home, and they'd bring their local god with them, a statue or altar or whatever. And Solomon let them set these up, to worship their gods in Israel.

At first, maybe it didn't seem like a big deal. But over time, as Solomon bound himself to more and more wives, more and more foreign nations, more and more foreign gods, Solomon began to change:

In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the LORD his God, as his father, David, had been. Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites... On the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, he even built a pagan shrine for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and another for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. Solomon built such shrines for all his foreign wives to use for burning incense and sacrificing to their gods. -- 1 Kings 11:4-8 (NLT)

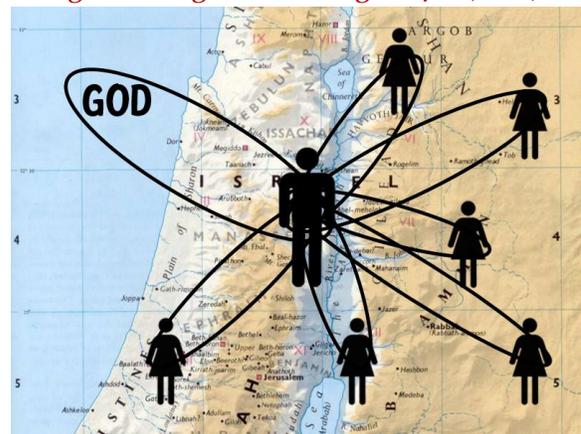
Solomon bound himself to all these foreign wives, and those bindings slowly pulled him away from God.

All those Good, politically astute marriages were toxic. Solomon thought he was doing the right thing by seeking these alliances, by making these treaties to keep his people safe. He thought he was being a Good King. And plenty of people would've agreed with him.

That's why those good things in our lives are so dangerous. Other people might think you're a good friend or a good parent or a good spouse or a good employee when in fact you're binding yourself too tightly to something that's pulling you away from God.

What everyone on the outside looking in might approved of, applaud you for, God may hate.

The LORD was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. He had warned Solomon specifically about worshipping other gods, but Solomon did not listen to the LORD's command. -- 1 Kings 11:9-10 (NLT)



This is the kind of stuff that makes God angry. When we bind ourselves to our kids' schedules, to our spouse's happiness, to our jobs. When the Scriptures describe God as jealous, this is the kind of stuff that does it.

Why is that? Am I saying that God hates kids? Nope - we know for a fact that Jesus *loves* kids. That God hates marriage? Nope. Marriage was God's idea. That God wants you to quit your job and go be a missionary? Nope. In fact, God wants you to "be a missionary" right where you are, in the job you're working.

Did God hate all these foreign women that Solomon married? Nope. God created them. God loved them just like God loves us. In fact, Israel's whole mission, their whole reason for *being* was to help all those neighboring nations to come to know God. And as the king, Solomon was to lead Israel in being that light.

But instead, Solomon *bound* himself to them. And that had dramatic consequences *for Solomon*. The writer of 1 Kings clues us in with a little Hebrew wordplay. Verse 4 tells us:

When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not true to the LORD his God. -- 1 Kings 11:4 (NRS)

In Hebrew, Solomon's name comes from the same root as Shalom, which is the word for peace, wholeness. As a verb, it means "to be true". The fun thing about Hebrew is that words are made just with consonants. Solomon's name is written SLMH, and the word that's translated as "true" or "peace" is SLM.

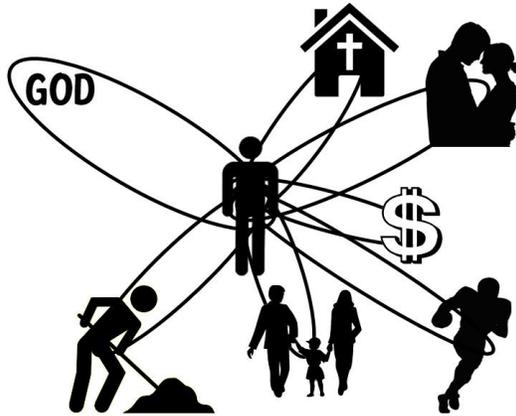
So 1 Kings 11:4 actually says,

When SLMH was old... his heart was not SLM to the LORD his God. -- 1 Kings 11:4 (NRS)

When Solomon strayed from God, he quit being Solomon. As these bindings he'd created pulled him away from God, they also pulled him away from being that best version of himself God had called him to.

And *that's* why God hates it when we bind ourselves to anything other than God. That's why God is "jealous". Because to move away from God - in any direction - is to move away from who we were created to be. To move away from Life. To move away from the best version of ourselves.

You know that feeling, don't you? Do you ever feel like you're losing yourself in the craziness of your kids' activities? Like you're losing yourself in a relationship, becoming subsumed into the other person? Ever feel like you're drowning in your job? That's a good sign that things are really bad.



When you find yourself, like Solomon, binding yourself to anything that's not God, you are pulling yourself away from God and away from Life. Away from yourself.

If your kids occupy the center place in your life, if your kids' activities usurp God's place in the center of your life, that's idolatry, and it's a problem.

If your significant other occupies that center place in your life, if you look for meaning and fulfillment from your spouse or girl/boyfriend, that's a problem. It's idolatry.

If your job is what defines you, what makes you feel whole, that's idolatry and it's a problem.

If you bind yourself to anything other than Jesus, you're headed for a cliff. Because that other thing, whatever it is, isn't enough to ground your identity, to provide meaning and fulfillment. It will collapse, and leave you broken.

Bind yourself to God and everything else will find its proper place. This is the first relationship you need to focus on. This is the ground of your identity. This relationship informs your purpose and meaning.

That's what Jesus meant when he told us to **Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. -- Matthew 6:33 (NLT)**

If you don't get this right, everything else will be distorted. Broken. Wrong. If you want to find yourself, bind yourself to Jesus.



Examine:

You should've received a rubber band as you came in. Get it now, hold it and consider the following...

1. What place does God occupy in your life? Is God at the center, or one of many good things?
2. Over the past week, what have you bound yourself to? What has gotten your best energies and attention?
3. In this next week, what directions will you be pulled? What will demand your attention?
4. How can you be intentional about binding yourself to God this week?