

THE KINGS OF OLD

a kingdom divided



This Reading Guide has been designed for use during Part II of the “The Kings of Old” message series at South Ridge Church: October - November 2019

A Note from Pastor Justin:

With God’s help, king David and his son king Solomon led the nation of Israel to tremendous wealth and influence in the ancient world. But this legacy did not endure. The people in the Northern part of the nation revolted against God and those who lived in the South. As a result, the nation of Israel divided into two separate kingdoms.

The Northern Kingdom, known as the Kingdom of Israel, strayed far from God. Even though there were prophets and others who remained faithful, the nation as a whole faltered. As a result of their unfaithfulness, they were completely overwhelmed by the Assyrian Empire in 722 BC, with the majority of the people killed or taken into captivity by the Assyrians.

The Southern Kingdom, known as the Kingdom of Judah, also had a number of faithless kings. Yet there were others who continued to trust God in even the darkest of circumstances, and God rewarded their trust by protecting them from the Assyrian Empire.

We may think we have little in common with these kings of old. But as we read through their stories, we will continue to see that God can use people who are seemingly insignificant to accomplish extraordinary things.

My hope throughout the remainder of this message series is that you will read, journal, and pray about your life and the daily decisions you make. That you will reflect on how these decisions impact not only your own life, but the lives of countless others. Additionally, my hope is that you will grow in becoming a person who truly follows God with your heart, soul, mind and strength, and continue to grow into the person God has made you to be.

As we continue this message series, we encourage you to:

- Commit to joining us every week of this series.
- Commit to reading through this Reading Guide, reflecting and journaling through the questions provided within each daily reading.
- Use a good Study Bible and/or other resources as you read through this Reading Guide. Refer to <https://southridgeblog.com/study-bible-info> for more information on many excellent Study Bibles available today.
- Write down questions you have about what you’re reading, and take opportunities to seek out answers to those questions.

THE KINGS OF OLD

ISRAEL UNITED
(ONE NATION)

ISRAEL DIVIDED:
10 NORTHERN TRIBES (ISRAEL); 2 SOUTHERN TRIBES (JUDAH)

SAUL: 1050-1010 BC	REHOBAM: 930-913 BC (JUDAH)	ASA: 910-969 BC (JUDAH)	AHAB: 874-853 BC (ISRAEL)	UZZIAH: 792-740 BC (JUDAH)	HOSHEA: 732-722 BC (ISRAEL)	ISRAEL ASSIMILATED BY ASSYRIA: 722 BC	HEZEKIAH: 715-686 BC (JUDAH)	JOSIAH: 640-609 BC (JUDAH)	ISRAEL EXILED BY BABYLON: 586 BC
DAVID: 1010-970 BC		JEROBOAM: 930-909 BC (ISRAEL)							
SOLOMON: 970-930 BC									

DAILY READING EXAMPLE:

DAY 1: LOOKING FORWARD

The left side of each daily reading will contain a brief devotional and question for reflection.

READING & JOURNALING:

The right side of each daily reading will contain a few Scripture verses to read, and additional questions for reflection. You will benefit most from this study by writing out answers to all of the questions in a notebook. This will help you to pause and reflect on the Scriptures and topics for each reading.

F260 READING:

This is an additional Scripture Reading for those who want to read through the foundational passages of Scripture throughout the year. This F260 Reading Plan paired with the “7 Arrows” method for reflection is an excellent way to *Read, Reflect, and Respond* to God’s Word.

PRAYER:

The right side of each daily reading will also contain a brief prayer to read and reflect on.

MESSAGE SERIES OUTLINE:

OCTOBER 20: ASA

OCTOBER 27: AHAB

NOVEMBER 3: AZARIAH (aka UZZIAH)

NOVEMBER 10: HOSHEA & HEZEKIAH

NOVEMBER 17: JOSIAH

Week 6: Asa

Asa's story is told in 1 Kings 15:8-24 & 2 Chronicles 14-16.
He is also mentioned in Jeremiah 41:9 & Matthew 1:7.

DAY 1: King Asa Brings Peace to Judah

Think about a time in which you were completely at peace. You were experiencing peace with God, peace with others, and peace within yourself. What was that experience like? What were the circumstances that led to that level of peace? For king Asa, we learn in 2 Chronicles 14:3 that, "Asa did what was pleasing and good in the sight of the LORD his God." This led to peace for him, and for the kingdom of Judah. But what *exactly* did he do that was pleasing and good?

Well, he didn't simply show up to worship services, nor did he simply focus on doing good deeds for others. Instead, he intentionally sought out to remove everything in the nation that was offensive to God.

We may think that attending worship services or focusing on good deeds may help us to experience peace. And yes, these may be *good* things to do. But we, too, must be intentional when it comes to removing the things in our lives that are offensive to God. Only then will we experience true peace with God, with others, and with ourselves.

As you read today, consider this: What is something that may be preventing you from experiencing real peace?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 CHRONICLES 14:1-15

What is something that may be preventing you from experiencing real peace with God? With others? With yourself?

According to 2 Chronicles 14, king Asa "removed" and "smashed" the things that were offensive to God. What steps can you take to completely smash/remove the things in your life that are offensive to God?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 48 & 49

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I am confronted with the hard truth that there are many things that are getting in the way of me experiencing peace with You, with others, and with myself. I'm also confronted with the hard truth that I've allowed most of these barriers to continue in my life. As this week begins, I pray for Your wisdom to help me see these barriers clearly, and begin to take the necessary steps to remove them so that I may experience true peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2: A Sincere Commitment

Think about it: How many things are you truly committed to? For example, you may be committed to your marriage or children, but when it comes to most other things in life — whether it's a home, car, gym membership, or some other commitment—there's generally a lack of ongoing commitment. These commitments are short-term, and even then there's almost always a way out.

But when king Asa asked the people of Judah to make a sincere commitment to God, they went all out. The Life Application Study Bible notes that their oath of allegiance was punctuated with shouts and trumpet blasts. Seemingly, the people wanted their commitment towards God to be known loud and clear, and they were giving everybody else permission to hold them accountable to following through.

This doesn't mean the decision was easy. Even king Asa's grandmother had taken opportunity to worship another god. The king had the idol removed and his grandmother was deposed from her position. His commitment to God was evident to everybody. As you read today, consider this: What are some things you are truly committed to?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 CHRONICLES 15

What are some things you are truly committed to?

Which of your commitments are life-giving for you? Which of these commitments are life-draining?

Are there any life-draining commitments you could remove from your life and/or family calendar?

Have you considered giving up what may be a *good* commitment for an even better one?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Genesis 50 & Exodus 1

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I realize today that there are some things I'm committed to that are life-giving, and others that are life-draining. Those that are life-draining are not leading me closer to you, or may not be helping me better love people well. Help me to only make commitments that help me to know and love You and others well. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 3: Asa's Commitment Wanes

Think about a time when you had to make a really big decision. Did you take the opportunity to get advice from others? Were you willing to ask others for help?

As king Asa ages, we see that his overall commitment to God begins to wane. He's experiencing a national challenge, and he calls on another king to help. From an outside perspective, it would appear that the plan works and everything should be OK. But a man of God comes to tell Asa that due to his neglect in seeking God to help him, the nation would no longer be in peace, but would be forced into war.

Proverbs 15:22 reads, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed." It was good for Asa to seek the counsel of others. However, it was unwise for him to not seek out the counsel of God.

Later in life, Asa continues this trend. As he's struggling with a disease, he relies solely on his physicians, and does not seek the LORD's help.

As you read today, consider this: Why do you think Asa's commitment to God waned?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 CHRONICLES 16

Why do you think Asa's commitment to God waned?

What are some things that you do to ensure your commitment to God stays strong?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 2 & 3

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I admit that it's hard to know for certain why king Asa's commitment to You waned as he got older, but I recognize that as I grow older there are more and more things that can distract me from You. Help me to see the things that are causing too much of a distraction in my life. Provide me the wisdom and the courage to lessen - or completely eliminate - these distractions from my life so that I better walk in step with You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 4: A Life Summary

Reading through the lives of Old Testament kings can be challenging. As you read through 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings, you then come to 1 & 2 Chronicles and start to wonder, *Haven't I already read through this story?*

The simple answer is yes, you probably have. The longer answer is that these books were all written and compiled by different people. So the life story of king Asa is much more detailed in 2 Chronicles than it is in 1 Kings. The brief section about his life in 1 Kings is nothing more than a brief summary of his life and accomplishments.

But here's the thing, your life story isn't much different. Somebody could write out your life story and provide a lot of details. These details could be passed on from your children to your grand children and continue to be passed on for dozens of generations. But somebody else may write out your life story and simply write a brief summary of who you were and your greatest accomplishments.

As you read today, consider this: If you were to write a brief summary of your life and your greatest accomplishments, what would you write?

READING & JOURNALING: 1 KINGS 15:8-24.

If you were to write a brief summary of your life and your greatest accomplishments, what would you write?

Despite some of Asa's mistakes, he was still a great king for the people of Judah. Despite some of your mistakes, you too can live a great life. Review this week's readings. What led Asa to be such a great king? What steps can you take to emulate him in your own life?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 4 & 5

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that it's a big challenge for me to think about my greatest accomplishments. Nevertheless, I do have a desire to leave something meaningful behind for my children, grandchildren, or other loved ones. Continue to help me know the purpose You have for my life, and help me to live out that purpose each and every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5: WEEKLY REFLECTION

What's getting in the way of you growing in your relationship with God? (e.g., your view of God, your view of yourself, self-centeredness, entertainment, lustful pleasures, jealousy, envy, etc.). Write down at least 2-3 steps you'll take over the next week to remove these obstacles and grow in your relationship with God.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 6 & 7

Reflect: Journal: What did you learn from today's reading? See back page "7 Arrows."



Week 7: Ahab

Ahab's story is told in 1 Kings 16:28-22:40.
He is also mentioned in 2 Chronicles 18-22 & Micah 6:16

DAY 1: Ahab Invites Evil Into Israel

Have you ever traveled to another city or town and thought about just how different it was compared to your own? Maybe the people showed a lot more hospitality and manners, or maybe they showed a lot less. Maybe the town was clean and the people seemed more content, or maybe they seemed depressed or miserable.

For ancient Israel, there was a significant cultural difference between the Northern Kingdom: Israel, and the Southern Kingdom: Judah.

Last week, you read about king Asa and how he brought peace to Judah. Late in Asa's reign, king Ahab takes control of the Northern Kingdom. And to say that Ahab was different than Asa would be an understatement.

Instead of destroying the things that were offensive to God, Ahab invites evil into Israel. Ahab worshiped the god Baal, which represented a desire for power and sexual pleasure. His decision to lead the people of Israel astray would have long-lasting consequences.

As you read today, consider this: Are you currently inviting (welcoming) anything ungodly into your life?

READING & JOURNALING: 1 KINGS 16:29-35

Ahab *invited* (welcomed) evil into his own life, his family, and the entire nation of Israel. Are you currently inviting (welcoming) anything ungodly into your life? Your family's lives? The lives of others?

What would be some good checks and balances to have in place to ensure you're not inviting evil into your life?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 8 & 9

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, admittedly, I don't like to think that I may be inviting or welcoming evil into my life. Yet I know there are likely people, books, movies, music, or other things that may seem innocent, but which can lead away from You and Your Word. Continue to provide me the wisdom to see the things that get in the way of knowing you better, and the courage to eliminate them from my life. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2: Elijah vs. the Prophets of Baal

What is the most spectacular thing you've ever seen God do in your own life, or in the life of somebody else you know? It was a truly awesome experience, right?

Well, while king Ahab is running the nation of Israel into the ground, there's one man of God who remains faithful to Him. This man of God, Elijah, is about to draw a line in the sand. He offers a contest of sorts, him and his God vs. 850 other prophets and their little-g gods. With the odds so heavily in their favor, king Ahab and prophets of Baal agree to the terms of the contest.

And for the spectators who show up — which likely includes thousands and thousands of people — this contest doesn't disappoint. It goes on for hours and hours. As the prophets of Baal continue to be unsuccessful, Elijah loudly mocks them. He goes so far as to ask if their little-g god is relieving himself in the bathroom. When it's all said and done, God shows up and clearly wins the contest. King Ahab may have been humiliated, but he still doesn't choose to trust God.

As you read today, consider this: What do you find most interesting about this story?

READING & JOURNALING: 1 KINGS 18:1-46

What do you find most interesting about the story of Elijah vs. the prophets of Baal?

Why do you think king Ahab continued to show a lack of trust in God after witnessing this event?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 10 & 11

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, there is a lot about this story of Elijah vs. the prophets of Baal that are interesting. It's an excellent reminder that even though there may be dozens, or hundreds of others around me who are not following You, You continue to hold onto me, and You provide me the strength to continue to hold onto You. I'm so grateful for that!

Today, in the same way Elijah showed his sincere devotion to You, I commit to living out my sincere devotion to You. May others see me as fully, wholeheartedly committed to You in all things. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 3: Elijah Experiences Despair

You know that feeling of having no hope? Perhaps something really tragic and terrible happens and you question whether you'll ever experience any joy again in life? You're not alone. Everybody experiences this at some point in time.

Elijah, a dedicated prophet of God, had seen and experienced God accomplish amazing things. Elijah and God had battled against the prophets of Baal, and came out victorious. Later, Elijah prays for rain, and God answers his prayer in a mighty way. But when Ahab's wife Jezebel hears about Elijah's defeat of the prophets of Baal, she threatens to take his life. How does Elijah respond? He not only flees; he prays for God to take his life (1 Kings 19:2-3).

This level of despair happens to all of us. It may even occur after a tremendous spiritual victory, as it did for Elijah. But it's important to remember that God gently restores Elijah, because there was more God needed Elijah to accomplish.

As you read today, consider this: When you're experiencing a lack of hope or deep depression, do you allow God to gently restore you?

READING & JOURNALING: 1 KINGS 18:41 - 19:18

Do you take time to allow God to gently restore you?

How much time do you think you need every day for God to restore you? What can you do to ensure you take that time each day over the next week?

How regularly do you consider that God still has a purpose for you to fulfill?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 12

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, there are a lot of things I go to experience what I may *think* is restoration. Whether it's watching a movie, taking a nap, reading a book, or something else. While these things may provide some physical rest or entertainment, I know that the kind of restoration You provide is different. The restoration You provide is more fulfilling. May I continue to grow in coming to You to be restored and renewed each morning. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 4: Ahab Refuses to Listen to Wisdom

Think about a time when you asked somebody's advice, but didn't like the advice they offered. Did you follow their advice anyway? Or did you just go and find somebody else who would tell you what you wanted to hear?

During king Ahab's reign, he asks the king of the Southern Kingdom, Jehoshaphat, to join him in battle to take back a city that belongs to Israel. Jehoshaphat is excited for the opportunity, but requests that a prophet of God be consulted. He's hesitant to go to war without God indicating that His favor is with them. Ahab responds to Jehoshaphat's request saying, "There is one more man who could consult the LORD for us, but I hate him. He never prophesies anything but trouble for me!"

Sure enough the prophet Micaiah says exactly what Ahab doesn't want to hear. Does Ahab listen? Nope. He has Micaiah thrown in prison and decides to go to war anyway. The result: Ahab is killed in battle.

As you read today, consider this: Do you struggle to follow the advice of others when it goes against your own desires?

READING & JOURNALING: 1 KINGS 22:1-40

Do you struggle to follow the advice of others when it goes against your own desires?

Are you currently experiencing a difficult situation and you aren't sure what to do? Who are 1-2 people who you know have your best interest at heart? Today, invite at least one of them to offer some advice.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 13:17 - 14:31

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, there are certainly times in my life when I ask somebody's opinion, and don't like what they have to say. Today I pray that You will help me to see and understand the different perspectives of others, and that You would help me to receive advice from others even if it goes against my own desires. In other words, I pray that You would help me see my need to trust others who have my best interests at heart. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5: WEEKLY REFLECTION

What's getting in the way of you growing in your relationship with God? (e.g., your view of God, your view of yourself, self-centeredness, entertainment, lustful pleasures, jealousy, envy, etc.). Write down at least 2-3 steps you'll take over the next week to remove these obstacles and grow in your relationship with God.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 16 & 17

Reflect: What did you learn from today's reading? See back page "7 Arrows."



Week 8: Azariah / Uzziah

Azariah /Uzziah are the same king. He is mentioned as Azariah in the book of Kings, and Uzziah in the book of Chronicles. His story is told in 2 Kings 15:1-7 & 2 Chronicles 26:1-23. He is also mentioned in Isaiah 1:1, 6:1, 7:1, Hosea 1:1, Amos 1:1, & Zechariah 14:5.

DAY 1: Instructed in the Fear of the Lord

There's a phrase or statement that comes up several times throughout the Bible, and many pastors or churches will use the phrase regularly without fully discussing what it means. The Scriptures repeatedly say that it's important to *fear* the Lord? But what exactly does it mean to fear the Lord?

Does it mean to be scared or afraid of God? That wouldn't make much sense, as there are other passages which indicate the more we fear God, the more we love Him. Surely we couldn't become more afraid of God by loving Him more, right?

Pastor and author Timothy Keller once taught, "Fear of the Lord is life rearranging, joyful awe and wonder before the greatness of who God is and what He has done."

King Uzziah was raised and instructed in the fear of the LORD. From early in his life, he was taught to be in joyful awe and wonder before the greatness of who God is and what He has done.

As you read today, consider this: How has your relationship with God completely rearranged your life?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 CHRONICLES 26:1-10

How has your relationship with God completely rearranged your life? (Your view of marriage or singleness? Your view of parenting? Other relationships? Finances? Sex? ...other?)

What are at least three times in which you were brought into joyful awe and wonder before the greatness of who God is and what He has done?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 19 & 20

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, it's sometimes easy for me to separate my life into chunks. I have my "church life." I have my "family life." I have my "work life." But I don't always live in such a way that my relationship with You is front-and-center in every aspect of life. This week, my desire is take another step forward in fearing you - that is, having a life rearranging joyful awe and wonder of who You are and all You have done. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2: The Fear of the Lord Brings Wisdom

Think for a moment about your greatest fear. What exactly is your greatest fear?

Generally speaking, if you think about what you most desire in life, you can then discover your greatest fear. For example, if your greatest desire is to be liked and appreciated by others, then your greatest fear is rejection. If your greatest desire is success or power, then your greatest fear is likely humiliation. If the thing you most love is money, your career, your children, there's almost certainly a fear that is driving that desire forward. Your greatest fear, therefore, is about losing that which you most hold dear.

The Scriptures teach that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of all wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). This may be best understood as, "When God is what you most hold dear; when God is what you are most living for, it is then that you're on the path towards wisdom. But you cannot have wisdom without God being the absolute central part of your life."

As you read today, consider this: What would you say you most hold dear? What are you most living for?

READING & JOURNALING: PSALM 25, PROVERBS 9:10

What would you say you most hold dear? What are you most living for?

What would you say you're most afraid of?

What two or three verses stick out to you most from Psalm 25? Take the opportunity to write them down, and commit to sharing one or more of them with somebody else this week.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 24 & 25

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that I don't regularly think about what I fear. I also confess that I do want to be liked and appreciated by others, and I do want to experience success in life, but I haven't really taken the time to evaluate if I want those things more than I want to know You. Today, help me to see anything I may desire more than You. And help me to see that losing that which I desire is really no big deal as long as You are with me. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 3: Pride Comes Before the Fall

Think about a time when there was something you really wanted to do, and you felt like you deserved to do it.

Because king Uzziah was brought up in the fear of the LORD, he made a lot of wise decisions. As a result, the Kingdom of Judah was at peace and experienced a season of tremendous blessing from God. But this level of prosperity and power led to Uzziah growing in pride. Later in his life, he made a decision to do something that only the priests were permitted to do. Reading the story, it really doesn't seem like it would be a big deal. Uzziah wanted to burn incense in the sanctuary — so what?

It's important to remember, however, that Uzziah wasn't being punished for burning incense. Instead, he was being punished because of his pride. After his many successes in life, he failed to be grateful to God for the many blessings he had. Instead, he felt that he deserved to be able to do anything he wanted. We, too, must be careful not to fall into the same trap.

As you read today, consider this: How regularly do you take opportunity to thank God for the many blessings you have?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 CHRONICLES 26:11-23

How regularly do you take opportunity to thank God for the many blessings you have?

Think about it: What are some of the dangers of thinking you *deserve* to have something (or you *deserve* to do something)? Where might this kind of thinking lead?

Today, take the opportunity to write out your own prayer/praise to God. Thank Him for the many blessings in your life.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 26 & 27

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I acknowledge that I live in a world in which people do feel like they *deserve* to have something they want. Because I live in this world too, I confess that I sometimes feel like I deserve something I haven't actually earned. Today, help me to see that even though there's little I've done to deserve Your love, You have loved me infinitely more than I could ever hope to be loved. I rejoice in that today! In Jesus' name.

DAY 4: Focus on the Positives

Think about a time when somebody said something or did something that really bothered you. In general, is it easier for you to remember that *one* thing they did, or is it easier for you to remember many of the positive things they said or did?

Whether it's an aspect of our broken world or perhaps just a part of our culture, it seems easier to remember negative experiences than positive ones. In fact, counselors and therapists today are in agreement that there needs to be a 7:1 ratio of positive experiences vs. negative ones in order to manage tension well. In other words, you need to offer seven encouraging statements to others for every one disagreement you may have with them, in order for you to be able to navigate through a disagreement in a healthy way.

For king Uzziah, he had done a lot of really good things for the nation of Judah. He was remembered as a king who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. But the one moment his pride got the best of him was also something he was remembered for.

As you read today, consider this: Is it easier for you to focus on the positive or the negative things people say and/or do?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 KINGS 15:1-7

Is it easier for you to focus on the positive or the negative things people say and/or do?

How difficult do you find it to share appreciations or words of encouragement to others?

Will you commit to sharing 7 x more appreciations or words of encouragement than constructive criticism with others over the next week?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 28 & 29

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I know that I had others who loved me deeply throughout my childhood, but I confess that I haven't really learned how to share appreciations well. Help me to grow in sharing appreciations and words of encouragement with others. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5: WEEKLY REFLECTION

What's getting in the way of you growing in your relationship with God? (e.g., your view of God, your view of yourself, self-centeredness, entertainment, lustful pleasures, jealousy, envy, etc.). Write down at least 2-3 steps you'll take over the next week to remove these obstacles and grow in your relationship with God.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 30 & 31

Reflect: What did you learn from today's reading? See back page "7 Arrows."



Week 9: Hoshea & Hezekiah

Hezekiah's story is told in 2 Kings 16:20-20:21, 2 Chronicles 28:27-32:33, & Isaiah 36:1-39:8. He is also mentioned in Proverbs 25:1, Isaiah 1:1, Jeremiah 15:4, 26:18-19, Hosea 1:1, & Micah 1:1. Hoshea's story is told in 2 Kings 17:1-4.

DAY 1: Israel (the Northern Kingdom) Falls

The Assyrian Empire had one of the most proficient militaries in history. When the Assyrian Army came knocking on your city door, chances are high that they came to knock it down. When Hoshea was king of Israel (the Northern Kingdom), the people of Israel had already received not one, but two strong warnings from the Assyrians. All they needed to do was pay tribute to the Assyrians and not rebel against them. Well, all they *really* need to do was turn back to God. But the people refused to see that their situation was of their own making.

Because of their refusal to turn back to God, in 722 BC the Assyrian Empire completely overthrew the Kingdom of Israel. Not only did they overthrow Israel, they deported the people to other cities.

At this point in time, Judah (the Southern Kingdom) is still functioning outside of Assyrian rule. Will the people there remain faithful to God?

As you read today, consider this: When do you find it most difficult to be faithful to God? Is it when things are going well for you or when things are going poorly?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 KINGS 17:1-15

When do you find it most difficult to be faithful to God? Is it when things are going well for you or when things are going poorly?

Have you ever experienced such a strong tragedy that you questioned if God was real, or if He was listening? Looking back, how did He respond to that level of pain and hurt you were experiencing?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 32 & 33

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I confess that it's more natural for me to turn to You regularly in times of chaos or hurt than it is for me to turn to You when things are going well. But I also confess there have been times when things have been so bleak that I have doubted your presence. Today, I simply rejoice in knowing that You are *with* me through everything. Whether good times or bad, You are always there! Thank You! In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2: Judah (the Southern Kingdom) vs. Assyria

Imagine being confronted with a bully who seems willing to do just about anything in order to get what he wants. How would you respond?

In the days of king Hezekiah, Judah was perhaps the most valuable piece of property on the planet. Sandwiched between the stronghold of Egypt and the Assyrian Empire, Judah was a significant trade route that connected three continents. When Hezekiah became king, he was upset that Assyria was controlling and receiving the financial benefits of this trade route, so he rebelled. The Assyrians swiftly responded, demanding a huge financial tribute from Hezekiah.

Hezekiah paid the tribute, but the Assyrians wanted more. They still wanted full control of Judah's lands. King Hezekiah is stuck between a rock and a hard place. He knows that the Northern Kingdom of Israel has already fallen and the people were taken off into captivity. Now, some of Judah's key cities were being overthrown as well. Only Judah's capital city of Jerusalem remained. How would Hezekiah respond?

As you read today, consider this: What is the most difficult decision you've ever had to make?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 KINGS 18:1-37

What is the most difficult decision you've ever had to make? As you wrestled with it, how did you eventually come to the decision that you made?

In what ways did this experience help you to grow individually? Were there any ways in which this experience helped you be able to help others?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 34:1 - 36:1

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, it's not always easy for me to read about these ancient kings and recognize that some of the things they struggled with are some of the same things I struggle with. Today, I realize that Hezekiah had some really difficult decisions to make, and in the end he called on You and other godly people for wisdom. As difficult circumstances come my way, may I also come to You and other godly people for wisdom and direction. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 3: Hezekiah's Prayer

Do you spend more time in prayer for the things you want in life, or more time in prayer for God's will to be done?

As the Assyrians began to surround Jerusalem, king Hezekiah could have prayed that God would protect his life. Instead, Hezekiah prayed that God would miraculously save Jerusalem so that all of the world would know that God alone is the true God. This is a much bigger prayer, and God would respond to Hezekiah's prayer in a really big way.

Archaeology has confirmed that Hezekiah had a tunnel constructed in order to keep fresh water in the city while the Assyrians surrounded it. (You can still walk through this tunnel in Jerusalem today.) Archaeology has also confirmed that the Assyrian army left Jerusalem without overthrowing it. In fact, of the dozens, even hundreds of cities overthrown by the Assyrians, Jerusalem is the *only* city they failed to conquer.

What the Scriptures tell us is that God performed a miracle, sending his angel to slay 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Indeed, God answered Hezekiah's prayer in a big way! As you read today, consider this: What is one prayer God has answered in your life in a big way?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 KINGS 19:1-37

What do you find most interesting about Hezekiah's prayer (2 Kings 19:14-19)?

What is one prayer God has answered in your life in a big way? (Perhaps you or others may consider it a "miracle.")

What do you find most interesting about this story as a whole?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Exodus 40

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, it's hard for me to think of just one prayer You've answered in my life in a big way, because as I dwell on it, I realize that You have answered many of my prayers in a big way. Whether it happens today, in the coming weeks, or even years from now, I pray that You will continue to work in my life in a significant way. Not so that others would see me better, but so that all others would see that You and You alone are God. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 4: Hezekiah's Blunder

Imagine living in a culture in which you don't turn away strangers at your door. A culture in which you invite them into your home, feed them your best food, and make them feel as welcome as possible before they continue on their journey. Where do you draw the line between being hospitable, and giving away too much information about your family, or other items of value in your home?

Late in Hezekiah's life, he's ill. Some messengers from a foreign land arrive asking about his well-being, and offering gifts. He receives the messengers well, and shows them tremendous hospitality. Unfortunately, Hezekiah is a bit too eager to please his guests, taking time to show off everything he owns. He avails to them all of his gold and silver, large storages of fine oil and spices, and everything else of value.

But Isaiah the prophet sees the foolishness in Hezekiah's decision, and reveals to him that because of his lack of wisdom, the Kingdom of Judah will fall. Not to the Assyrian Empire, but to the coming Babylonian Empire.

As you read today, consider this: How can you grow in being more hospitable to others?

READING & JOURNALING: 2 KINGS 20:1-21, 1 PETER 4:8-9, LUKE 14:12-14

How can you grow in being more hospitable to others?

What are some good boundaries to have in place that still provide you opportunities to be overtly hospitable, yet safeguard your family or other items of value?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Leviticus 8 & 9

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, even though the culture in which Hezekiah lived in much different than our own, I recognize that he offered a level of hospitality to foreigners and outsiders from which I can learn. I pray that You would stretch me in such a way that I grow in this area, yet also pray that You would provide me wisdom to not blunder in the same way Hezekiah blundered. Finally, as the end of the week draws near, I pray that You would continue to help me know You more, and know the plans You have for me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5: WEEKLY REFLECTION

What's getting in the way of you growing in your relationship with God? (e.g., your view of God, your view of yourself, self-centeredness, entertainment, lustful pleasures, jealousy, envy, etc.). Write down at least 2-3 steps you'll take over the next week to remove these obstacles and grow in your relationship with God.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Leviticus 16 & 17

Reflect: What did you learn from today's reading? See back page "7 Arrows."



Week 10: Josiah

Josiah's story is told in 2 Kings 21:24-23:30 & 2 Chronicles 33:25-35:27. He is also mentioned in Isaiah 1:1-3, 22:11, 18.

DAY 1: Inspiration vs. Transformation

What is the most inspiring movie you've ever seen, or book you've ever read? Now be honest, what kind of an impact did it *really* have on your life?

In this day and age, you may watch a movie, read a book, or hear a message at church that is *inspirational*. You're encouraged to make a change in your life, whether it's to take on a new goal, eat healthy, exercise more, or something else. Sometimes these inspirational stories lead to real, honest life change. But many times an inspirational story doesn't actually lead to life *transformation*. Transformation occurs with repeated, habitual decisions.

King Josiah finds himself in a very unusual position of becoming king at a very young age (8 years old). 18 years later, a copy of God's Law is discovered and read to the king. Immediately, he begins to make reforms for the nation of Judah. These reforms won't occur overnight, but ongoing transformation will occur due to Josiah's desire to honor God and His Word.

As you read today, consider this: How do you think real life transformation occurs?

READING & JOURNALING:

2 KINGS 22:1-20

How do you think real life transformation occurs? Be specific.

Think of a time when you were *inspired* to change something in your life, but you didn't actually *transform* that area of your life. What do you think would've most helped you to follow through?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Leviticus 23

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, today I confess that I regularly enjoy inspirational books, movies, or other stories, but I don't regularly follow through when it comes to transforming these areas of my life. While there may be many reasons for this, I recognize that the main reason is that I seek out inspirational stories instead of seeking out a transformational God. You and You alone can change me in the person You've made me to be. Help me to be that person. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2: Real Life Transformation

Be honest: When you spend time in prayer, do you spend more time praying for your circumstances to change, or more time praying that God would truly transform your life? That you would come to know Him so strongly that He could change your perspective and see things more like He does?

In his book simply titled *Prayer*, Pastor and Author Timothy Keller writes, "It is remarkable that in all of his writings Paul's prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances. It is certain that they lived in the midst of many dangers and hardships. They faced persecution, death from disease, oppression by powerful forces, and separation from loved ones. Their existence was far less secure than ours is today. Yet in these prayers you see not one petition for a better emperor, for protection from marauding armies, or even for bread for the next meal. Paul does not pray for the goods we would usually have near the top of our lists of requests."

As you read today, consider this: How are your own prayers similar to the Apostle Paul's? How are they different?

READING & JOURNALING:

Today's reading is a compilation of prayers from the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. These prayers are how he prayed for his friends who were likely experiencing adversity on a level far greater than we do today. Read through these passages in the order listed, and then answer the questions below.

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6; PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11; COLOSSIANS 1:9-12; EPHESIANS 3:16-19; EPHESIANS 1:17-19; COLOSSIANS 3:12-17; PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

How are your own prayers similar to the Apostle Paul's?

How are they different?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Leviticus 26

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Today, write out your own prayer to God. Don't pray that He would transform your circumstances. Instead, invite Him to transform your life.

DAY 3: God's Covenant Renewed

In our culture today, there are a couple of topics that people shy away from discussing, especially in the workplace. Both *Religion* and *Politics* are sensitive topics, with people creating self-made lines that form into an *Us vs. Them* mindset.

Things were not so different in king Josiah's day. After having God's Word read to him, Josiah made the decision to completely reform the nation of Judah. He wasn't just focused on his family, or his city. Judah represented the people of God, so Josiah wanted to be certain they *all* worshiped God and God alone.

How did Josiah lead? He started by having the people renew their covenant with God. This *covenant* was much more than a legal agreement. It was a life-commitment to God and His Word. It was a sincere dedication to rid their lives of the things that interfered with their relationship with God. It was much more than attending worship services together. It was total full-on commitment to God each and every day.

As you read today, consider this: Is there any area of your life in which you're not *fully* committed to God and His Word?

READING & JOURNALING:

2 KINGS 23:1-20

Is there any area of your life in which you're not *fully* committed to God and His Word?

What steps can you take today, this week, this month, and into the next year to yield this area of your life fully to God?

Who can you ask to help you and hold you accountable as you take these steps?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Numbers 11 & 12

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, I don't want to enter into life with an *Us vs. Them* mindset. While there will always be others I disagree with when it comes to religion, politics, or other topics, I still want to live acknowledging that all people have been created by You, are deeply loved by You, and that You are regularly inviting me to love others in the same way You love me. Help me to love others better. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 4: The People Celebrate

How often do you truly celebrate something? Perhaps you celebrate a birthday, a Holiday, or another special event throughout the year, but do you really go all-out in your celebration?

For many of us, we'll celebrate on some levels, but not in a big way. Wedding anniversaries may be celebrated on a bigger level at 20, 25, or 50 years. Birthdays, too, may be celebrated on a larger level at certain ages. But many celebrations may be fun and enjoyable, but not an all-out wholehearted celebration.

For the people of Judah, this was about to change. King Josiah commanded the people to celebrate *Passover*, an event for them to remember how God had saved his people hundreds of years prior in Egypt. And what a celebration it was! 2 Kings 23:22 reads, "There had not been a Passover celebration like that since the time when the judges ruled in Israel, nor throughout all the years of the kings of Israel and Judah."

As you read today, consider this: What is something big God has done in your life that you, your family, and friends can celebrate in a big way over the next year?

READING & JOURNALING:

2 KINGS 23:21-28

What is something big God has done in your life that you, your family, and friends can celebrate in a big way over the next year?

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Numbers 13 & 14

Journal: Write it out. Following the pattern from "7 Arrows", (see back page) what did you learn from today's reading?

PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, when I think about something in my life that is worth celebrating, the simplest answer is You. You are worth celebrating for sending Jesus to live and know what it's like to experience difficult trials and circumstances. You are worth celebrating for Jesus dying on the cross and bearing the burden of my sins. You are worth celebrating for creating me in Your image. You are worth celebrating for rescuing me. You are worth celebrating for so much more. May I celebrate You for the life transformation You're working in my life each and every day. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5: WEEKLY REFLECTION

What's getting in the way of you growing in your relationship with God? (e.g., your view of God, your view of yourself, self-centeredness, entertainment, lustful pleasures, jealousy, envy, etc.). Write down at least 2-3 steps you'll take over the next week to remove these obstacles and grow in your relationship with God.

F260 READING: (A Scripture Reading Plan for Busy Believers)

Read: Numbers 16 & 17

Reflect: What did you learn from today's reading? See back page "7 Arrows."



Journal

Dig Deeper into
God's Word

Read the passage for the day, and then Reflect and Respond to the passage by answering the questions provided below.

7 ARROWS of BIBLE READING

What does this passage say?



What did this passage mean to its
original audience?



What does this passage tell
us about God?



What does this passage tell
us about man?



What does this passage
demand of me?



How does this passage change
the way I relate to people?



What does this passage
prompt me to pray to God?

