

The Stumbling Block of Emotions

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As we all know, the Spring Holy Days are just around the corner and as we are also very aware, this is the time of year that we typically do a self-evaluation. We look to see where we are at in our Christian lives and how we are doing. We try to be aware of the areas where we might need improvement; areas that might trip us up and become our stumbling blocks. Areas that could get us off course, causing us to fall into sin or just make bad decisions in our lives and not follow God's way.

What I would like to do today is to look at this subject and help us prepare for the upcoming Spring Holy Days. We are going to look at this issue of stumbling blocks. For all of us, depending on our background, our personality, how we are wired, we can all have our individual weaknesses and stumbling blocks. Different areas that can trip us up and either lead us into bad decisions, down a wrong road or draw us into sin—by just making mistakes in life. Depending on our own personalities and our own strengths and weaknesses, we all have our own unique areas.

One thing we all have in common, regardless of who we are, is a vulnerability to our emotions being a stumbling block. They can get us going down the wrong road. It doesn't really matter what the emotion is, I think we are all vulnerable if we let our emotions start running our thinking. If we don't keep them in check and under control, they can take control of our lives and become a wedge and a tool for Satan to use to manipulate us; to get us off course and going away from God's way.

We are going to look at this particular subject. If you would like a title for this sermon it's:

The Stumbling Block of Emotions

I think for all of us, emotions can be that stumbling block. Different, particular emotions or different things that get to us can become a weakness. Solomon, in the book of Proverbs, points out just how dangerous it can be if we don't keep our emotions under control. If we don't keep a watch on them and keep them from getting us into trouble. To start off with we will go to Proverbs 25 and look at a warning that Solomon gives us. Starting in verse 28.

Proverbs 25:28 *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.* (NKJV)

To fully understand this particular reference, we have to think back to the historical context in which Solomon was writing. Today in our modern world, we don't typically build a wall around the city. Back in this time, when they built a city somewhere, they typically built a wall around it for the protection of the city. This could be for protecting

the inhabitants from wild animals that might come in and cause problems and attack people, from invaders, from foreign armies wanting to come in and attack the area and steal everything everybody had. If you have a wall around the city it served as protection and as a barrier to defend against these things. This is what he is talking about. If we don't control emotions and keep a watch on them, keep them under surveillance you might say—keep them under control—we can become like a city without walls and so very vulnerable to attack. We have to remember that we have a spiritual enemy that is after us. As the Bible tells us, he is like a roaring lion. He is like a predatory animal seeking prey, looking for an easy dinner.

In 1 Peter 5:8 we see where Peter talks about this.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* (NKJV)

If you have ever watched any nature shows about lions or other big predatory animals hunting, they don't typically go charging into a herd of animals they may want to eat. They look for an opportunity. They stalk about, looking for the injured animal that may be an easier kill, maybe one that is older and slower that they can easily chase down. Maybe one distracted and not paying attention and they can sneak up on it. They are basically looking for an easy opportunity to get an easy dinner. Satan can the same way. He's strategic in how he comes after us and he's going to look for any opportunity.

It reminds me of a conversation I had with a good friend of mine several years ago. We were talking about trials in general and the tests that we have faced in life and may face in the future. My friend made an interesting comment. He grinned at me and said, "I can even tell you how it's going to come at you." I was intrigued by this statement and said, "Okay tell me your assessment of that." He smiled and looked back and said, "Wherever you are most vulnerable." In other words, whatever is your weak spot where you can be attacked. That is what Satan is going to come after."

He would basically describe Satan as an opportunist who is going to look for an opportunity wherever your weakness is. Just like lions stalking and coming after a herd of animals. They are looking for the one that is injured, distracted and not paying attention, something easy to come after. Satan is going to do the same thing. He's not going to look for that opportunity where your strong area is and you have a good defense. He is going to look for the vulnerability in the area where you are weak and he can easily trip you up.

Oftentimes our emotions can be that very thing. We have to be aware that if we allow ourselves to let our emotions lead our lives or our thinking, we are very susceptible to being manipulated. We can be manipulated by Satan or by other individuals in our lives. If you have ever dealt with a telemarketer trying to sell you something, you know they try to sell to you using emotion. They know they can get you to buy into something if they tell you that you deserve this; you owe it to yourself. You will kick yourself if you don't get this product. They are basically selling you on the emotion, because they know

that once they have the emotion hooked, you will turn around and reverse engineer logic to justify that emotional decision. That's just how human beings tend to be wired. That's why the sales profession often train their people to find that hook—that emotional appeal—and go for it. Once a person is locked in emotionally, they will justify things and push logic aside to appease that emotion, even when the decision they are making is very illogical.

To look at a biblical example that I think well demonstrates this principle, look at the life of Samson. As we go through this sermon today, we are going to look at a number of biblical characters who, as in Samson's case, are very strong, powerful individuals, very wise and intelligent. These aren't just your average run of the mill people who didn't have a lot going for them—these are people who had a lot going for them. They are very remarkable in a lot of ways but what tripped them up was their emotions.

We will look at the life of Sampson in Judges 14. As we know, Samson was a man God had blessed with tremendous strength. He was very unusual in the amount of strength he had and God used him as a tool to strike some blows at the Philistines. We can see there was a theme throughout Samson's life where his emotions caused him to do illogical things. It really hurt his life and actually brought devastating consequences. He made some decisions, as we are going to see in the second case, where it was blatantly obvious what was going to happen if he goes down that road. Because he was thinking with his emotions, he did not see the logic of what was happening to him. In Judges 14:5, we see the story where Samson marries a Philistine woman. But notice how his emotions are played on and he winds up being betrayed.

Judges 14:5 *So Samson went down to Timnah with his father and mother, and came to the vineyards of Timnah. Now to his surprise, a young lion came roaring against him.*

6) *And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he tore the lion apart as one would have torn apart a young goat, though he had nothing in his hand. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.*

7) *Then he went down and talked with the woman; and she pleased Samson well.*

8) *After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion. And behold, a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion.*

9) *He took some of it in his hands and went along, eating. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they also ate. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey out of the carcass of the lion.*

10) *So, his father went down to the woman. And Samson gave a feast there, for young men used to do so.*

11) *And it happened, when they saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him.*

12) *Then Samson said to them, Let me pose a riddle to you. If you can correctly solve and explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing.*

13) *But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty changes of clothing.” And they said to him, Pose your riddle, that we may hear it.”*

14) *So, he said to them: Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet.” Now for three days they could not explain the riddle.*

15) *But it came to pass on the seventh day that they said to Samson s wife, Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father s house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours? Is that not so?”*

16) *Then Samson s wife wept on him, and said, You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained it to me.”*

And he said to her, Look, I have not explained it to my father or my mother; so, should I explain it to you?” (NKJV)

Notice the appeal, what she has done to him; she’s not just asking the question, she has played the card that if you really loved me, you would do what I want and give me this information. She is crying and playing on his emotions. This is meant to make him feel bad like he is an insensitive, horrible husband and he doesn’t care about her and doesn’t love her because he won’t tell her this information. These aren’t sincere tears she is crying; she has an agenda because we already know she is purposefully looking to get this information so she can betray him. This isn’t real trauma that she is expressing with her tears, she’s just blatantly trying to manipulate him. This is a ploy as we will talk about in a minute that can often be a weakness for men. A woman’s tears oftentimes will punch their buttons. They will abandon logic and try to go along to appease the emotions, not looking at the bigger picture of what’s taking place. Let’s pick up the story and follow it.

17) *Now she had wept on him the seven days while their feast lasted.*

She was working on him for seven days. So now he is going to start feeling guilty about not being a sensitive, nice guy and that he doesn’t love her, because she’s been playing on his emotions now for a week.

17 continued) *... And it happened on the seventh day that he told her, because she pressed him so much. Then she explained the riddle to the sons of her people.*

18) *So, the men of the city said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down: What is sweeter than honey? And what is stronger than a lion?” And he said to them: If you had not plowed with my heifer, You, would not have solved my riddle!” (NKJV)*

Notice how she plays on his emotions and gets him to share this information. She wasn’t crying these tears because she sincerely felt unloved, it was just a way to be

manipulative and play on his emotions to get him to give this information. As we will see later when we look at the example of Delilah, this became a trend in Samson's life. Obviously, this was a weakness for him that could be played upon. Think about what is going to happen here. In this example, we don't have reason to necessarily know that Samson could see this coming. But later in the example of Delilah, it was painfully obvious what she was up to. Because of the track record of her behavior, anyone with common sense could see what was going to happen.

How does Samson get tripped up? It's because she is played on his emotions. He's not thinking logically at this point, he is trying to appease emotions. He is trying to get her to stop crying and feel like he is a good husband by making her feel good. Quite frankly he is probably trying to absolve his own guilt. You think about it, she is crying, it's going on for a week—"you don't love me, you don't care about me, you are an insensitive, uncaring husband, you don't show your love"—now he's wanting to prove he is a nice one. He's not this horrible, bad husband, he's nice and cares about her so he wants to give her this information. He is thinking with his emotions.

There is a greater lesson we can learn in all of this. Not only just the general lesson. As I mentioned before, oftentimes for a lot of men in particular, a woman's tears can be a situation that they just don't have a defense for. They easily fall for it. Understand, I'm not suggesting at all that husbands should just be insensitive jerks and never care if they have hurt their wives—that's not what I'm saying at all. If you look at track records of behavior and logic, you can sometimes sort out if this real trauma and pain happening here or is this an attempt at manipulation?

Let me give you a personal example that I experienced a number of years ago. I was doing a counseling session with a lady I had known for a little while. Knowing this individual, I knew she had a track record of being a bit dramatic about things in her life. She also tended to look at the world in a way of conceptualizing herself as a victim. She would see her trouble and problems only from her point of view and that the reason she was having trouble was everybody else's fault. All the other people in her life were the source of the problem and it wasn't any of her own decisions or her own behavior that created the difficulties. I was having this counseling session with her one day and we were talking about these things. It was clear to me that the subject matter we were talking about were her own decisions and behavior which had created a lot of her own troubles. I was trying to gently point this out to her, saying let's look at how you behaved here and what you did there and didn't that result in this? Isn't part of the problem looking at yourself? Out of nowhere, all of a sudden, she immediately bursts into tears and started characterizing herself as this wounded victim. She literally bent her head down with tears flowing and her hands over her face. I had seen this type of thing with this individual before. I knew this wasn't real trauma, this was a distraction to get away from having to talk about her own failings.

What struck me as she was doing this, and quite frankly was a little amusing to me, I knew she was expecting me to immediately jump into consoling mode; change the subject and not talk about any of her behavior and treat her as the victim to stop the

tears. I just patiently sat there and didn't say anything. I was waiting for this to run its course so we could get back to discussing things. She had her head over, waiting for me to jump in and console but I did not do that. She opened her eyes and looked through her fingers. I could tell she was looking to see if I was falling for it. I did not jump in to console, I just sat patiently waiting for this to play its course. When she saw that, she dropped her hand down, her head came up, the tears stopped just as fast as they had turned on—it was like a light switch when they came on and when they came off—and she started having a logical conversation with me as if it didn't happen. Which confirmed for me, this isn't real trauma we were dealing with, it was just a way to distract, to change the subject and to get away from having to face her own actions. Please understand I'm not suggesting that every husband out there should be an insensitive jerk and never care if his wife is crying—that's not where I'm going with this. I am saying that if you stop and look at this logically and have seen a track record of this behavior—then the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Because I knew there was a track record of this, I could see what was happening and realized this was an emotional ploy. If we can be aware of the types of things that can be our triggers, we can keep from being drawn into bad decisions that appease emotions, and don't look at the greater situation.

This was a lesson that Samson had to learn very much the hard way, with very devastating conclusions. We won't cover this part of the story, but later the wife that is described here ends up getting killed. Then later, he winds up meeting Delilah and falls in love with her. So, we will continue the story with her. In Judges 16:4 we are going to see that Delilah wants to find out the source of Samson's strength. She keeps asking for this information and as we are going to see, she plays the same card on him that the first wife played. "If you really loved me, you would tell me what I want to know". In her case it's much more obvious, because by the time Samson gives her the true information, he has seen enough of her behavior to realize that there is a pattern here and it's very predictable what she is going to do next.

Judges 16:4 *Afterward it happened that he loved a woman in the Valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah.*

5) And the lords of the Philistines came up to her and said to her, Entice him, and find out where his great strength lies, and by what means we may overpower him, that we may bind him to afflict him; and every one of us will give you eleven hundred pieces of silver." (NKJV)

Notice, she was being bribed to betray him. This is a repeat of the same movie. This is what the first wife did to him. It's now an evil agenda and she is playing on his emotions to get him to reveal the information.

6) So, Delilah said to Samson, Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you."

7) And Samson said to her, If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man."

- 8) *So, the lords of the Philistines brought up to her seven fresh bowstrings, not yet dried, and she bound him with them.*
- 9) *Now men were lying in wait, staying with her in the room. And she said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he broke the bowstrings as a strand of yarn breaks when it touches fire. So, the secret of his strength was not known.*
- 10) *Then Delilah said to Samson, Look, you have mocked me and told me lies. Now, please tell me what you may be bound with."*
- 11) *So, he said to her, If they bind me securely with new ropes that have never been used, then I shall become weak, and be like any other man."*
- 12) *Therefore, Delilah took new ropes and bound him with them, and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" And men were lying in wait, staying in the room. But he broke them off his arms like a thread.*
- 13) *Delilah said to Samson, Until now you have mocked me and told me lies. Tell me what you may be bound with." And he said to her, If you weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom"—*
- 14) *So, she wove it tightly with the batten of the loom, and said to him, The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" But he awoke from his sleep, and pulled out the batten and the web from the loom.*
- 15) *Then she said to him, How can you say, I love you, when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength lies."*

Notice the card she is playing; "If you really loved me, you would tell me what I want to know." At this point, a very commonsense principle should be coming out to Samson. As I love to put it, *the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior*. There's a track record here; three times now she has asked him for the source of his strength and what does she immediately do with that information? Every single time she tries to throw him under the bus and betray him to the Philistines. There's a pattern emerging here. If Samson had just looked at this logically and said, okay there is a track record here, and then project forward—I know how this movie is going to end. It was common sense what was going to happen next. This wasn't rocket science. Anyone with common sense could look and know how this movie was going to end. If he gives her the information of how it really works, he is going to get betrayed and it's going to end very badly.

What happens is Samson's emotions get played upon. He doesn't sit back and look at this logically and analytically and see that he is being manipulated. So, the last thing he should want to do is play into this. But no, she starts playing on his emotions, he probably was feeling guilty because he's an insensitive husband. "You mocked me, you don't love me, if you loved me you would do what I want" and what happens at this point is that he is no longer thinking logically and analytically about the situation. He is trying to appease emotions. He wants to make her feel better and make her stop nagging him and constantly telling him that he is a bad husband. He wants to appease his own guilt and feel good about himself. He doesn't want to think he's an insensitive jerk of a husband who doesn't love his wife. Now he is on a mission to prove that he is a good one and really cares about her. And boy, does this movie end badly.

15) ... *How can you say, I love you, when your heart is not with me? You have mocked me these three times, and have not told me where your great strength lies.*"

16) *and it came to pass, when she pestered him daily with her words and pressed him, so that his soul was vexed to death ... (NKJV)*

He's getting worn out now, his emotions are getting worn down and he just wants this to stop. He wants to stop feeling guilty about himself and just appease her emotions and get her to stop bothering him.

17) *that he told her all his heart, and said to her, No razor has ever come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man."*

18) *When Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up once more, for he has told me all his heart." So, the lords of the Philistines came up to her and brought the money in their hand.*

19) *Then she lulled him to sleep on her knees, and called for a man and had him shave off the seven locks of his head. Then she began to torment him, and his strength left him.*

20) *And she said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson!" So, he awoke from his sleep, and said, I will go out as before, at other times, and shake myself free!" But he did not know that the LORD had departed from him.*

21) *Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison. (NKJV)*

Notice this ended very badly. It's not like he couldn't see it coming. This is something where, if he had just utilized a very basic, commonsense principle—best predictor of future behavior is past behavior—it would have been very easy to predict how this movie was going to end. Three times he gives her an answer, every time she promptly uses that to try and betray him. It's not rocket science to know if we give her the right answer, we know how that's going to end. He ignored this common sense conclusion and basically threw himself under the bus. By giving her this information, it was no surprise this was going to end badly and the consequences were devastating. He gets his eyes poked out and he becomes a slave—his life is ruined—all because of a bad decision.

There's a proverb that Solomon gives us that very much illustrates this principle. Proverbs 22:3—I normally read this out of the New King James translation but I'm going to read this one to you out of the NIV because I like the better way it words it.

Proverbs 22:3 *The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty. (NIV)*

This is a situation that Samson could have very easily foreseen was going to happen. It wasn't rocket science to look and know she had a very clear track record. She does the same thing every time she gets this information—not really hard to project what she's going to do if she gets the right information. Instead of being prudent and seeing the danger coming and acting accordingly, he keeps charging forward and thinks it will be different this time if he is just positive about it and gives her this, it will be okay. No, it wasn't okay, it ended very badly. This is a principle that if we utilize in our lives, we can save ourselves a lot of trouble.

Just to give some simple examples of this, I've worked as a recruiter for the last twenty years. A lot of my job is to interview people and try to make placements in the company that I work for. You learn quickly as a recruiter that, when you are dealing with people, it is a job you are constantly pulled in multiple directions all the time. You have to prioritize what you are going to focus your time and energy on. You learn quickly that there are a lot of activities and things you can be doing and spend a lot of time on that don't necessarily get you any benefit. What you are hired to do is fill the openings of your company and to fill these positions by not just making a hire, but hopefully making a hire that will last for a while. It's good for all parties concerned. The candidate is going to get a job that they are happy with and will want to stay in and the department gets an employee who works well with their team and everybody wins.

You learn to try and manage your time in all of this and literally from the time I pick up a resume or deal with an individual, I'm trying to look down the road and see where this movie is going to end. If you start thinking like that and look for obvious road blocks that can come down the road through this process. Once seen, you try to be prudent and take action so as not to waste your time going down this road if it's going to end badly. If you foresee some road block is going to come up, whether it be compensation, the needs of the department, or if this person is going to stay in this position and if it will really work for their long-term goals. You are always trying to think like this. Even when you're interviewing someone, you are always looking at what are their past decisions. Not just the words they tell you, because if you are in a job like this—think about it—if you have ever gone to a job interview, what are you doing when you are being interviewed. You are trying to say what the interviewer wants to hear because you want the job. You are already giving a false impression of yourself. What a recruiter learns to do is look at people's behavior, not just their words and try to see where this is going to lead.

I try to do this with candidates and with hiring managers. When you see this isn't going to end well, you try to be very upfront with them; you say, "Let me tell you how this movie is going to end—it's not going to end the way you want it to work out.". In the twenty years I have been doing this, I have found a lot of people are very thankful for that, saying that they appreciate me being upfront and straight with them so they don't waste their time pursuing something that isn't going to work. But then you also have to deal with the people that go, "I'm just so positive, I just want to be positive about this and pursue it anyway.". Time after time I've seen situations where you tell them it's not

going to work out the way they want it to and they just won't see that and insist on going forward. Then they become very frustrated and upset later when they have wasted a lot of their time and it didn't turn out the way they wanted it to. If we start looking at this in terms of, "If I do this move where does this end and where does this go?"

One of the keys is looking at the track record of behavior with individuals. If you learn to do that, you can stop a lot of frustration in life. In fact, even sometimes in a broad general sense, you can look at an individual's behavior and any strong patterns can anticipate behavior sometimes a year or two in advance. If circumstances keep going in this direction, at some point X is going to happen and you can see the trouble coming a year or two in advance and can take action to get around it. Take a stereotypical example of the patterned behavior of someone who is in an abusive relationship. They have a spouse or family member who has an addiction problem with alcohol or drugs and it's an ongoing issue that causes chaos in their life. Periodically they become violent and smack around other people in the family. Oftentimes what happens is a cycle will be seen in this. People go down this road and they get violent and when bad consequences are about to come, then they are going to change and never do it again. But then the cycle repeats and repeats and goes on for years.

You will often see people stuck in these environments thinking, "He promised he's never going to do that again. If I'm just positive that will happen. But wait, isn't this the same thing that has happened numerous times in a row?" What happens is people get into wishful thinking and they don't stop and see that if you look at the pattern of behavior, no real change that has taken place.

Another statement you will hear when people are stuck in a situation like this, particularly if they have a religious or Christian background, is, "God can change anybody. I'm just optimistic and have faith that God can change anybody.". Let's realize that actually, the way they make that statement, it's not true. Let me show you an example in Matthew 3 of John the Baptist. It's a situation where John is in his ministry, baptizing people and he has some Pharisees come to him requesting baptism.

Matthew 3:4 *Now John himself was clothed in camel s hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey.*

5) *Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him*

6) *and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.*

7) *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*

8) *Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance,*

9) *and do not think to say to yourselves, we have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*

10) *And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (NKJV)*

Let me explain what I mean. When I made the comment ‘people say God can change anybody’ and I said that’s actually not true. I’m not saying God’s power is limited and He cannot fix anyone who is depending upon Him and yielding to His Spirit to do so. What I mean by that is, God requires willing participants. Just as John was saying, when these Pharisees came for baptism. All you have to do is read Matthew 23 and Christ’s critique of the Pharisees to realize these men had a pretty nasty track record. If you look at their past behavior, it was not a good picture. It wasn’t a situation where God was not willing to work with and try to rehabilitate these men; it was an issue of showing that there is a need for real change. John didn’t just baptize them and say, “I’m positive and if we baptize them, maybe they will repent later because God can change anybody”. That’s not what he did. John looks at it and says, first go show fruits worthy of repentance. Demonstrate with your behavior that you are actually making a meaningful change and when you do that, then we’ll talk. It’s not an issue that people can’t change. Sometimes when I say the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, people say I am not allowing for people to change. It is not saying that people who have had a bad past can’t change—no, they absolutely can change. But the evidence of that change is in their behavior, not just their words. People will play upon emotions and make others feel bad but there is no real evidence of change in behavior. The key is looking at change in behavior, because that is the real indicator. People can definitely change, that’s the entire point of being baptized and repenting, but that is showing real repentance and there is a change in life.

The point I’m getting at is realizing how our emotions can be played upon and that we can make bad decisions going forward if we are trying to appease emotion. Rather than doing that just sometimes taking a logical step back to look at what’s happening in the situation. Take a look at ourselves, look at the track record of other people’s behavior and realize what’s taking place, because we will make much better decisions.

As I mentioned before, we are going to look at a number of very talented individuals in the Bible as examples of how emotions can be manipulated. They weren’t foolish individuals, they were wise, talented, strong individuals, whose emotions wound up doing them in. As we are going to see, this happened to the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon. In 1 Kings 3 we see that at the beginning of Solomon’s reign, God asked him what gift he would like to receive and he asked for wisdom and was blessed with being the wisest man who ever lived. 1 Kings 3:5.

1 Kings 3:5 *At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, Ask! What shall I give you?"*

6) And Solomon said: You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7) Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.

8) And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted.

9) *Therefore, give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"*

10) *The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.*

11) *Then God said to him: Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice,*

12) *behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.*

13) *And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.*

14) *So, if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." (NKJV)*

Solomon was gifted with being the wisest man before his time and even after. He was known famously for it. He wrote major sections of the Bible, sharing this wisdom. Even in his time people would come from far and wide to talk to him and get advice from him because he was so known for his wisdom. Despite all of this, it is his emotions and his inability to keep them under check that ruins his life and destroys all of this. Turn over to Ecclesiastes 2, we can see that he casts self-control aside, not realizing that his own emotions, his own desires, can be his own worst enemy in spite of the great wisdom he has. He ignored all of this and decided he was going to indulge any desire that he had. Obviously if you take that approach, you are going to try and satisfy every emotion, whim and desire that you have. This is basically what he did.

Ecclesiastes 2:1 *I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore, enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity.*

2) *I said of laughter— "Madness!"; and of mirth, What does it accomplish?*

3) *I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.*

4) *I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.*

5) *I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.*

6) *I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.*

7) *I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house.*

Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

8) *I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.*

9) *So, I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also, my wisdom remained with me.*

10) *Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For, my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor.*

11) *Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed, all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun. (NKJV)*

Notice what he did here was basically cast aside self-control. One of the lessons all of us have to learn in life is, that trying to satisfy all of our desires and following every emotional impulse we have, is a really bad idea. That will really get us into trouble in a heartbeat. This is what happened to Solomon. In spite of all his wisdom and what he had to be aware of, the chief things that got him into trouble were his emotions and his hormones. His desire for love with lots of wives was really his undoing. The Bible directly tells us that this is the case in 1 Kings 11:1.

1 Kings 11:1 *But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—*

2) from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. (NKJV)

He clearly would have known better—Moses’ writings clearly laid out that this is not something you should do. he had to be aware of this since he was the wisest man who ever lived. In spite of that he still throws caution to the wind.

3) And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. (NKJV)

It has always puzzled me, given the magnitude of the numbers, how he got the numbers quite so high without learning long before he gets to this point that it’s not turning out so well.

4) For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.

5) For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

6) Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.

7) Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon.

8) And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

9) *So, the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,*
10) *and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded.*
11) *Therefore, the LORD said to Solomon, Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.*
12) *Nevertheless, I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son.*
13) *However, I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.” (NKJV)*

His undoing was his desire for love and his hormones as well. You can imagine how this scenario played out. I would imagine the first wife played upon his emotions with “If you really love me, you would build an altar to my god and you would be involved in the worship and what’s important to me.”. Then once he had done it for the first one then the others would use the same tactic and he had himself in a real pickle. He does one after the other and it just sucks him in. This can be the undoing of a lot of us when you think in terms of emotions. Even just the emotion of loneliness can wind up being a stumbling block. Oftentimes that is what happens with single people in the church. They marry someone of a different faith who is not going to be supportive of the life that they want to live as a Christian. Sometimes the emotion that trips them up is the emotion of loneliness. Our emotions can be that stumbling block because they create opportunities for Satan to play on whatever that emotion is. He starts leading us down the road where we are trying to appease that emotion and do not make logical decisions.

Another emotion I’m sure that also played out in Solomon’s situation, with all the wives that he had, was the emotion of jealousy. To see a biblical principle on this, turn to James 3:13.

James 3:13 *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.*

14) *But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.*

15) *This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.*

16) *For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.*

17) *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

18) *Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*
(NKJV)

It talks about how envy and jealousy results in confusion. You get confusion and chaos. I’m sure that happened in Solomon’s situation; imagine with all of those wives and children and the sheer numbers of what he was dealing with. He had to have had a lot

of wives who felt neglected and hurt and who never got any attention. They would be vying to try and get that love and favoritism for their children—1000 wives—there had to be an enormous number of children. Solomon is one man; he can't be stretched in that many directions. It was just a set up for disaster. Imagine the chaos that all of the jealousy could cause. To get a clear example of this, we will go to Genesis 29 and see a situation that played out with Jacob and his wives. Jacob made a deal with Laban to marry Rachel and then he was tricked into marrying Leah. He accepts that marriage and then wants to marry Rachel as well. In the situation that plays out, you can see how much confusion and chaos was created because of the jealousy that took place.

Genesis 29:31 *When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.*

32) *So, Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."*

33) *Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.*

34) *She conceived again and bore a son, and said, Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore, his name was called Levi.*

35) *And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore, she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.*
(NKJV)

As we continue on with the story, I want you to notice how the actions of Leah and Rachel are motivated by getting their husband's love. Getting the attention, getting the love and adoration that they are seeking. But their children and even the hand maiden's become pawns in the game; they are objects to be used trying to fulfill these unmet emotional needs and it creates chaos within the family. Chapter 30.

Genesis 30:1 *Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, Give me children, or else I die!"* (NKJV)

Notice this is envy and she is trying to meet her emotional needs.

2) *And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?*

3) *So, she said, Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her.* (NKJV)

Notice Bilhah is just an object to be used now to fulfill her emotional desires. The children that are going to result and the handmaiden have now become objects to be used to satisfy emotions.

4) *Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her.*

- 5) *And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.*
- 6) *Then Rachel said, God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore, she called his name Dan.*
- 7) *And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.*
- 8) *Then Rachel said, With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." (NKJV)*

Notice this is a competition with her sister and everybody else is an object to be used.

- 8 continued) *... So, she called his name Naphtali.*
- 9) *When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife.*
- 10) *And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.*
- 11) *Then Leah said, A troop comes!" So, she called his name Gad.*
- 12) *And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.*
- 13) *Then Leah said, I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So, she called his name Asher. (NKJV)*

The focus is totally on herself, everybody else is an object to be used.

- 14) *Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."*
- 15) *But she said to her, Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel said, Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes." (NKJV)*

They are making deals back and forth on Jacob's time.

- 16) *When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." [He's being bought and sold now] And he lay with her that night.*
- 17) *And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.*
- 18) *Leah said, God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband." So, she called his name Issachar.*
- 19) *Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son.*
- 20) *And Leah said, God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." (NKJV)*

The children are objects for her to get the love and attention she wants.

- 20 continued) *... So, she called his name Zebulun.*
- 21) *Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.*
- 22) *Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.*

23) *And she conceived and bore a son, and said, God has taken away my reproach.*

24) *So, she called his name Joseph, and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.*" (NKJV)

Notice what's happening here and how much chaos is taking place and this is all being sparked by an emotion of envy. They are both desiring love and their husband to take care of them and show them attention. Literally, the children and the handmaids become objects to be used. It becomes chaos. How did all of this start? The inability to deal with the emotions they were feeling, feeling hurt and neglected and envying the attention the other was getting. Now it becomes a game back and forth.

Another example where this thing can play out is, unfortunately with children whose parents are in a divorce. I was an eight-year-old child myself, when my parents divorced, so I experienced this. What can happen is, where it isn't so much vying for love and attention, but where the children become objects to hurt the other spouse. They use the children as a way to express anger towards the other spouse, either during or after a divorce and the children get caught in the middle becoming pawns in a game. It's one of those things we have to be aware of with our own feelings and not just look at what we are feeling at the moment. We must ask that question, if I go down this road, how does this movie end? How does it affect other people? What are the long-term effects of this? If we stop and look at a logical, analytical picture of things, then sometimes we can separate from that emotion and look at the bigger picture. When we make bad decisions, it is often being sucked into that emotion or feeling at the moment. We appease that emotion and don't look at what if we go down this path, is there danger ahead? Does it hurt me, does it hurt the innocent bystanders and others who are involved? If we get locked into the emotions we can get skewed on the bigger picture.

Another common but dangerous emotion that can really trip us up and that we are all aware of, is anger. Let me give you a definition I like to use for how to define anger. Sometimes you can give a number of definitions of exactly what that means. I like to define anger as an emotional response to a real or perceived injustice. Think about when we get upset or angry about something, oftentimes the core of it is, we feel we have been wronged or someone we care about has been wronged. That can be a real injustice, or a perceived injustice; either way we respond the same way when we feel like we've been wronged. As we are going to see in the examples we will look at, it doesn't matter if that injustice was real or not, we still have to effectively manage it. We can be angry over a very real injustice, a very legitimate injustice but it can still destroy our lives. In Ephesians 4 we will look at a warning that the Bible gives us about anger. The reason I like to define it as an emotional response to an injustice is, as we're going to see, it's not necessarily automatically wrong that we are angry about something, it's how we manage it.

Ephesians 4:26 *Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,*

27) *nor give place to the devil.* (NKJV)

It's not saying don't ever get angry about anything because anger is inherently wrong—no there can be a just reason to be angry—but it warns you to be careful with this. It can quickly become an opportunity for Satan to take advantage of this and lead you down a very wrong path. Anger can be like cancer. If you have ever dealt with someone with cancer, it can start in one part of the body and then if it metastasizes and can spread all throughout the body and affect everything about the body. Anger can work the same way. Proverbs 29:2.

Proverbs 29:2 *An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.* (NKJV)

In other words, it says he abounds in transgression because if we let anger get control of our lives, it becomes a cancer. We abound in transgression because it spills over into the other areas of our lives, polluting our thinking and leading us down a wrong path. In fact, it's not just like a cancer, it can be like an infectious disease. It can not only ruin our lives; it can negatively affect those who are around us because it can rub off on other people. To see that, look at Proverbs 22:24.

Proverbs 22:24 *Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go,
25) Lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.* (NKJV)

In other words, it's like an infectious disease. If we hang around someone who is angry and resentful it just comes out in all areas of their life, how they talk about things and how they live their life. That attitude can rub off on us. We can start taking on their attitude and develop that in our own lives and it becomes a snare. It becomes an opportunity for Satan to take advantage of and then manipulate us. One of the keys is not to look at this as I mentioned, as a real or perceived injustice because that's what gets us angry and worked up and resentful about something in life. It's I've been wronged. That can be real or perceived, it can be legitimate or we can just see it that way. Sometimes in life we weren't necessarily wronged like we think, but we see it that way and will respond accordingly. I think it's important to realize that it doesn't matter if it was legitimate or not. We will look at an example of a man who destroyed his own life over his inability to deal with anger, even though the issues he could be upset about were very legitimate.

We are going to look at the example of Ahithophel—he was a very wise man and known for his wise counsel. It's even said of him in the Bible, as we will read today, inquiring of Ahithophel was as if you had gotten advice from God Himself. This man was just known for his great wisdom. As you will see he was a counselor to King David and there was a point where he was very angry with David and was on a mission to kill him. The Bible doesn't come right out and spell out what exactly his issues were and why he felt so negatively about David, but if we put together his family tree and then look at his advice that he gives when he's against David, it's not hard to figure out what he's upset about.

In 2 Samuel 23 we can look at his family tree, who he is related to and I think we can easily see a reason why he would have a beef against David. We are going to break into a context and just look at verse 34; this is a list of David's mighty men. It's not relevant to us, all this whole list, I just want you to notice where Ahithophel is mentioned.

2 Samuel 23:34 *Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite ... (NKJV)*

I want you to notice that Eliam's father is Ahithophel; Eliam is his son. Now let's notice who is related to Eliam. Turn to 2 Samuel 11:1.

2 Samuel 11:1 *It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.*

2) *Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold.*

3) *So, David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (NKJV)*

If you look at this story, Eliam is Bathsheba's father; Ahithophel is Eliam's father, Bathsheba's grandfather. As you know, the story with David and Bathsheba, he winds up having an affair with her, she winds up getting pregnant and the child ends up dying. As a result of this son, David goes farther than this. He realizes he's about to get caught here because her husband Uriah has been out in the battlefield fighting in the army and everyone knows it can't be Uriah's child; there has to be foul play. So, David sets Uriah up and has him murdered to make his guilt go away and try to cover this up. You can easily see why Ahithophel would have a problem with David. Think of the issues he can accuse David of. He destroyed my granddaughter's life, he's responsible for the death of my great grandchild, he betrayed his own troops, set up one of his own people and had him murdered; he can make some severe allegations against David and it's all true. He's not making any of this up. He doesn't have to blow a situation out of proportion; he can say David is guilty of all of this and it's absolutely true.

What happens is, Ahithophel joins a rebellion against David. David's son Absalom is dividing the nation and there is an attempted coup going on. Ahithophel joins up with Absalom and you can see by the advice he is giving; he is trying to get even with David.

2 Samuel 16:20 *Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, Give advice as to what we should do."*

21) *And Ahithophel said to Absalom, Go in to your father's concubines, whom he has left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you are abhorred by your father. Then the hands of all who are with you will be strong." (NKJV)*

He's basically saying, go take your father's wives—a concubine then wasn't just a girlfriend, she was a wife of lesser status, it's still a formal relationship—but he's basically saying, to do to your father what he dished out. If you think about what happened in Ahithophel's family you can see where he's trying to get even with David and humiliate David. He doesn't just want to humiliate him he wants to kill him. Let's continue the story.

22) So, they pitched a tent for Absalom on the top of the house, and Absalom went in to his father s concubines in the sight of all Israel.

23) Now the advice of Ahithophel, which he gave in those days, was as if one had inquired at the oracle of God [like you got wise advice from God Himself]. So was all the advice of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

2 Samuel 17:1 *Moreover Ahithophel said to Absalom, Now let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight.*

2) I will come upon him while he is weary and weak, and make him afraid. And all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike only the king.

3) Then I will bring back all the people to you. When all return except the man whom you seek, all the people will be at peace.”

4) And the saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel ... (NKJV)

He literally wants to go and kill David himself. He's very ticked off at David; he wants to humiliate and now murder him. Absalom accepts this but God intervenes and warns David what's going to happen and the plan doesn't work. What's interesting is to see what happens with Ahithophel's life when things didn't work out the way he wanted them to. Down to 2 Samuel 17:23; we see the end of the story and I want you to see his reaction.

2 Samuel 17:23 *Now when Ahithophel saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled a donkey, and arose and went home to his house, to his city. Then he put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died; and he was buried in his father s Tomb. (NKJV)*

When his advice didn't work out, his plan didn't come to fruition, he kills himself; he destroys his own life. Why? He couldn't manage the anger and his response to an injustice. Was the injustice real? Yes; David was guilty of all that he could accuse him of. David had already repented to God and that's why God protected him. The lesson in this is Ahithophel destroyed his own life and killed himself because he couldn't manage his own emotions. It wasn't David's actions that destroyed him, it was his own inability to manage his own emotions that destroyed him.

One of the great lessons in all of this is the lesson of forgiveness. Often when people are very hurt by someone else over an injustice and you talk about the subject of forgiveness, what you will hear is, "That dirty dog doesn't deserve to be forgiven, let me tell you what they did to me.". It's from the standpoint of whether or not they deserve it. If you understand forgiveness, it's not a gift to the person who hurt you, it's a gift you

give yourself. Who is making the payments on the debt—just think of it that way? Whose life is it affecting? Your own. In Ahithophel's situation, if he had been able to let it go and move on with his life, it wouldn't change David's life, it would have saved his own life. That is one of the lessons we have to learn in this; even if we have truly been wronged and suffered a great injustice. If we don't manage our own emotions well, we can destroy our own lives. Harboring that resentment and anger is not hurting the other person, it is hurting ourselves and giving an opportunity to Satan to manipulate us.

There are lots of ways that this lesson of emotions can play out throughout our lives. There are a lot of different triggers, loneliness, anger, anxiety, jealousy. There is certainly not time in a sermon to cover all of them. One of the things we need to be aware of is how our emotions can be played upon. Sit back and take a logical and analytical perspective of a subject and try to step away from the emotion. Realize, if I continue down this road, how will this movie end?

One of the other things we need to realize in all of this is, it's not just about being logical and analytical, it's realizing we have to have God's help to do this. Sometimes when emotions are enveloping our lives, we just need to cry out to God. Tell Him that you need help right now, because this particular situation is eating my lunch and really getting to me. I really just need Your help to get through this and just cry out to Him to get that spiritual help to get through it. It's something that we will all face as we all have these triggers.

As we look forward to planning the Spring Holy Days and examining our own lives, let's be aware that some of the stumbling blocks that we all face are often triggered by our own emotions. We need to be aware of that and realize these triggers can happen and become stumbling blocks. Satan is an opportunist and is looking for that opportunity to get us wherever we are most vulnerable and if he sees that vulnerability, he's going to seize upon that and play upon on those emotions to try and lead us astray.

As we go forward towards the Spring Holy Days, be aware of this and cry out to God for that help, for that insight to see those weaknesses in our own lives and for the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to effectively manage our emotions.