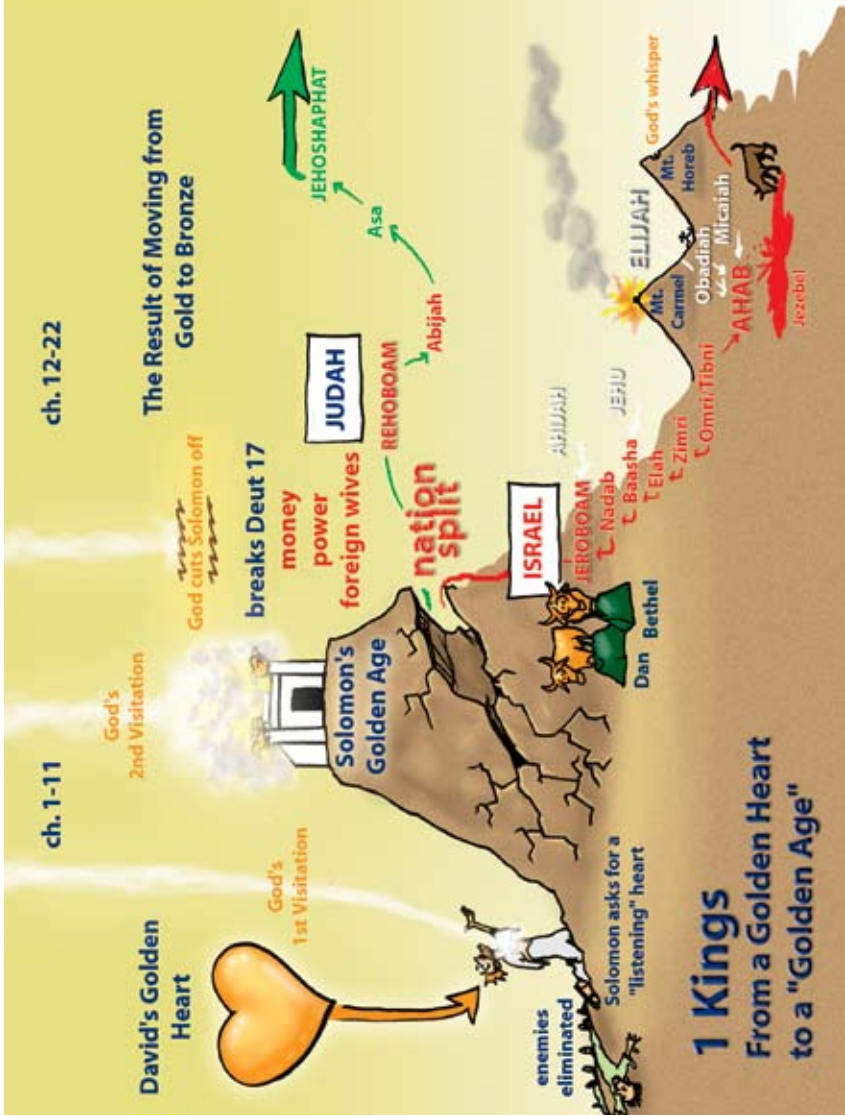

1 Kings



Monday: 1 Kings 4-6
Tuesday: 1 Kings 7-9
Wednesday: 1 Kings 10-13
Thursday: 1 Kings 14-17
Friday: 1 Kings 18-21

Introduction

1 Kings: From a Golden Heart to a “Golden Age”

There are two major sections in 1 Kings.

Solomon’s Golden Age ch. 1-11

David was a man after God’s own heart. As we read last week, we realize that David was not a perfect man, yet David had two strengths that endeared him to the Lord. First, he was honest with God. He had a vital relationship with the Lord, warts and all. Second, he saw his role as king to be that of the servant of the people. He did not exalt himself into grandiose positions. He was a humble warrior/servant/king. This is what God desired. David had a golden heart.

Solomon succeeded David on the throne of Israel. Solomon began well and ended in tragedy. The downfall of Solomon’s reign was that he externalized the gold. He forgot that the gold that God desires for His people is the golden shine of a surrendered heart, not the gold shine of a big building or a powerful nation.

David’s son started well by asking God for a discerning heart. He asked for understanding to be able to govern the people with fairness. Through

Solomon's wisdom the nation of Israel experienced a "Golden Age" of peace and prosperity. During this time Solomon became a prolific author, songwriter, and scientist.

Then everything changed. Solomon violated the law regarding the king found in Deuteronomy 17 and amassed for himself great wealth, great military power, and a vast harem of foreign wives who wooed him with their pagan gods. In the end, Solomon abandoned Yahweh, followed after his wives' gods, and was cut off from the blessing of God.

Israel's Bronze Age ch. 12-22

After Solomon's death his son, Rehoboam, took the throne of David and made things in Israel go from bad to worse. Because of his stubbornness and detachment from the plight of the lower class, the ten tribes of Israel rebelled against the house of David and split Israel into two kingdoms.

Symbolic of this tarnishing of Solomon's "Golden Age," 1 Kings 14:25-28 tells of how the Egyptians stole all the gold from the temple, forcing Rehoboam to replace it with Bronze. Visualizing Rehoboam's guards standing with bronze shields in place of the once brilliant shields of gold is a fitting picture for the mockery that the monarchy of Israel was about to become.

The rest of 1 Kings and the entire book of 2 Kings is the story of the downward spiral of both kingdoms, Judah and Israel, that led to their ultimate destruction. Similar to the story of the Judges, these tales are full of bad kings being scolded by unwelcomed prophets. These kings plunged the nations deeper and deeper into idolatry and separation from the true Kingdom of God.

Monday: Walking in Wisdom

1 Kings 4:29-34

What was the source of Solomon's wisdom?

In your own words, how is Solomon's wisdom described?

What are the different fields of study and interest in which Solomon dealt?

Food for Thought:

In the 1990's a book written by Bruce Wilkinson swept the nation. It was titled The Prayer of Jabez. In that book Bruce challenged Christians to step out in radical faith and to tear off the ceilings of limitations that they had placed on themselves and on God. The key phrase in that prayer was asking the Lord to "expand my territories." He challenged us to dream big and to step out with no fear into the calling that God had placed on our hearts, expecting that God will bless it, because it is His will that we are doing.

In another book, titled Wild at Heart, John Eldridge challenges the Christian with this compelling phrase, "Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and go do it, because what the world needs is more people who are alive."

Those are inspiring words. Too many times we can get into a burdensome place of worrying about making ends meet, pleasing our bosses, keeping up with the Jones', or wondering if the people around us approve of what we are doing. These two authors have challenged us to drop the shackles of worry that come from looking at others for our sense of direction and self-worth. They said we can drop these shackles by looking to God and God alone for direction, fulfillment, and empowerment. When our eyes are fixed on God and we are worrying only about what He wants from us, then we can remove any ceiling that we may have needlessly placed on ourselves. With God leading us we can climb any hill and accomplish anything that He desires. Why? Because we are simply following and obeying, not forging ahead on our own agenda.

In today's passage we see a beautiful picture of a man

who was living the fulfillment of this philosophy. Solomon had begun his journey by asking God for a “listening heart” (see last week’s devotional). Because of Solomon’s selfless attitude and yielded spirit God led him into amazing places of art, literature, science, politics, exploration, and discovery. His wisdom launched into the stratosphere and the Kingdom of God flourished because of it.

In a few chapters we will see that this “Golden Age” of Solomon’s Kingdom became tarnished and eventually destroyed the nation. It could be easy for us to look at that failure and say, “see, dreaming dreams and stepping out in an adventure with God will only lead to corruption and destruction.” It is true that Solomon became corrupted by his success, but it is important for us, at this point, to understand where the corruption truly came from. It was not the peace and fruitfulness that was the problem, that came from God. The problem was that Solomon took the blessing of God and hoarded it for himself. We will deal with that issue on Wednesday.

Today, let’s not lose sight of the fact that it was God that gave Solomon the wisdom he needed to lead the nation. It was God that poured into Solomon such rich gifts that allowed him to overflow with the creation of original songs, proverbs, architecture, and innovation. It was God that blessed the kingdom with peace so that *“the people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy.”* (4:20)

Perhaps this is a picture of what the Kingdom of God can be like for people who are willing to submit their hearts to God and step out in adventurous faith to do the things that God is asking them to do. Imagine what it would be like if every person in our

church was authentically tapped into a dynamic relationship with God through the daily discipline of study, prayer, and meditation, that they were truly submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, that they knew what the unique overflow was that God had for their life, and that they were courageous enough to obey God to do that thing that He had asked them to do? A church like that would be gushing with the Kingdom of God into its local region. A church like that would be an unstoppable force for the Kingdom of God to pour the light of love, grace, and hope that comes through Jesus.

Today, what is holding you back from stepping into God's flow in your life? Is it fear? Are you holding on to the safety of the known, fearing that God would not be there to catch you if you failed? Do you know enough about yourself and about God to be able to discern God's calling on your life?

Whatever it is, ask God to make it clear to you. Ask God to fill you with His love and ignite your heart with passion to know the thing that you were designed to do and to jump into that thing with fervor.

When you come alive, it will be like a charcoal briquette igniting. That, in turn, will ignite the person next to you, and before you know it, your whole community will be on fire!

Tuesday: “Look What I Built For You, Dad!”

1 Kings 8:10-13

Close your eyes and paint a mental picture, write a poem, draw a picture, or do some form of creative response to the scene depicted in these three verses.

1 Kings 9:1-9


What was God’s attitude toward the temple that Solomon had built for Him? (v. 3)


In vv. 4-9 God sets up a condition for Solomon. He said “if” you do this, “then” I will do that. “If” you do not do this, “then” I will do that. What is the “if” in this passage, and what are the consequences of “do” and “not do”?

Food for thought:

Solomon's Temple is one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was a magnificent structure whose brilliant gold and white facade took one's breath away. People would literally travel from all over the world to marvel at it.

In today's passage we observe a strange mixture of responses from God toward this temple.

 **God loved the Temple.** To see the construction of this beautiful building must have brought great joy to God's heart. Why? It was not because He really needed a boost in His real estate and felt that the tent was getting a little too cramped. No. God loved the Temple because it was an expression of love to God from Solomon and was an overflow of the giftedness that God had given Solomon. It would be much like the pride and joy that a father feels when his son builds a cool toy with the Legos he had given him for Christmas, or passes a big test that they had studied for together, or uses the skills that they had worked on for years to land a great job. In that instant it is not the thing that the father is proud of, it is the relationship that the thing represents. The thing is the fruit of what is at the heart of the matter. So, God loved the Temple that Solomon built.

 **God hated the Temple.** In the same breath that we say God loved the Temple we can also say that the Temple brought God great distress. God knew that the Temple could easily become a distraction to the people. Notice his words to Solomon. Allow me to paraphrase, "Solomon, son, your Temple is nice. You did a great job on it, and I will be proud to associate my name with it. But,

son, look me in the eye and listen carefully. This Temple means diddly squat when it comes to the heart of the matter. What matters is you and me and our relationship. I don't need your gold or your successes. As a matter of fact, your magnificent Temple is like a tinker toy compared to what I can do. What I want is your heart. If, at any time, you lose your focus and start thinking that you're better than needing to follow my simple plan of loving and obeying me, then you can kiss your little gold building goodbye. I'll rip it away from you like it was made of paper. Are we clear? I love you too much, and I love these people too much to let something like a building and political power get in the way of our relationship."

In our lives we need to function with two thoughts always present. First, we need to press ahead with drive and ambition to fulfill the mission that God has called us to, regardless of how big or little it may be. We need to work hard, with all our might to build whatever vision He has given. That is what we read about yesterday. Secondly, we need to do all that hard work with the constant knowledge that the product we are working on is not the point. Our focus should not be on the product and doing whatever it takes to make the product happen, our focus should be on the person for whom the product is being made. We need to realize that the mission is simply a vehicle, a discipline, through which God is refining our character and cultivating a deeper relationship with us. Too many times we, as Christians, have worked hard to throw a clay pot in which to hold the Kingdom of God, and then we have gilded it with gold and said, "Wow, I'm a great pot maker. Let's admire my pot."

What project are you working on? Has God called you to be a great stay-at-home Mom so that your children can have a safe, secure, and nurturing environment in which to grow? Great. Go for it. Do it with all your heart. But, don't attach your self-worth to it. Don't pride yourself in being that kind of Mom. Just know that you are doing what God called you to do, and enjoy the relationship you are building with Him through it. Are you an artist who is creating works of art that allow God to shine through your creative process? Are you a business man who is building a successful business with integrity in order to shine a light in the corporate world and raise resources to fund the ministry? Are you a teacher, a pastor, a farmer, whatever? If God called you to it, then do it with all your heart. Then let it go.

Enjoy the hard work, remain in the vine, and let the Gardener deal with the fruit inspection.

Wednesday: From Gold to Bronze

Make a list of the rules that the king was supposed to follow found in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

Read 1 Kings 10:14-11:13

According to this description of Solomon's rule, how well did he obey these rules regarding the king.

Read 1 Kings 14:25-28

What happened to Solomon's gold when his son, Rehoboam, took over?

What did Rehoboam do to compensate for this loss?

Food for thought:

Today we come to the crescendo (or the deafening crash) of Solomon's story. For the past two days we have been focusing on the positive aspects of God's blessing. Today we see the other side of the equation. God warned Solomon, very directly, that if he lost his focus then the "blessing" would be ripped away.

Notice the three areas in which Solomon lost his focus and broke the law regarding the king in Deuteronomy 17. As we observe these three offenses we would do well to monitor our own heart as well:

- 1. He must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself.** If this were written in today's world it may read like this, "the king must not build up a huge reserve of war machines like tanks, ships, and planes, nor should he storehouse an arsenal of nuclear weapons." In Solomon's day the horse was not an aesthetic beast that galloped around on a picturesque rolling field, waiting to ride in the Kentucky Derby. A horse was the war machine of the day. The army who had the most horses usually won the battle. So, if the king was building up his stables he was bolstering his military power against his enemies. Why would God not want the king to do this? Wouldn't acquiring horses just be smart leadership? Remember who we are dealing with here. God is the one who told Joshua to march around the city seven times. God is the one who told Gideon to send most of the soldiers away. God is the one who used a shepherd boy to bring down the Philistine champion. Has God ever needed or wanted His people to build up an army? Has the battle

ever belonged to the people of Israel? Never. If the king were to build up a reserve of horses it would be an external symptom of a serious heart disease. It would be a symptom of a lack of faith in the protection and deliverance that comes only from the Lord. How many times do we store up horses in our own lives? We stock pile for a rainy day. We stash a cabinet of guns to protect against the intruder. We believe in our own strength and wisdom to get us out of a jam. Our prayer life becomes reserved for that moment when we have exhausted all our own strength and the threat is still coming. Well, at that point, it may be too late.

- 2. He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.** We must read this command through the cultural lenses not only regarding the average Joe marriage, but also through political lenses as well. For the king, marriage was more about politics than it was about romance. When a king wanted to make peace with a country he would take the daughter of the rival king as his wife. What king would invade the land where his daughter is queen, right? If a king took on many wives it meant that he was getting in bed (both literally and figuratively) with the surrounding pagan nations. We know how God felt about that from Deuteronomy 7:3-4, *“Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.”* If the king intermarried with these nations, then the ramifications

of this unholy alliance would have national impact. Solomon did not just break this law, he annihilated this law by taking on 700 political marriages plus 300 wives for pleasure (concubines). In our lives this may seem to be a mute point. How many of us suffer from polygamy? Ah, but we do, in fact. We get in bed with pagan wives all the time. We have married ourselves to ways of thinking that are contrary to the Kingdom of God. We have bought into the “wisdom of the world” as Paul put it, and are constantly being pulled between two competing value systems. Check your heart today. Are there any pagan wives hanging around in the harem of your heart?

- 3. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.** The hoarding of wealth is an indicator of two forms of heart disease. The first is similar to the stockpiling of horses. To hoard wealth is to believe that God will not be able or does not desire to meet your physical needs on a daily basis. It demonstrates a lack of faith in God’s provision. The second demonstrates a hierarchical perspective on the community of God. In other words, it is a belief that the people who are in places of leadership are somehow better than the rest of the masses and deserve to be served and to be pampered. God never intended for this to be the case in His kingdom. In God’s original design all things existed in balanced, equal harmony with one another. It was sin and the knowledge of evil that created the pecking order in humanity, causing people to use and abuse one another in an effort to climb to the top of the tower of power and control. A good king would have realized that the wealth of

the nation was just that, the wealth of the nation, not his own. A king should live in the same status as the people and the financial resources should be used to benefit the entire population and care for those who are not able to care for themselves. Solomon blew it in this department and passed his values about finances and social status on to his son Rehoboam. This distortion of truth is what ultimately destroyed the kingdom. Too many times we, too, slip into the same perspective on money. We believe that the money we earn is our money. We think it belongs to us, and because we worked hard for it we should be free to pamper ourselves with it. In the community of God we must realize that all money is God's money and that He gives us gifts in order to mutually edify the body. In the book of Acts they shared everything in common. Those with the gifts of leadership and teaching did not lord it over their "subjects." They understood their gifts and their role in the body to be that of a supporting servant, working to equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

How do you view your finances and your position today? Do you think that because you are poor and do not have a leadership role in the church that you are less valuable than others? WRONG! Do you think that because you have a leadership role in the church that you should be treated differently or profit financially because of it? WRONG! We are the community of God. He provides for us, we care for each other, and the Kingdom of God prevails!

Thursday: Going to the Dogs

The passage of focus today is actually from yesterday's reading, but it is important in that the events of this passage set the trajectory for the events that happened in today's reading.

1 Kings 12:25-33

What was Jeroboam's fear? (vv. 26-27)

What change did Jeroboam make in regard to Israel's form of worship?

Food for thought:

The key to this passage and today's thought is found in vv. 25-27.

Let's try to see this situation from Jeroboam's perspective. Jeroboam was one of Solomon's officials who was well respected by the king and placed in a position of power in the government. In ch. 11 we read the story of God speaking to Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah and saying,

"I will take you, and you will rule over all that your heart desires; you will be king over Israel. If you do whatever I command you and walk in my ways and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and commands, as David my servant did, I will be with you. I will build you a dynasty as enduring as the one I built for David and will give Israel to you."

So, Jeroboam knew that he had been given the divine green light to start this rival nation. At the moment that this new nation was formed, Jeroboam stood at a fork in the road. He had a choice to either follow the Laws of God in love and obedience, or to follow the common-sense wisdom that anybody would follow if they were setting up a new kingdom. Think about it. True worship of Yahweh was to be centered on the Temple. The Temple was in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the capital city of the enemy. If the people's hearts were attached to the Temple in Jerusalem, then how could Jeroboam ask them to fight against their holy city? You can't build a nation that way. Solution? Create a new religion and divert the people's attention away from the true source of their life and convince them that your alternative is just as good as the original.

It makes sense doesn't it? Here were the advantages for the new form of worship:

- ☀ **Less travel time to worship.** Hey, now there are two convenient locations!
- ☀ **More culturally relevant.** The high places were the spots on which the Canaanites had been worshipping their various Baals for centuries. The bull was more of a universal symbol representing the "God concept." Establishing the bulls on high places, and establishing localized high places made it possible for better cross-cultural relations and made life more conducive to peace.
- ☀ **Less restrictive.** Now that priests could come from any tribe, not just the Levites, there were more priests to go around. And, for the right price, you could purchase your own local priest to ensure a "nod to god" in the comfort of your own home.
- ☀ **It's just a lot more fun.** Hey, what red blooded Israelite man doesn't enjoy a good romp with a shrine prostitute once in a while, after all? And, so not to be sexist, we are now introducing male prostitutes to meet the needs of those women (or men, wink, wink) as well.

(If you have not detected the sarcasm in the last four points yet, please do.) Bottom line, Jeroboam sold out. He exchanged the revealed truth of God for a political solution that fit his agenda.

As a society, both in our churches and in our own hearts, we have made the mistake of Jeroboam too many times. We compromise God's standards and rationalize it away.

Look what happened as a result of this major, systemic shift in focus and compromise for the nation of Israel. Because of Jeroboam's choices, every king that followed him was more wicked than the last. The rest of the book of 1 Kings and the first half of the book of 2 Kings is the story of the fast decline of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. 1 Kings ends with the story of Ahab and his wicked queen Jezebel. This couple took the nation to an all time low and ended up being literally eaten by the dogs.

In what ways have you noticed the church in America make subtle compromises with our culture in order to "keep the peace". In what ways have you noticed your church doing this? In what ways have you noticed yourself doing this? Ask God to expose these "golden bulls" in your life and give you the courage to root them out.

Friday: The Mt. Carmel Syndrome

1 Kings 19:1-18

What great victory had Elijah just won on Mt. Carmel? (ch. 18)

What threat did Jezebel make? How did Elijah feel about it?

To where did Elijah run?

Where was God's voice?

What was Elijah's self-perception? (v. 14)

What was the truth of the situation? (v. 18)

Food for thought:

Do you ever feel discouraged? Do you ever feel like living in the Kingdom of God is not as fun as you thought it would be when you signed up? Here you are “pressing on for the goal,” living according to God’s standards, pouring your heart and soul into your spiritual community, and for what? So that your kids can think you are mean? So that you can be misunderstood and falsely accused? So that people in your community can bail on God after all the work that you have done? So that corruption can infect the church so that it doesn’t look any different than the political messes of corporate America? So that day after day you can see the battle lines for the moral character of our nation fall to the enemy? Is that why you are doing this? Perhaps, you have felt that way before.

When you have those thoughts about your circumstances, how do you feel about yourself? How do you feel about God? Perhaps you feel that somehow you are missing the mark and that, because of some kind of hidden sin you must be messing the whole thing up. Perhaps you feel that you just aren’t worthy of the calling and you are ready to give up. Or, perhaps you become angry or disillusioned with God and wonder if He really is all that you were taught that He is supposed to be. In either case, the bottom line is that you feel alone.

The irony is that many times we can feel this way right after we have experienced a great spiritual victory. Right after you have led someone to a relationship with Jesus, or have pulled off a great ministry event, or have poured out your heart in a selfless act of love and have seen the Holy Spirit do His work in someone’s life. Right then, just when you

think you should be on a high, BOOM, you get hit with a bout of depression.

This is called the Mt. Carmel Syndrome and we see it happening in the life of Elijah. He had just miraculously and spectacularly defeated the 400 prophets of Baal on top of Mt. Carmel. He had proven, unquestionably, that Yahweh was the one true God and that Baal was an imposter. You would think that this victory would have filled Elijah with confidence that would have empowered him to march right into Queen Jezebel's throne room and drag her down himself. Instead, at the word of her threat, he hightails it out of town and runs to Mt. Horeb.

It is speculation to guess what was really going on in Elijah's mind as he huddled in fear in that cave on Mt. Horeb. One thing we do know from the text, however, is that he felt all alone.

Let's focus in on that word. Alone. Why did he feel that way? He felt alone because he took a huge risk. Elijah stepped way out on the branch of faith when he challenged the prophets of Baal to a duel of skyfire.

That's how it always is when we step out in faith. Most people (I'm talking about Christians here) are not willing to risk in their spiritual lives. We like to play it safe and go through the familiar "churchy" motions that make us feel warm and fuzzy and... safe. When one person steps out in a bold act of faith, the rest of us freeze in uneasiness, wondering if that person is bold or just plain stupid.

When you are the person who steps out, it's kind of like standing naked in front of a crowd. It's vulnerable, it's awkward, it's cold, and it's lonely. Even though it was the right thing to do and God

asked you to do it, those raw human emotions are very real and have a great impact on your soul.

So, after the risk is over, the victory is won, and the adrenaline is worn off, what do we do? We run to hide in a cave. Then what happens? Then God comes to us in a gentle whisper and says, "Hey Elijah, come on out here for a minute. What are you doing here, bud? Why are you hiding? What you did for me was courageous. I know you feel alone and afraid right now, but let me show you something. Let me show you the truth. You are not alone. There are 7,000 more like you out there. You are fighting the right battle, and I will always be with you. Now, go out and get yourself a partner (Elisha) and keep fighting the fight."

Perhaps you need to hear those words today. First of all, don't feel bad about the post-victory let down. It's much like post-partum depression. It happens. Stepping out in faith and winning a battle takes its toll on the physiology of our brain chemistry. The adrenaline rush can cause a rebound crash. That's just a fact. Embrace the down time. Allow yourself a little space to recharge. Secondly, listen to the small, sweet voice of God, and allow yourself to hear the truth. Be strong. Be courageous. You are not alone.