**Digging Deeper Hezekiah Week 1**

**Scriptures to Read**

* 1 Samuel 8:1-7
* 2 Kings 16
* 2 Chronicles 28
* Isaiah 7

In 1 Samuel 8:1-7 we read about how the people of God wanted king like the other nations around them. This was problematic on so many levels, the basic level being that the Lord was to be their king so in asking for a ‘king’, they were in fact rejecting the Lord as their king. The Lord gave them what they wanted, He allowed them to have a king, even though it was not His plan for them.

The Lord will sometimes give us what we want, even if it is not His plan for us or what is best for us. Can you recall a time when you wanted something and persisted in asking the Lord for it but when you got what you wanted, you realized you really didn’t want it after all or you wish you had never asked for it in the first place? Or maybe you had been praying for something and didn’t hear an answer and went ahead with your plan anyway? Or maybe you did what you wanted to do and then asked the Lord to bless it after the fact?

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Read 1 Kings 12:6-8 below.

Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. “How would you advise me to answer these people?” he asked. **7**They replied, “If today you will be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favorable answer, they will always be your servants.” **8**But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him.

Rehoboam was Solomon’s son who was to take over as King. The people wanted their load to be lightened. He sought out the older men who had advised his father but didn’t like their answer so he went to his friends and liked their answer. The Lord wants us to go to Him first with our requests. Do you go to the Lord first or do you go to others and then to the Lord? Is He the first person you go to our the one of last resort?

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It is easy for us to pick up the phone and call a friend when things in our day aren’t going well. In fact, as women, we are quite masterful at choosing who we call for “support” in certain situations. I want us to take a look at four different types of friends or family members that we might turn to when we are challenged or hurt.

* Defender
  + This is the friend that we choose to call when we want someone who will be on our side. Depending on the situation, we know our friends and family members pretty well so we know who will see things from our perspective. This is the friend that you call who will defend you at all costs. No matter what the situation, the “defender” will take our side and always stick up for us and they help us to rationalize or justify our role or decision in a situation.
  + The problem with “defenders” is that they take our side even when we are wrong and they don’t help us to see things from any other perspective than our own. Do you know who your defenders are?

Can you think of a time when one of your friends was a defender, but in the end they only helped you justify your actions and later realized that your actions were wrong?

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* Comedian
  + These are the friends or family members that can find humor in any situation. They can make us laugh no matter what situation we are facing.
  + The problem with comedians is that they may make jokes or find humor in situations that aren’t humorous because they don’t know how to respond or are uncomfortable. These “comedians” don’t really help us deal with the situation or face it, but rather make light of it even if it isn’t a light situation.

Can you think of the last time you called a friend who made you laugh in the moment, but it was only a distraction tactic from dealing with the issue?

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* Bandwagon
  + Bandwagon friends are those that will jump on whatever bandwagon you are on and drive it full speed ahead. These are the friends that when you “vent” or share your situation with them, they not only agree with you but they kick it up a notch – they tend to throw fuel on the anger or hurt that you are already feeling. When you get off the phone with a bandwagon friend you are ready to fight to the death.
  + The problem with bandwagon friends is that they tend to make more out of a situation than necessary and often make things worse. We may have been irritated by a situation but after talking to a bandwagon friend, you are downright furious. Can any of you relate to that? Bandwagon friends tend to make us feel worse in the end than when we started.

When was the last time you talked to a bandwagon friend about a situation and how did you feel after the conversation?

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* Sister in Christ
  + These are the friends who will tell us the truth even if it’s not what we want to hear and even if it is hard for them. Sisters in Christ will also point you back to the Lord or help you see things from His perspective.
  + We **all need** sisters in Christ who we can turn to because they turn us back to the Lord and remind us of our dependence on Him and they also help us to trust Him more.

Do you know who your sisters in Christ are? Can you recall a time when they helped you see a situation from God’s perspective or helped you turn back to the Lord?

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I can tell you that I have friends that fall into all of the above categories and at any given time I can fall into any of the categories. Did one of these ring true for you and the kind of friend you are or the way that you respond when your friends reach out to you?

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Do you have sisters in Christ to turn to? If you do, praise God and thank him for them and if you don’t pray that God will bring some wonderful sisters in Christ into your circle of friends.

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I want to give you an example of a sister in Christ from my own experience. My friend, Dianne, and I were invited to Abu Dhabi to speak to two different Women’s Bible study groups. Unfortunately, Dianne wasn’t able to go so I decided that I wouldn’t go either because I didn’t want to go by myself. I was telling my friend, Fredrica, about this situation and how I wasn’t going to go because I really didn’t feel comfortable going by myself. Her first response felt a little like a punch in the gut – she said something like this, “So **you’re** not going to go and share God’s Word to the women in Abu Dhabi because you don’t want to go by **yourself** and because **you** don’t feel comfortable? Shelly, it isn’t about you! It is about the Lord and what **He** wants you to do. You need to get on your knees and pray to the Lord and see whether or not He wants you to go and then you need to be obedient.” Well, I can tell you that is not what I **wanted** to hear, but it was what I **needed** to hear. I did seek the Lord and felt He was calling me to go and I went. I was so blessed by all the wonderful women in Abu Dhabi! I would have missed out on those blessings if Fredrica didn’t have the courage to speak truth to me.

We all need sisters in Christ in our lives. They are blessings from the Lord that help us to stay on track and continue to grow in our faith. We may not always like what they have to say, but we can be assured that they will turn us back to the Lord and help us grow in our relationship with Him. Sisters in Christ are more concerned for our spiritual well-being than our comfort level and we all need to be challenged to step out of our comfort zones so that we can learn to experience God working in and through us!

Because of Rehoboam’s response to the people, the kingdom was divided. The northern kingdom became Israel also called Ephraim and the southern kingdom became Judah. By dividing the kingdom, both new kingdoms were weaker and open for attack. Matthew 12:25 Knowing their thoughts, he (Jesus) said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.”

When kingdoms, churches or families are divided they are weaker and open the door for the enemy to attack. Have you experienced division in a church or your family? Often times there is division that is created when someone in a family dies as people fight over their possessions. If you have experienced division in church or your family seek the Lord. Ask Him to reveal your part in the situation. Ask Him if there is something He wants you to do – do you need to confess and seek forgiveness? Is there a relationship He wants to restore and reconcile? Record your thoughts below.

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Sometimes we seek out advice from others and sometimes the Lord sends someone to us with advice or words of wisdom. In Isaiah 7 we see how the Lord sent Isaiah to King Ahaz with a message. Look at what Isaiah tells Ahaz in Isaiah 7:4 **4**And say to him, ‘Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint… Is that what you do when you face difficulties – are you careful, quiet, not fearful and not experiencing a heart that is faint? How do you normally respond when faced with difficulties – what is your initial response?

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Notice that Ahaz did not seek out Isaiah but rather the Lord **sent** Isaiah to Ahaz. Can you relate to that? Has the Lord ever sent someone to you that helped you get back on track, encouraged your faith, challenged what you were doing?

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Here’s an example from my personal life. The Lord prompted me to have a conversation with someone that I am in a broken relationship with. I sent the person a text and asked when would be a good time to chat. What followed was a lot of back and forth texting that made it clear his preference was to text rather than talk. I was pretty irritated by this as I don’ like to have conversations over text messages. A couple of days later he set a time to talk. By this time I was very frustrated and no longer wanted to have the conversation. The Lord had two of my sisters in Christ check in with me about the conversation. I explained to both of them that I no longer wanted to have the conversation. I was reminded that it was the Lord who prompted the conversation and if the Lord wanted me to have it 2 days ago, that probably hadn’t changed and I still needed to have the conversation. Grateful for the sisters in Christ in my life who confirm what the Lord has said and grateful that He sent them both to me – on the same day I might add – the day that I ended up having the conversation.

King Ahaz worshiped idols and encouraged the same for the people of Judah. There were a lot of false gods and idols in the Old Testament that people put their trust in and we aren’t so different today. We may not be putting our trust in carved images, but we certainly have our own idols today. Anything that takes our focus off of God can be an idol. I love what J Ellsworth Kalas says in his book The 10 Commandments from the Backside, “Priority is another name for God. When we draw up our little list of things that matter most, that which we designate Number One is god. Whether or not it is God with a capital G is another matter.” John Calvin says, “The evil in our desire typically does not lie in what we want but that we want it too much.” Just as the Israelites didn’t want the Lord to be their only king, I think we put things on our to do list that take precedence over the Lord and what He wants for our lives. What is number one on your priority list? Is it your job? Is it your spouse? Is it your hobby? Is it your children or grandchildren? Is it your favorite tv show? What is it that you want too much? What distracts you and takes your time away from the Lord?

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Isaiah 7: 9a If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. That’s what Isaiah shares with King Ahaz after telling him the attacks by Israel and Syria in Jerusalem will not prevail. When we face difficulties, we must be firm in our faith. In the teaching, I outlined three ways to firm up or shore up our faith. 1. In the Word, 2. Seeking Him in prayer, 3. Being in community with other believers.

Are you in the Word regularly? Do you follow a Bible reading plan? Have you read through the entire Bible? Is this an area you want to shore up to firm up your faith? Pray to the Lord and ask Him to reveal to you how you can further shore up your faith through His Word. Record what you feel like He said to you and commit to do it.

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Is your prayer life what you want it to be? Do you spend all of your prayer time talking to the Lord? What is your listening prayer like? Do you need to spend more time listening to the Lord? Do you need to find a prayer partner? Do you need to make prayer appointments with the Lord in order to ensure you have it? Ask the Lord how you can improve your payer life. Record what you hear from the Lord below and commit to following through on them.

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We were created to be in community with others. Are you in a faith community? How has your faith community changed due to the pandemic? How is the Lord calling you into deeper community – perhaps a small group, an accountability group, a Bible study? Seek the Lord and record what He says and write our your plan to be obedient below.

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2 Chronicles 28:24 And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and he shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem.  Ahaz literally shut the doors of the temple. Everitt Fjordbak a pastor at Lakewood Assembly in Dallas did a sermon series on Hezekiah in 1975 and this is what he had to say about this event: “Nailing up the doors and closing the windows of God’s house is not going to stop the church of the living God!” How have you seen this be true during the pandemic when church buildings have been closed for the most part? Where have you seen God move? Where have you seen the body of Christ at work?

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Everitt Fjordbak went on to say, “There is not one thing man can do to escape the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. You can go in, close your door, and put your hands over your ears. He will come right into your mind and start to work! You know that – you cannot get away from God! And I am so glad that is true. One of the greatest blessings God ever gave his people is his conviction when they do wrong.” Have you experienced that? Can you share a time when you were convicted by the Holy Spirit? If you can’t, pray that the Lord will show you an area in your life where you need to more fully submit to the Lord or turn from in order to follow Him more faithfully. Share your story below or what the Lord reveals to you.

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