

February 1, 2015

Overwhelmed

Overwhelmed by Responsibility!

1 Kings 3:1-15

Opening words: John H. Johnson once said, “*Dream small dreams. If you make them too big, you get overwhelmed and you don't do anything. If you make small goals and accomplish them, it gives you the confidence to go on to higher goals.*” I am not so sure how I feel about that quote. However, it does lead to an interesting question. When was the last time you were overwhelmed?

Our scripture for today comes from First Kings. It is important that you know a little background about this Old Testament book. Originally, First Kings and Second Kings were a single literary piece. It was divided into two books by the writer of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Jewish tradition credits Jeremiah as the author, but that has been questioned many times. What hasn't been questioned is the date, 562 BC. First and Second Kings run parallel to First and Second Samuel. The Kings tell us about the history of the Kings. The Samuels tell us the history of the nation of Israel itself. By the third chapter of First Kings, Solomon has just been crowned king. Our scripture lesson for today is 1 Kings 3:1-15. Let me call this message *Overwhelmed by Responsibility!*

1 Samuel 3:1-15 ¹Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the LORD, and the wall around Jerusalem. ²The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the LORD. ³Solomon showed his love for the LORD by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. ⁴The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” ⁶Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. ⁷“Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” ¹⁰The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹²I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you,

nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.” ¹⁵ Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.

Did you know today is the Super Bowl? This evening at 6:30 the entire country will come to a grinding stop. This year the New England Patriots and the Seattle Seahawks are playing in Phoenix. Last year, more than 111 million people watched the Super Bowl. This year will be another big crowd. This year’s game has drawn a great deal of attention by a controversy call “deflate gate.” Forbes magazine has called it the dumbest controversy in the history of American sports. It revolves around the fact that the game-approved footballs were deflated by someone within the New England Patriots organization, giving them an unfair advantage over the Indianapolis Colts in the AFC championship game. Patriots starting quarterback Tom Brady and head coach Bill Belichick have been interrogated about it. Both have cried ignorance; they know nothing. They want the world to know that they are not responsible. That leads us to an interesting question.

Is anyone here responsible? I don’t mean about deflate gate. I mean about life, itself? Does anyone here feel like you are responsible for the entire world? You feel like Atlas carrying the whole world on your shoulders. Every step is a struggle. Every step may be the last step. Have you ever been overwhelmed by responsibility? If so, this story is for you. If you have any responsibility in your life, say, **“Amen!”**

I began working on this message last Sunday night. It is amazing the information you can find online. Some of it is true. You can google any topic. I googled our topic for today, overwhelmed by responsibility. The Bing search engine came up with more than four million websites. At the top of that list was a website called soulseeds.com. I clicked on it and found an article posted in October 2011 called “Ten Ways to Know You are Taking on Too Much Responsibility.” This is the list:

1. You need to fill conversational silences.
2. You apologize for things you had nothing to do with.
3. You take on the blame for events and circumstances that are beyond your control.
4. You make excuses for people who are behaving badly.
5. Your first inkling is to rescue people.
6. You feel paralyzed by the size of challenges.
7. You lose sleep, worrying about world problems.
8. You feel like you always have to be the life of the party.
9. You deprive yourself of basic rights because others are missing out.
10. You struggle with guilt.

Can I be honest with you? I went nine for ten. I don't worry about world issues. I was not surprised by that fact.

I thrive under responsibility. I don't know how that happened. Do you know what I have learned? I have learned responsibility is like mold in your basement. At first there is just a little, but growing regularly every day. I can trace my mold back to sixteen years old. In those days I had no responsibility. My parents were responsible for everything. The only thing I really wanted was a car and a girlfriend. It was those two things, a car and a friend, that led to my downfall. If I just would have stayed at home with my parents, I would have no problems today because I would have no responsibilities.

Today, I have more than my share of responsibility. I have one wife and two adult daughters. I have one son-in-law and a granddaughter. I love each one of them, so I worry about each one of them. I feel a certain amount of responsibility for each one of them. I own one house and a cottage at Lakeside that I would love to sell. (If you buy it, I will give you the Western Reserve discount.) I own two cars and a beagle. The cars have to be maintained and the dog has to be walked. I have bills of every size that must be paid. I have a job that I love but it consumes most of my day. I never thought about it until I began to write this message. I feel a great amount of responsibility here at Western Reserve. I don't want this ministry to fail, because I feel responsible to you. I don't want this ministry to fail because I am responsible to the Annual Conference. I don't want this ministry to fail because I feel responsible to God. If I am nothing else, I am sincere. I cover as much ground as I can every day and the list of things to do never ends. There is always someone to visit. There is always someone to call. There is always a sermon that needs to be written. There is always a meeting to attend. There is always some upset person who needs to be calmed and someone who needs to just talk. There is always someone who finds it necessary to highlight what I have done wrong. There is always some building issue that needs to be addressed. During vacations and days off, my phone is busy receiving texts and calls. Don't get me wrong. I don't mind, because it is all part of my calling. I love my job. I don't want you to learn the truth. You would do just fine without me. However, this is also the truth. There are days when I am sick or tired,, when I grow overwhelmed by responsibility. I am not alone. You are just the same. There are days when you are overwhelmed by responsibility too. If you have ever grown weary of your responsibilities say, **"Amen!"** If you have ever been overwhelmed by responsibility, then this piece of scripture is for you.

We find ourselves today in First Kings. The central character in this morning's reading is Solomon. We are not strong in Old Testament knowledge, so let me remind you of a few important facts. Solomon's parents were David and Bathsheba. He is hand-selected by his father to be the king. David sent the priest Zadok on his own mule to anoint Solomon.

Prior to today's reading, the mantle of responsibility has been passed from David to Solomon. The moment Solomon had been waiting for his entire life has finally happened. He was king! For years, he has known of the perks of the job, but he was blindsided by the responsibility. The first thing he did was form an alliance with the Pharaoh King of Egypt and marries his daughter (3:1). That would not be his last wedding. The scriptures tell us he had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). My question is, why? That is a lot of drama. Next, Solomon turns to God. He finishes the construction of his own palace and the temple of the Lord (3:1). Proving to be a man of faith, he sacrifices regularly to God (3:4). Those sacrifices grabbed God's attention. God, himself, comes to Solomon in a dream (3:5). God says he can have anything that his heart desires. What does your heart desire? Solomon does not desire money, power, territory or a long life. What Solomon desires is a discerning heart to be a great ruler of God's chosen people (3:9). God is pleased with his request.

The key that unlocks this whole passage is understanding the word *discernment*. The world defines discernment as the ability to decide between right and wrong, truth and error. The biblical understanding of discernment is different. In the Bible, discernment means to make decisions based on Biblical truth. In other words, it means to think biblically. Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 6:33, "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you.*" The secret to understanding and handling our responsibilities is to look at them biblically. If you think you can remember that, say, "**Amen!**" The next time you are overwhelmed by responsibility, remember two words.

The first word is **define**. Years ago, I learned that my calendar is a sacred thing. I set my own agenda every day. I don't let anyone set my personal agenda, because I know what is important. Generally, I do the most important things first. Looking through a biblical filter, the most important thing to me is family. I would drop you in a heartbeat to help any of them at a time of crisis. The second most important thing to me is this ministry. This sounds cold, but the things that I do first in the day are the things that touch the greatest number of people. For example, I will never stand before you unprepared to preach. Sunday morning is when I have the greatest opportunity to influence the whole. The smaller the group, the less attention I give it. The more independent the group, the less attention I give it. Some things I have eliminated completely because they have no influence on what is important to me, such as the ministerial association and denominational committees. I like football but I really don't care who wins the Super Bowl. I am no different from you. I find myself overwhelmed and frustrated when I don't do the important things well because I spent all my time doing other secondary things. The first word is define. Looking through that biblical lens, what are the most important things to you? If you think you can remember the word define, say, "**Amen!**"

The second word is **delegate**. What overwhelms you because you simply don't feel qualified to handle it? Automaker Henry Ford asked electrical genius Charlie Steinmetz to build the generators for his factory. One day the generators ground to a halt, and the repairmen couldn't find the problem. So Ford called Steinmetz, who tinkered with the machines for a few hours and then threw the switch. The generators whirred to life-- but Ford got a bill for \$10,000 from Steinmetz. Flabbergasted, the rather tightfisted car maker inquired why the bill was so high. Steinmetz's reply: For tinkering with the generators, \$10. For knowing where to tinker, \$9,990. Ford paid the bill.

Looking through a biblical filter, you have to admit, there are many talented people in the world. You are not the only one. There are some who are more gifted than you in some area of your life. That is their expertise. Ask them for help. What responsibilities do you have that you need to delegate? If you can remember the word delegate, say, **"Amen!"**

One of the most interesting stories in the news this week was the seventieth anniversary of Auschwitz, the Nazi death camp. The camp located in Poland was liberated on January 27, 1945 by the Soviet Red Army. The camp remains today as a reminder of her horrible past. More than one million people, mostly Jews, were killed. The sixtieth anniversary of the liberation drew about 1,500 Auschwitz survivors, this year's anniversary drew 300. That generation is dying quickly. Some of those 300 were interviewed. Each one had an emotional story. The interview that caught my attention was the grandson of the commandant of that camp, Rudolf Hoff. He was hanged in 1947 after a trial in Warsaw. The grandson admitted that he wrestled with what his grandfather had done. How do you justify the fact that a family member was directly responsible for the execution of a million people? He said, "I know I am not responsible, yet I feel responsible for his actions." Can you relate to that story? Have you ever felt responsible for something that is out of your control?

Have you ever been overwhelmed by responsibility? If so, then you should be like Solomon. He asked for the gift of discernment and so can you. When you look through that biblical lens you are able to define what is really important to you. Spend your time doing those things! When you look through that biblical lens, you will find some help and the ability to delegate. Only a fool wouldn't ask for help.

Will you pray with me?