

The material here is linked to the July–September issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about forty-five minutes of study. In addition to the questions, you'll find Leader Notes to guide discussion. Feel free to duplicate the questions and use them with *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light*

Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

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July Week 1

July 1–3; 2 Samuel 1–4

1. Saul, who had repeatedly hunted and sought to kill David, committed suicide in the battle that also took the life of Jonathan, Saul's son and David's closest friend. Note the lament David wrote concerning Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:19–27). In what way is David's lament remarkable, given the circumstances of Saul's relationship with David? What does it reveal about David's faith?

2. Second Samuel 4:1–12 records how brothers Rechab and Baanah did the wrong thing for the right reason and suffered the consequences. What examples of doing the wrong thing for the right reason do you find in your own life or in the world around you?

July Week 2

July 4–10; 2 Samuel 5:1–14:24

1. In what way do the words of the Lord spoken to David, recorded in 2 Samuel 5:1–2, remind us of one of David's descendants who would be born some 1,000 years after David's time? See Matthew 15:21–28.

2. Review 2 Samuel 6:12–19. In what various ways did David show His delight and love for the Lord?

3. David planned to build a house for the Lord. Compare the house David wanted to build for the Lord with the house the Lord built for David (2 Samuel 7:1–16).

4. What do David's words in 2 Samuel 9:3 suggest about the ultimate motivation for David's kindness to Mephibosheth of the family of Saul?

5. Second Samuel 12:1–14 tells of Nathan confronting David because of David's sin with Bathsheba. God's Spirit works through the Law, and David repents of his sin. What words indicate David's repentance? What statement of Gospel shows God's grace to David?

6. Second Samuel 13 describes Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar. Why does Jonadab also share responsibility for what happened (v. 5)? See also Proverbs 1:10–19.

July Week 3

July 11–17; 2 Samuel 14:25–24:25

1. Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel (2 Samuel 15:1–6). How did Absalom steal the people’s hearts? Why were his actions wrong?
2. After all the rejection and ill-use David had endured at the hand of his son Absalom, David bitterly mourns his rebellious son’s death: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2 Samuel 18:33). In what way does David’s love for Absalom remind us of the love of God for us?
3. Joab helps David to see the inappropriateness of his behavior in the face of those who put their lives on the line to save David and his family. Joab chides, “You love those who hate you and hate those who love you” (2 Samuel 19:6). When have you behaved as David did?
4. What is the theme of David’s song of praise, recorded in 2 Samuel 22? From what has God delivered you?
5. According to 2 Samuel 23:5, why can David rest secure?
6. By God’s grace, David was able to keep things in perspective. Explain his words in 2 Samuel 24:14.

July Week 4

July 18–24; 1 Kings 1–11

1. In his final words before his death, David reminded Solomon of God's promise: "If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before Me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 2:4). How are God's people today empowered to walk faithfully before God with all their heart and soul? See 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

2. Reflect on God's grace to Solomon in response to Solomon's request (1 Kings 3:1–15). What quality of God is exemplified by God's action in these verses? See also Ephesians 3:20.

3. Workers erected two pillars at the entrance to Solomon's temple. These were named Jachin, which probably means "He establishes," and Boaz, which probably means "in Him is strength" (1 Kings 7:21). Why are these names fitting reminders for those worshipping at the temple?

4. Review the portion of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple recorded in 1 Kings 8:23–24. What quality of God, mentioned by King Solomon, supports his statement, "There is no God like You, in heaven above or on earth beneath"?

5. Comment on the queen of Sheba's words regarding God's blessing of Israel in the person of Solomon (1 Kings 10:9). What similar benefits does God bring contemporary believers through leaders and authorities in our day?

6. Consider 1 Kings 11:1–13. What evidence do these verses provide of God's judgment against sin? of His grace and faithfulness?

July Week 5

July 25–31; 1 Kings 12–22

1. “What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David” (1 Kings 12:16). With these words, the people of the Northern Kingdom rejected the house of David. Although God had given Jeroboam the majority of the kingdom and promised to remain with him and bless his rule, Jeroboam began to feel insecure in his reign. With what action did he attempt to secure his reign (1 Kings 12:26–30)? What lesson can we learn from Jeroboam’s negative example?

2. King Solomon disobeyed God by marrying women from surrounding nations where the people practiced idolatry. Soon, Solomon’s heart was turned away from the true God (1 Kings 11:1–9). During the reign of King Rehoboam, son of Solomon by Naamah an Ammonite woman, idolatry and practices associated with a culture of idolatry became common in Judah (1 Kings 14:21–24). What influences from an ungodly culture lead the people of God astray today?

3. God is faithful in all of His promises of blessings as well as of judgment. Compare Joshua 6:26 and 1 Kings 16:34 and explain.

4. “Do not fear” Elijah said to the widow of Zarephath after she told him about her destitute condition (1 Kings 17:13). Then he told her about the miraculous provision she was about to receive from God. How do Elijah’s words to the widow apply also to you? What gracious—even miraculous—provision have you also received from the hand of your loving God?

5. Contrast the prayers of the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:26–29) with Elijah’s prayer, recorded in 1 Kings 18:30–37.

6. The Lord appeared to Elijah when Elijah was feeling alone and despondent (1 Kings 19:15–18). What did God say to Elijah to direct him away from his self-preoccupation?

7. Review 1 Kings 21:17–29. How did Ahab react to God’s words of judgment?

August Week 1

August 1–7; 2 Kings 1–10

1. Compare the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua (see Exodus 14:21–22, 26–27 and Joshua 3:7–8, 17; 4:14–18) with the transfer of leadership from Elijah to Elisha (see 2 Kings 2:8–15).
2. Reflect on the words of the Shunammite upon the death of her son (2 Kings 4:22–23). What do her words suggest about her faith?
3. Review the account of Naaman and Elijah recorded in 2 Kings 5. Why might we pray that God would bless us with companions like those of Naaman (2 Kings 5:11–14)?
4. What good news were the lepers keeping to themselves (2 Kings 7:1–9)? What good news are we sometimes guilty of keeping to ourselves (Acts 5:42)?
5. Consider God’s blessing to the Shunammite (2 Kings 8:6). How do you explain these blessings in light of Matthew 6:33?
6. Review 2 Kings 10:1–31. Relate the events recorded in these verses to God’s promise in 1 Kings 21:20–24, 29.

August Week 2

August 8–14; 2 Kings 11–20

1. Second Kings 11:21 records that Joash (Jehoash) was seven years old when he became king of Judah. What does his age suggest about the way in which God sometimes works (see 1 Timothy 4:12)?

2. Second Kings 13:20–21 recorded a miraculous event. How does this Old Testament occurrence remind us of the resurrection of all who love and trust in Jesus? See John 11:25–26.

3. Influenced by pagans and their religion, King Ahaz oversaw the construction of an altar modeled after an altar in Damascus (2 Kings 16:10–11). What examples could you give of how God's people today might allow their worship to be influenced by the practices of those without faith in the true God?

4. Review 2 Kings 17:7–18, especially verse 18. What event, yet to occur, do these verses remind us of (see Matthew 25:31–33)?

5. Godly King Hezekiah shattered the bronze snake Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it (2 Kings 18:4). The bronze snake, called Nehushtan (v. 4) had been an object through which God brought deliverance to His people. How else might God's people demonstrate inappropriate devotion to an instrument through which God brings deliverance at the expense of the worship they might offer to God Himself?

6. Second Kings 20:1–11 tells of God's restoration of health to Hezekiah in answer to his prayer. What can we learn from the way healing came to Hezekiah about the way God often heals in answer to the prayers of His people?

August Week 3

August 15–21; 2 Kings 21–25; 1 Chronicles 1–12

1. What a change from the reign of godly King Hezekiah to that of his son King Manasseh! Read 2 Kings 21:1–16, especially verse 9. Comment on the hold the devil was able to win over God's chosen people during this period of time.

2. Second Kings 22:8–11 tells about how the kingdom of Judah had become ignorant of the Word of God. What takes place as people regularly read, hear, and otherwise receive God's Word (1 Thessalonians 2:13)?

3. Connect the ending verses of 2 Kings (25:27–30) with the promise God had given His people regarding the house of David (2 Samuel 7:14–16). What ultimately resulted from this promise (Luke 2:8–11)?

4. The first four chapters of 1 Chronicles lists the generations of the people of God beginning with Adam and continuing to the days of Judah's exile. Read Psalm 89:1–4. Of what do these opening chapters in 1 Chronicles remind us?

5. Contrast the life and work of Aaron and his descendants as described in 1 Chronicles 6:49 with that of Jesus (Hebrews 9:11–15).

6. The coronation of David as king was celebrated with eating and drinking (1 Chronicles 12:38–40). See Revelation 19:7–9. Of what other feast might David's coronation remind us?

August Week 4

August 22–28; 1 Chronicles 13–22

1. At David's direction, the people moved the ark of the covenant. But in the moving of it, they disobeyed God (see 1 Chronicles 13:7–11; 15:13–15) and God struck Uzzah, one of the movers, dead on the spot. What does this action demonstrate for us about God? See Psalm 5:4–5.

2. In gratitude to God, David wrote a psalm (1 Chronicles 16:7–36). According to verse 29 of the psalm, in addition to offering God words of thanks, spoken and sung, how else do God's people express gratitude to Him?

3. Reflect personally on the opening words to David's prayer (1 Chronicles 17:16). In what way do these same words apply also to you?

4. King David ruled as a warrior king, constantly doing battle with the enemies of God's people (1 Chronicles 18–20). How was God's power evidenced in the reign of David in David's regard for people? See 1 Chronicles 18:14.

5. David yielded to Satan and sinned against God by conducting a census of his fighting men (1 Chronicles 21:1–12). When a contrite David confessed his sin, he was given three options. Note David's response recorded in verse 13. What do David's words indicate about his faith?

6. Review 1 Chronicles 22. What do the verses in this chapter indicate about David's relationship with his God? with his people? with his son?

August Week 5

August 29–31; 1 Chronicles 23–29

1. Skim 1 Chronicles 23–27. Comment on the opportunities for service available for a person of God at the time of King David.
2. Reflect on David’s description of the house of God to be built by his son Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:2). In what way is a house of worship the “footstool of our God”?
3. Summarize David’s words of praise to God recorded in 1 Chronicles 29:10–19.

September Week 1

September 1–4; 2 Chronicles 1–5

1. Solomon asked for wisdom when the Lord told him to “ask what I shall give you” (2 Chronicles 1:7). Why did Solomon ask for wisdom? For what would you ask? How does your request compare with Solomon’s?

2. Solomon built the temple “for the name of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 2:1). What would that mean? Give examples of how you might do some task “for the name of the LORD.” Include your examples in your prayers today.

3. List some words you would use to describe the temple and its furnishings as Solomon built it (2 Chronicles 3–4). Why did Solomon build the temple in this manner? How might Solomon’s example provide a model for us in completing projects that we undertake?

4. Since the Chronicler was writing for exiles who returned from Babylon, what aspect of the description of the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 5) would encourage them? What encouragement does this description give you, a member of the “holy Christian Church, the communion of saints” (the Apostles’ Creed), for your own worship?

September Week 2

September 5–11; 2 Chronicles 6–16

1. The Lord appeared to Solomon at night (2 Chronicles 7:12) to talk with Solomon about the prayer that had been offered in the temple. The Lord assured Solomon that when the people prayed, He would listen; when they confessed their sin, He would forgive. These were words of assurance. At what other times has God “appeared at night” with words of assurance for His people? for you?

2. What picture do you get of Solomon in chapters 8 and 9? Does he seem to be growing in faith during these years? The rest of the story is in 1 Kings 11. What warning did God give Solomon (1 Kings 11:11–13)? How might this warning be a blessing to us?

3. The queen of Sheba received the message that Solomon ruled “because [his] God loved Israel and would establish them forever . . . that [he] may execute justice and righteousness” (2 Chronicles 9:8). What message might this picture send to rulers of our own day?

4. At the time of the division of the kingdom, people from throughout Israel “who had set their hearts to seek the LORD” moved to Jerusalem “to sacrifice to the LORD” (2 Chronicles 11:16). What changes in their lives did this move entail? What similar changes in their lives do Christians still make, with the blessing of the Holy Spirit, to worship the Lord? In your prayers, thank God for the strength He has given to people to make such changes.

5. The events of 2 Chronicles 12 follow an outline similar to an outline of sections of the worship service. Point out the similarities. Why would church services follow such an outline?

6. What is the common message of these three Scripture passages: 2 Chronicles 13:15; 2 Chronicles 14:12; and Romans 8:31–32?

7. Scriptures use the figure of speech “the eyes of the LORD” to paint a picture of God for us. Hanani painted such a picture for Asa, the king (2 Chronicles 16:9). Moses uses this phrase in Deuteronomy 11:12, the psalmist refers to God’s eyes in Psalm 33:18–19 and Psalm 34:15, Solomon uses this picture in Proverbs 15:3, Jeremiah uses it in Jeremiah 24:6, and Peter refers to it in 1 Peter 3:10–12. What picture of God is painted in all these passages? What message is God conveying to us in these passages?

September Week 3

September 12–18; 2 Chronicles 17–28

1. One message for us in 2 Chronicles 17 and 18 is that it is tough to do the Lord's will and associate with evil at the same time. Even though Jehoshaphat did many good things during his reign, he did ask for trouble. Identify places where he associated with evil. The apostle John recognized this danger to our faith and gave some advice. Skim 1 John 3 and 4. What advice did he give?

2. "See the salvation of the LORD on your behalf" (2 Chronicles 20:17). What an amazing statement and what an amazing verse this is! Review the circumstances under which God made this promise. Under what circumstances in your own life has (would) this promise brought (bring) you comfort and strength?

3. Review 2 Chronicles 22:10–12. Why was it so important that Joash be kept alive?

4. Note the destructive and godless legacies of Jehoram and Ahaziah and his mother, Athaliah. What is the legacy of Jehoiada in all of this (2 Chronicles 23)? Was his legacy good, bad, both, or something else?

5. As soon as Jehoiada the priest died, Joash the king switched gears. Describe the change in Joash. What caused this change? This change in Joash should be a warning to all of God's faithful people. Read the prayer of Jesus for His people (John 17:6–25) and then pray that you and your family would remain faithful until Jesus takes you home.

6. As you think about true prosperity in connection with your reading of 2 Chronicles 25–26, the question frequently is asked: Why do the wicked prosper? Even the psalmist in Psalm 10 raises the question. Does it seem to you that the wicked prosper? Some religious leaders teach that when you trust the Lord you will be rich. Is there a difference between being prosperous and being rich? If so, what is the difference? Look at these Scripture passages for more insight into prosperity: Deuteronomy 5:33; Ezra 6:14; Proverbs 28:25; Isaiah 45:7; and Ephesians 2:7. Then thank the Lord for your prosperity in Christ.

7. How do you respond when you are reprimanded for doing something wrong? Look at the experience of the victorious Israelite soldiers (2 Chronicles 28:6–15). They had won a battle and plundered the losers. Oded confronted them, however (2 Chronicles 28:9–11). Why did he object to this plundering? What did he say should be done? What does this incident in God's Word say to us?

September Week 4

September 19–25; 2 Chronicles 29–36

1. How is Hezekiah’s action—to “consecrate the house of the LORD” (2 Chronicles 29:5) and to cleanse everything in the temple that was unclean by taking it to the Kidron Valley (2 Chronicles 29:16) to purify—similar to our own Baptism? Think especially of the answer to the question in Luther’s Small Catechism on the Sacrament of Holy Baptism: “What does such baptizing with water indicate?”

2. As you look at Hezekiah’s rule in 2 Chronicles 30–31, identify several aspects of godly administration of a government, a church, or any other entity as exemplified in his administration.

3. After reading the account of how God destroyed the Assyrian army (2 Chronicles 32:21), what are your thoughts about statements such as “God doesn’t take sides in wars”?

4. To turn Manasseh around, the Lord allowed the king of Assyria to “[capture] Manasseh with hooks and [bind] him with chains of bronze” (2 Chronicles 33:11). What kinds of “hooks” and “bronze chains” do you think the Lord uses now to turn His people around and call them to repentance so that His Word of grace in Jesus will be received?

5. Review 2 Chronicles 35. One recurring sign that Israel was falling away from the Lord was that they neglected the celebrations of the Old Testament festivals, such as Passover. That is why the renewals of the Passover celebration under Hezekiah and Josiah were so significant. Why are celebrations so vital in the lives of God’s people? What particular features of your church’s celebrations help you recall God’s promises and the message of salvation through Jesus, our Savior?

6. Viewing the Babylonian exile from a time after the exile, the writer of Chronicles sees the exile as a time of Sabbath rest (2 Chronicles 36:21) for the land and the people. What were the benefits of Sabbath rest (Leviticus 25:1–7; 26:2; Hebrews 4:9)? How might you observe the Sabbath so it is a time of refreshment?

September Week 5

September 26–30; Ezra 1–10

1. Ezra reports that Cyrus, king of Persia, thought that he had been appointed by the Lord, the God of heaven, to build a temple for God at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2). Here is an example of an unbelieving ruler being used by God to fulfill His messianic purposes. Does God still use civil authorities to accomplish His purposes? Can you cite some examples?

2. Review Ezra 3:1–13. Another picture of the Lord building His church is in 1 Peter 2:4–12. Who is the “living stone” (2:4) and the “living stones” (2:5)? How do believers become “a living being” or living soul (1 Corinthians 15:45)? According to Peter, what are some things “living stones” do? In your prayers, ask the Spirit for the strength to do this.

3. According to the decree issued by King Cyrus regarding the temple of God in Jerusalem, provisions were supplied so that the priest could “offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the life of the king and his sons” (Ezra 6:10). Relate the practice of prayers for government leaders in Old Testament times to that which is still practiced by God’s people today (see 1 Timothy 2:1–2).

4. Ezra describes the hand of the Lord blessing the people along their way, providing protection from enemies and bandits (Ezra 8:31). What blessing did Ezra, the leader, receive as the hand of the Lord was upon him (see Ezra 7:28)? See also Joshua 1:9.

5. Relate the following segment from Ezra’s prayer to yourself and God’s other faithful people around you: “O LORD, the God of Israel, You are just, for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is today. Behold, we are before You in our guilt, for none can stand before You because of this” (Ezra 9:15).

Leader Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

July Week 1

July 1–3; 2 Samuel 1–4

1. David laments not only his friend Jonathan but also Saul. David refers to Saul together with Jonathan as the glory of Israel and as mighty (2 Samuel 1:19). David's lament bears no animosity or hatred toward Saul. David remembers the good of Saul and Jonathan, reflecting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) in his words.

2. Answers will vary. Comment on the misleading corruption of the human condition. Stress the forgiveness for human sin that Jesus came to provide.

July Week 2

July 4–10; 2 Samuel 5:1–14:24

1. Just as the Lord referred to David as shepherd of His people Israel, the New Testament refers to Jesus as both the Son of David and the shepherd of God's people.

2. David praised the Lord with great exuberance. He leaped and danced before the Lord, he sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to Him, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty, and then he gave a loaf of bread and cakes of raisins and dates to each person in the crowd.

3. God promises to make David's name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. He promises to bless David and his offspring, concluding, "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16).

4. David desires to share "God's kindness" with someone from the house of Saul. These words connote the power of God in David's life and actions.

5. David says, "I have sinned against the LORD," and the prophet Nathan says in response, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Samuel 12:13). Our God always forgives those who come to Him troubled over their sin. Ultimately, all sin is committed against God.

6. Although not directly involved in the rape of Tamar, Jonadab connived the plot whereby the rape occurred. In this way, Jonadab must share in the responsibility for the sin.

July Week 3

July 11–17; 2 Samuel 14:25–24:25

1. Absalom sought to endear himself to the people. Working to manipulate their loyalty away from the king and to himself, Absalom suggested that he could do a better job of ruling. In so doing, Absalom failed to honor his father even as he coveted his kingdom.

2. David the man said in sorrow that he wished he could have died in place of his son. God's Son, the God-man, died in our place in order to atone for the sins of all people.

3. Responses will vary. If we are honest, we can all recall times when we have treated those who have our best interest at heart worse than we treated others. These are the actions for which our Savior died to earn our forgiveness.

4. "And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul" (2 Samuel 22:1). Specific examples of God's deliverance will vary; each believer may claim deliverance from sin, death, and Satan's power.

5. David's house is right with God; He has made with David an everlasting covenant (2 Samuel 23:5). All who hold membership in the household of faith in Christ Jesus may make a similar claim.

6. By God's grace, David trusted in God's great mercy, recognizing God's awesome love and faithfulness in contrast to human behaviors.

July Week 4

July 18–24; 1 Kings 1–11

1. Through God’s Word, the Holy Spirit motivates and empowers God’s people to walk faithfully before Him.

2. God is good. He is “able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

3. The names of the pillars reminded God’s people, both upon entering and upon leaving the temple, of the power and purposes of God at work among them.

4. Solomon said, “You . . . [keep] covenant and [show] steadfast love to Your servants who walk before You with all their heart” (1 Kings 8:23).

5. Comments will vary somewhat. God also blesses His people today through leaders who maintain justice and righteousness.

6. In anger over Solomon’s idolatry, God pronounced His judgment. He said, “Since this has been your practice and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant (1 Kings 11:11). God also revealed His grace and faithfulness in the manner in which He dealt with Solomon. “Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen” (1 Kings 11:12–13).

July Week 5

July 25–31; 1 Kings 12–22

1. Fearing that the people of Israel would desire to restore themselves to the house of David if they would travel regularly to worship at the temple in Jerusalem, Jeroboam established centers for idol worship in the Northern Kingdom. Instead of seeking encouragement and alleviation for his fears at the hand of the God who had given him his kingdom, Jeroboam sought to secure himself by his own efforts. Similarly, each of us is tempted to forget the gracious and loving way God provides for us and seek instead to secure our own welfare.

2. Answers will vary. God desires His people to remain faithful to Him and to avoid those influences, subtle or otherwise, that would lead us to turn our back on Him and His saving grace.

3. As God's representative, Joshua spoke words of a curse upon the children of anyone who would rebuild Jericho. Joshua's words found fulfillment during the time of Ahab when Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho at the cost of both his firstborn and youngest sons.

4. Answers will vary. Stress God's unending faithfulness and how through Jesus He provides us with forgiveness, salvation, and all the blessings associated with an eternal life that we are enjoying even now.

5. The prayers of the prophets of Baal were directed to a god that did not exist except in the minds of his followers. Elijah's prayer was directed to the true God, who exists and acts for His people. The prophets of Baal shouted and cut themselves with swords and spears until blood flowed in an attempt to gain his attention. In contrast, Elijah simply prayed that God would reveal Himself as the one true God and that the people would turn their hearts back to Him.

6. God moved Elijah beyond his self-preoccupation by giving him work to do (“Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place” [1 Kings 19:15–16]). Then God encouraged Elijah with the knowledge that many believers still existed in the land (“Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” [1 Kings 19:18]).

7. Ahab responded to God’s words of judgment by tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth, and fasting, activities normally associated with repentance. In response, God delayed judgment against the house of Ahab until after Ahab had died.

August Week 1

August 1–7; 2 Kings 1–10

1. Early after the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua, God brought about a miraculous parting of water so His people could pass through it on dry ground. A similar event occurred after the transfer of leadership from Elijah to Elisha. With these events, God dramatically evidenced His blessing upon the new leader.

2. Upon the death of her son, the Shunammite showed her faith in God by simply going to get the man of God. Assuring others with the words “all is well,” she did not even share the news that her son had died.

3. Naaman’s companions, his servants, successfully reasoned with him in his rage. They encouraged him to obey. Similarly, we might ask God to surround us with companions who reason with us in our times of anger and encourage us to obey God.

4. The lepers at first kept to themselves the good news that the army of the enemy had fled and that there was a bounty God had graciously and suddenly supplied. Somewhat similarly, we, too, often keep to ourselves the good news of God’s grace and blessings—especially the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus.

5. God continued to bless the Shunammite beyond the primary blessing of salvation she had already received as one of His dear children.

6. God’s judgment upon the house of Ahab took place just as He had promised.

August Week 2

August 8–14; 2 Kings 11–20

1. God qualifies and equips those He calls to serve Him. Joash (Jehoash) and Timothy provide examples of young people empowered by God for service in prominent roles.

2. Through the power of God present in Elisha after his death, the dead man came back to life. This event foreshadows the resurrection from the dead of all the faithful. By God's power in the Savior, who died for us and rose again, all those who die in faith will one day rise from the dead to live with Him in glory.

3. Examples will vary but draw attention to how we may dishonor God and mislead others through the inappropriate use of procedures, music, or objects commonly associated with practices forbidden by God in His Word.

4. The separation of those who had turned their backs on God reminds us of the final judgment, when those who have rejected the Savior will be separated from God in eternal punishment.

5. God desires that His people worship Him only. Examples of misplaced regard for Him might include an inappropriate devotion to a pastor, a house of worship, or to a congregational program or organization.

6. God often restores health using the medical knowledge, technology, and skill that are also gifts from His benevolent and gracious hand.

August Week 3

August 15–21; 2 Kings 21–25; 1 Chronicles 1–12

1. The change from the spiritual climate during the reign of godly Hezekiah to that of the reign of his son Manasseh was indeed dramatic. In just a single generation, the reforms of Hezekiah were overturned and replaced by base idolatry and related sins.

2. As God’s Word is received, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it goes to work in people—effecting faith and obedience.

3. The Book of 2 Kings ends on an upbeat note. The line of David is preserved so that from it the Savior of the world would be born.

4. Verses 1–4 of Psalm 89 speak of the steadfast love and faithfulness of God being known through all generations. The genealogies of the first four chapters of 1 Chronicles record a number of the generations through which the promise of the Savior was transmitted.

5. Aaron and his descendants “made offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense for all the work of the Most Holy Place, and to make atonement for Israel” (1 Chronicles 6:49). Jesus came as the ultimate High Priest. He atoned for our sins once and for all, not by means of the blood of animals but by the shedding of His own blood.

6. David’s coronation might remind us of the marriage feast of the Lamb, when Jesus welcomes His Bride, the Church, into eternal glory (Revelation 19:7–9).

August Week 4

August 22–28; 1 Chronicles 13–22

1. God expects obedience. He punishes sin. The people disobeyed God in the transporting of the ark of the covenant by having it pulled on an ox cart instead of being carried by Levites with poles on their shoulders as God had commanded (Exodus 25:13–14).

2. In 1 Chronicles 16:29, David exhorts God’s grateful people to “bring an offering and come before Him.” God invites us to bring Him our offerings as an expression of our thankfulness for His abundant grace and goodness.

3. The opening words to David’s prayer in 1 Chronicles 17:16, “Who am I, O LORD God, and what is my house, that You have brought me thus far?” remind us of God blessings also to us, weak and sinful as we are. Each of us who belongs to God by faith in Christ Jesus has the greatest gifts anyone can receive—forgiveness, new life, and eternal salvation in His name.

4. David evidenced God’s power and presence in that he “administered justice and equity to all his people” (1 Chronicles 18:14).

5. David trusted in God and His love. He said, “Let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercy is very great” (1 Chronicles 21:13).

6. David made preparations for the building of the temple his son Solomon would build to the honor and glory of God. In so doing, he recognized Solomon’s youth and inexperience and sought to make things easier for him. David reviewed God’s Word and blessed Solomon. Then David enlisted the help of the people in the construction of the temple, encouraging them, as he had Solomon, to remain devoted to God.

August Week 5

August 29–31; 1 Chronicles 23–29

1. From full-time workers in the Church to careers in the military, the opportunities to serve God were as varied and numerous as the responsibilities themselves. The same may be said in our day. God would have each of us serve Him faithfully in the work He has given us to do.

2. As a “footstool of our God,” the temple was where the glory of the almighty God would come in to contact and make a connection with the lowly. As a place of rest for the ark of the covenant, here God made His presence known among His people.

3. With these words, David praises God for His eternal greatness, power, glory, majesty, and splendor, noting that everything belongs to God and that He is exalted over all. All wealth and honor, strength and power come from Him. He also asked God to keep Solomon and the people faithful.

September Week 1

September 1–4; 2 Chronicles 1–5

1. Solomon asked for wisdom so that he would be better able to build the temple and rule God's people wisely (2 Chronicles 1:10). Responses of your people will vary. Encourage one another to think more of how God's kingdom might be served in what you request than in how you can request what you personally want for yourself in your prayer. You might ask, How might a prayer for healing be worded in order to pray that this healing can benefit God's kingdom? How might prayers for guidance or some other situations be worded to be more like Solomon's prayer?

2. Doing something "for the name of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 2:1) dedicates that task to the Lord. Doing a task "for the name of the LORD" prompts us to do that task excellently, in an honest manner, and with a servant heart. Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross for our salvation to bring honor to His Father in heaven.

3. Words such as *opulent*, *beautiful*, *impressive*, and *first-class* might describe Solomon's temple. He models giving the best to the Lord as he is moved to do so by the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the Means of Grace. People in your group might mention giving their best to the Lord as they do excellent work in their jobs and as they support their families, provide excellent facilities for the Lord's work in congregations, and provide excellent programs of ministry to proclaim the Gospel and serve people.

4. The focus of the worship that Solomon led at the dedication of the temple was not on the beauty of the temple, the hard work of the builders, or the leadership skills of the king in completing the temple, but it was on God, who had been faithful and loving toward His people. This same message of a loving God who cares for His people would encourage the exiles as they rebuilt their homes and the temple. We, too, are members of this "communion of saints" who can see a longer history of God's care for His people, especially as we know by faith that God has kept His promises and sent Jesus to be our Savior and that because of Him our sins are forgiven.

September Week 2

September 5–11; 2 Chronicles 6–16

1. God sent the angels at night to the shepherds to announce “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:8–11). Other instances that people may mention include Jacob wrestling with God at night, Jesus coming to the disciples on the water at night, or God sending His angel to deliver Peter from jail at night. Of course, God comes to help His people at any time of the day. When we grieve over our own sin, fret about our health or the health of a loved one, are concerned about the faith of a relative, or worry about many other situations in life, the Lord comes to us in these “nights” with His Word of hope: “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you” (Jeremiah 1:8) and “Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27).

2. During these twenty years, Solomon becomes rich and known throughout the ancient world. His land becomes a center of trade and commerce. Nothing is mentioned in Chronicles about Solomon’s growth in faith. 1 Kings 11 details how Solomon “turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel” (1 Kings 11:9). Too often, we become angry when someone mentions that they have missed us in church or that we need to get back to our regular daily devotions. These calls to faithfulness are blessings to us, for they remind us again that God is the source of our blessings and our salvation.

3. Those who serve as rulers, in government positions or positions of authority, will be judged by their efforts to act to achieve justice and righteousness in all situations. It is God’s will that all people be treated with justice and righteousness. God calls all citizens in every community to serve in such a way and to choose leaders who will promote these qualities among the people.

4. People probably gave up jobs, homes, and perhaps land so they could move their families to Jerusalem to worship God and “walk . . . in the way of David and Solomon” (2 Chronicles 11:17). By God’s grace, people today still make similar changes in their lives. In the history of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, people moved from Germany to the United States so they could worship and raise their families in ways that were faithful to God’s Word. In our own time, some people have given up jobs so they could become involved in Christian missionary work, families have moved to a new home so they could enroll their children in a Lutheran school, and people have changed their lifestyles so as to be able to support Christian charities generously.

5. The events of 2 Chronicles 12 follow this outline: People abandon the law of the Lord and live in sin; God points out their sin and calls them to repentance; people respond to God's call and repent; God, in mercy, forgives the people. Similarly, sinful people gather together in worship. Here, the people confess their sin, acknowledging that they, too, have abandoned the Law of God. In mercy, God forgives their sin, and through His Word and Sacraments strengthens them for faithful living.

6. In all three passages, the common message is that God is the one who conquers evil and those who threaten His people. In each case, the odds seemed to be in favor of the opposing army: Abijah's 400,000 troops faced Jeroboam's 800,000 (2 Chronicles 13:3); Asa's 300,000 troops faced Zerah's vast army and 300 chariots (2 Chronicles 14:8–9); we face a multitude of dangers, including trouble, hardship, famine, demons, death, and the devil (Romans 8:35, 38–39). Yet “God defeated Jeroboam” (2 Chronicles 13:15), “the LORD defeated the Ethiopians (2 Chronicles 14:12), and “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

7. In all of these passages, God is pictured as caring for us, as He did for the Israelites who were moving into a new land (Deuteronomy 11:12), strengthening and supporting those who trust in Him (2 Chronicles 16:9), caring for us especially at the time of our death (Psalm 33:18–19), listening to our prayers (Psalm 34:15), watching out for our good (Jeremiah 24:6), and blessing those who are faithful to Him (1 Peter 3:10–12). These words of Hanani (2 Chronicles 16:9) are especially comforting to those who undergo suffering of any kind.

September Week 3

September 12–18; 2 Chronicles 17–28

1. Jehoshaphat made an alliance with Ahab, king of Israel, who wanted to go to war (2 Chronicles 18:2–3). He joined Ahab in the war in spite of warnings from the prophet Micaiah that the war would be a disaster for Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:22). John warned the Christians of his day against lawlessness and sin, and urged them to “let no one deceive you” (1 John 3:7) and “not believe every spirit” (1 John 4:1). He reminded the people that Jesus came “in order to take away sins” (1 John 3:5) and that they are to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). Pray for forgiveness in Jesus and this same strength and wisdom to avoid evil as you conclude your discussion.

2. God made this promise to Jehoshaphat and the people who lived in Judah and Jerusalem at a time when the vast army (2 Chronicles 20:2) of the Moabites and Ammonites threatened them. In His reply to their prayer, God, through Jahaziel, tells the people that they should not be afraid (2 Chronicles 20:15), the battle was God’s so they would not have to fight the battle (2 Chronicles 20:17), the Lord would deliver them and be with them. Individual applications of this verse will vary, but God is consistent in His promise to help and support His people.

3. God promised that Jesus, the Messiah, was to be a descendant of David and the kings of Judah (Genesis 49:10 and 2 Samuel 7:16). He promised David an everlasting kingdom. This promise was fulfilled through Jesus.

4. Jehoiada’s legacy, through God’s mercy, was that he preserved the Davidic line and restored it to the throne in Judah (2 Chronicles 23:20); through these actions the messianic promises were being kept. He placed the Levites in charge of temple worship again (v. 18), protected Joash (v. 10), and covenanted with the people and the king that they would be the Lord’s people (v. 16). He led the efforts to put to death Athaliah, who wanted to destroy the Davidic line (v. 15), and he rid the land of Baal worship (v. 17). It was a violent effort to uproot violent evil. Identify similar situations in our own time.

5. Joash no longer supported making repairs to the temple or faithfully worshiping there. Rather, he abandoned the temple and allowed a return to the worship of Asherah poles and idols. He would not listen to warnings from prophets and had Zechariah the priest stoned when he condemned this spiritual decay. The only hint at why Joash changed is the comment that he listened to the officials of Judah (2 Chronicles 24:17). The Chronicler no doubt wanted the returning exiles from Babylon to remain faithful to their Lord. In the face of so many temptations to abandon the faith, we, too, need to heed these warnings and pray that the Holy Spirit might preserve us in the faith.

6. Your group will probably be able to cite many instances where the wicked or unbelieving have a good life. In speaking of the wicked, the psalmist laments that it seems “his ways prosper at all times” (Psalm 10:5). God in no way rejoices over the ravages that sin brings to people, nor does He place His blessing on wickedness. Rather, God promises prosperity to those who walk in His way (Deuteronomy 5:33), who listen to God’s Word (Ezra 6:14), and who trust in Him (Proverbs 28:25). God’s idea of prosperity is not the same as our idea of being rich. The Lord does bring His prosperity to us (Isaiah 45:7), the riches of His grace in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:7).

7. Oded told the Israelites they should not plunder the people and make the soldiers of Judah prisoners for several reasons. God had given them the victory because He was angry with Judah for their unfaithfulness, but that did not give Israel the right to slaughter and plunder them and make them slaves. Israel was also guilty of sins against the Lord. Oded’s words moved the Israelites to release the prisoners, to use the plundered goods to provide them with food and clothing, and to return them to Judah. This incident calls us to repent and make amends when we are reprimanded. It highlights the proper use of God’s Law, the penitent response of the believer, and opens the way for the hearing of the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus and the amending of the sinful life in response to the Gospel.

September Week 4

September 19–25; 2 Chronicles 29–36

1. To clean up the temple, the priests removed all the unclean articles from the temple. (Everything had been blemished by the actions of Ahaz [2 Chronicles 28:24], either through neglect or through use to worship idols.) The Levites took them to the Kidron Valley to ritually destroy the evil, cleanse and refurbish them, and return them to the temple. In our Baptism, “by daily contrition and repentance” our evil nature is drowned and dies “with all sins and evil desires” so that a new person can “daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Small Catechism, explanation on The Sacrament of Holy Baptism).

2. Some aspects of godly administration evident in Hezekiah’s rule that your group identifies may include the following: Hezekiah focused on being faithful to the Lord (30:8); he invited everyone in the country, from both Israel and Judah and the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, to participate in the celebration of the Passover at Jerusalem (30:1); he asked the Lord to pardon even those who were ceremonially unclean and were not supposed to participate in the temple celebration (30:18–19); Hezekiah himself contributed to the celebration (30:24; 31:3); he organized and arranged for the generous support of temple officials (31:4); he ensured that the resources contributed by the people were used fairly and wisely (31:11–12, 14); and he did what was good, right, and faithful in the eyes of the Lord (31:20). Pray that our government and church officials may operate in a similar manner.

3. Ideas will vary. Too often, such statements are made in connection with athletic contests and similar events. God certainly acts to further His purposes in the world, all of which in New Testament times focus on proclaiming the Gospel and ensuring that all people have an opportunity to hear His Word. God takes care of His people according to His good and gracious will, especially when “He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die” (Small Catechism, explanation to the Third Petition).

4. The writer of 2 Chronicles probably wanted the exiles returning from Babylon to think of their Babylonian captivity as a “hook” used by God to turn them around and be faithful to God. Your group might suggest illness, trying times, drought and famine, unemployment, and other hardships as modern-day “hooks.” The proclamation of God’s Law is a “hook” intended to call us to repentance so that the Lord can free us with His Word of forgiveness through Jesus and empower us to amend our sinful lives.

5. Answers may vary. Celebrations in the Church help us teach and review the major events in the story of God providing for the salvation of all people. This is one of the chief benefits of following the Church Year calendar of festivals. Christmas is a celebration of God the Father, who gave His Son to be the Savior. Lent and Easter are a celebration of God the Son, who gave His life and rose from the dead to assure the forgiveness of our sins and our triumph over Satan. Pentecost is a celebration of the activity of the Holy Spirit, who continually calls people to repentance and works faith in Jesus in the hearts of those who repent and trust the Gospel. During other festivals of the Church Year, such as Epiphany, Transfiguration, and Ascension, other aspects of the salvation story are remembered and celebrated.

6. Leviticus describes the Sabbath year as every seventh year when the land was to lie fallow. Whatever grew could be used, but no crops were to be planted and no regular harvest conducted. Both people and land would rest, yet the Lord promised His care (Leviticus 25:21) through a bountiful sixth year harvest. Hebrews 4:9 suggests that this Sabbath rest is a picture of our own salvation—rest that we receive through faith in Christ rather than through our own hard work to live a perfect life.

September Week 5

September 26–30; Ezra 1–10

1. God still does use civil authorities and many others to accomplish His purposes, but it may be difficult to identify specific actions of civil authorities as fulfilling God's purposes. God acts to benefit His people and bring the Gospel to all the world, for His will is that all be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth that Jesus is the Savior, who gave His life that all might live eternally.

2. By the inspiration of the Spirit, Peter says that “the living stone” is Jesus, “rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen” (1 Peter 2:4) who “bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (2:24). Jesus, the “life-giving spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45), creates faith in us and builds us into “a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5) that declares His praises and proclaims His excellencies (2:9), abstains from sinful desires (“passions of the flesh” [2:11]), and does good deeds that glorify God (2:12).

3. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:1–2, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” God blesses us through leaders who protect our rights to the extent that we are free and unhindered in our desire to live our lives as God empowers and directs us through His Holy Word.

4. Because the hand of the Lord was upon Ezra, he says he, “took courage” and “gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me” (Ezra 7:28). Somewhat similarly, God encouraged Joshua in his leadership with the words, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

5. Such is our condition before our holy and righteous God. Thankfully, because Jesus has paid the penalty we deserve because of our sins, God welcomes us as His dear and redeemed children.