When I see lives that are less than promising, I wonder what went wrong, and the follow-up is, "What would have happened if...?" We have the mistaken idea that if family life and education were ideal, there would be no problems, or at least small ones. Most people believe that starting right makes things right, but this is not always true. Let me explain further by looking at the life of Solomon.

The accolades were plentiful. "Long live King Solomon!" the Israelites shouted. King Hiram of Tyre declared, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel...He has given King David a wise son..." The queen of Sheba later announced, "Praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you, and placed you on his throne [of Israel]." Such was the praise Solomon received—and rightly so. He became (according to 2 Chronicles 9) the greatest king on earth, both in riches and wisdom.

Something, however, began to slip deep within his life. Without noise or notice, a definite deterioration began to occur. Little things were first tolerated... then accepted... then finally embraced. We need to uncover those signs of erosion, one by one, that ultimately led to his ruin. A word of alert: let us who think we stand take heed... or we may fall too!

An Exciting Beginning

Solomon began his young adult life and career with impeccability. He had so much going for him.


"Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings." God gave him wealth and honor as never enjoyed by any predecessor or successor.

A variety of interests—1 Kings 4:29-34.

"God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. 30] Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom
of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. 31] He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. 32] He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. 33] He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the Hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. 34] Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.” His horizons of interest were limitless, and he had been in demand for his diversified realm of research. When he fell, he did so from great heights.

A record of achievements—1 Kings 6:1, 38; 7:1; Eccl. 2:4-6.

He had built a temple of unsurpassed beauty, an exquisite home, pools, other houses, and resorts. At least 20 years were spent creating architectural dreams.

Unparalleled wisdom—1 Kings 10:1,6,23-24.

v. 24—"The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart."

A regular parade of fans pilgrimaged from the corners of the world to behold Solomon and all his glory. Fortune, fame, friends, and fulfilled fantasies became his daily experience. Like a steady diet of desserts, however, these pleasures soon made him nauseous. Solomon’s glory soon began to lose its luster, as earthly pleasures have a way of doing. The poet Robert Burns noted:

But pleasures are like poppies spread
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed
Or like the snow falls in the river
A moment white—then melts forever

What is it that really lasts? This verse puts things in perspective: "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, the flowers fall, But the word of our God stands forever”—Is. 40:6b, 8. His Word is what lasts, what stands. Are you investing enough of your time and your life in it?
How the Mighty Have Fallen - Part One
Written by Bob Stone

A lot of what busies us will eventually fade and melt away. Only His Word really lasts. Only His Word keeps our characters, our lives from eroding—Ps. 119:9,11. Let me illustrate this with Solomon’s own words. He writes about:

**An Emptiness From Success—Ecclesiastes 2**

Solomon’s life was unexcelled by any other, but it ultimately fell to the earth like a deflated balloon. The Scottish essayist, Thomas Carlyle, once stated insightfully, "Adversity is hard on a man; but for one man who can stand prosperity, there are a hundred that will stand adversity." Solomon fell within the majority in that statement, right alongside 99 others. Testing himself against and with life, he tried

1. pleasure—v. 1

2. laughter—v. 2

3. mental stimulation—v. 3

4. building projects—v. 4

5. slavery—v. 7

6. accumulation of precious commodities—v. 8

7.
What caught him by surprise? Solomon had everything, but it left him empty.

No satisfaction—vv. 9-11

Nothing satisfied him any longer. Even though he had plenty of time, money and resources, he began to experience emptiness.

Disillusionment—vv. 16-19.

Nothing stimulated him anymore. Solomon wrote, "For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. ...I hated life...all of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

Despair—vv. 20-24.

Nothing excited him as it once did. Reflecting upon life, he stated, "... my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor..."; all man's days are "pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest." I would say he's down a little.

Solomon needed Alka-Seltzer for his soul. Bored and disillusioned, nothing satisfied Solomon any longer; nothing stimulated him. His taste buds had had it! He was stuffed, nauseated, so full of himself and life's pleasures he was ready to throw up.

Is he unique? I don't think so. That all-you-can-eat buffet lifestyle seems to be the diet of many Americans as well. Eventually it leads to heartburn. "Americans have always been able to handle austerity and even adversity. Prosperity is what's doing us in" (James Reston, 3,500 Good Quotes for Speakers, p. 194). Eventually we crave relief.
How the Mighty Have Fallen - Part One
Written by Bob Stone

How about you? Do you need a little relief from the heartburn of living for yourself? If so, try a change in your eating habits—for "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

An Eroding Life—I Kings 3, 9, 11

Turn to Matthew 7. From a distance, Solomon's exquisitely-hewn character looms impressive and striking. But a closer look reveals signs of erosion: a chip here, a crack there, a compromise here, a crumbling conviction there. However polished his granite character, Solomon—like all of us—had feet of clay, and they were slowly beginning to wash out beneath him.

Remember how it happened to Solomon! Very few things deteriorate suddenly. No church suddenly splits. No child suddenly becomes delinquent. No friendship suddenly collapses. No marriage suddenly dissolves. No Grand Canyon suddenly forms. It happens slowly—grain by grain, compromise by compromise. If, then, you see erosion taking place in your life, it's time to start a soul conservation project and repair the foundations of your relationship with the Lord and His Word. Here's the answer:

Matt. 7:24-27—“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26] But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

It's not what you know, it's what you do with what you know.

If the erosion isn't stopped, the rains of life's storms will wash you away if you are not hearing and applying.

There were four specific areas of erosion in Solomon's life.
Preoccupation with his riches and building projects. We'll call it material attraction. He had so much, but he wanted more—Eccl 2:4-6. He wanted homes, pools, other houses, and resorts. He had an addiction to more things, but not more time with his God and walking in His ways!

- Unwise alliances with unbelievers—relational distraction. It began with a little chip of compromise. "Solomon 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"—1 Kings 3:1. Solomon's marriage with Pharaoh's daughter was a union of two nations—not of two people. It was a marriage of expedience—not obedience to God's precepts. It was based on political diplomacy—not love. Furthermore, it was a compromise of God's Word. In Deuteronomy 7:1-11, God laid down some very specific instructions to Israel regarding intermarriage with foreigners who worshiped other gods (see also Ex. 23:31-32; 34:12-16, and Ezra 9:2). Although we do see some conviction from Solomon on the matter (2 Chron. 8:11), his grip on God's Word showed definite signs of loosening.

Here's an afterthought on alliances. An unequal yoke (2 Cor. 6:14) will distribute the burden of the relationship unevenly. At best, you can expect blistered shoulders; at worst, you can be pulled off a path of obedience and fall, crippled, into a ditch. How many times do we need to say this to Christians?

- Unrestrained preoccupation with sex—sexual addiction: 1 Kings 11:1-3. Solomon not only had Pharaoh's daughter as a wife, he indulged himself in a harem unequalled in the ancient Near East. It was his unrestrained preoccupation with sex that ultimately led him away from God as he acquired 700 wives and 300 concubines. Again, Solomon turned his head away from the clear teaching of God's Word—Deut. 7:3-4. The result? "...his wives led him astray"—v. 3b. Another result? As he let sin creep in, little by little, Solomon's granite character began to erode away.

- Unholy involvement with idolatry—biblical infraction: 1 Kings 11:4-8. With the introduction of more foreign wives, idolatry infiltrated the nation and dug surprisingly into a once-sensitive heart toward God. "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. 5] He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the
Ammonites. 6] So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. 7] On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. 8] He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods."

The pagan altars of sacrifice, known as "high places," were still operational in spite of God's command to "break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire"—Deut. 7:5. God's Word was slipping further out of Solomon's hand as his commitment to God slowly relaxed. Flirting with idolatry was beginning to open the floodgates of an erosive stream that would eventually wash away the clay feet of Solomon's character.

An Example To Learn From

We never read that Solomon totally rejected his God, but his life tragically eroded. Erosion doesn't happen overnight. Charles Swindoll compares Solomon's life to the Colorado River.

The Colorado River serpentines through the Arizona desert taking little snaky licks along its path. It twists and turns, winding its way through sandstone, limestone, shale, and granite, biting chunks out of the banks. Tirelessly—day in, day out—the reptilian river slithers its way through the earth's strata. Writhing, laden with silt, the underbelly of the relentless river wears away the rock...grain by grain...pebble by pebble...day by day...year by year. The result? The Grand Canyon. More than half a million tons of sediment are eroded each day from the canyon. Though the river is the main erosive agent in the canyon, it is by no means the only agent. Water flowing from short, violent rainstorms pushes sediment down slopes where there is little vegetation to impede it. Roots of trees and other plants burrowing into cracks pry the rocks loose, sending them crashing into the hungry river below. The chemical action of lichens eats away at the rocks they cling to. Water hiding in the hairline fissures of giant boulders freezes in the winter and chips away at their stony surfaces. Even the wind, with its blasts of airborne sand, pits away at the huge, gaping void of the canyon. It's a monument now—that gash across the face of Arizona—a jagged testimony to the sweeping, destructive power of erosion. Character can erode like that, a grain of sand at a time...even character of granite, as polished as Solomon's—Charles Swindoll.

Conclusion
Erosion in Solomon's case is described in 1 Kings 11:4-8.

His heart was not wholly devoted to God, and he didn't follow the Lord or His Word fully—v. 6. Erosion comes in our lives the same way. It's not usually from blatant rejection but half-hearted and uncommitted Christianity. Erosion can be summarized in four areas:

**Material Attraction**—more concerned about acquiring and building your life than God's church.

**Relational Distraction**—more excited and attracted to people and relationships than God or His kids

**Sexual Addiction**—more focused on the ultimate sexual experience than God's provision in purity

**Biblical Infraction**—more adherence to your whims and desires than obeying God's Word

Let's take a few moments to perform a personal examination of our lives. Remember, deterioration is never sudden. It's little things that cause erosion and ultimate decay. Think about these questions:

1. How am I handling my material goods and my desires for more?

2. Are my friendships helping or hurting my relationship with God—do I have any unequal yokes?

3. To whom or what do I turn when disillusioned?
4. In which of these areas—material attraction, relational distraction, sexual addiction, or biblical infraction—am I most susceptible? How am I especially susceptible in this area?

5. How can I defend myself from erosion in this area?

6. Am I ignoring biblical counsel or applying it? In what area?

7. Discuss this list of questions with someone to whom you are accountable. Ask for an honest evaluation of these areas in your life.