

1 Chronicles: The Spirituality of Genealogies and Biblical Lists

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle

Prayer of Illumination

O God, by your Spirit tell us what we need to hear, and show us what we ought to do, to obey Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Background

Names. Lots of names. No other book of the Bible has as many names and lists as First and Second Chronicles.

But names are important. One of our favorite words is to hear our names spoken out loud.

Eugene Peterson says that “names launch stories.” And so all of the proper names in Chronicles remind us that our faith isn’t impersonal, but it’s personal. Chronicles protects us from a depersonalized and abstract religion.

The family of God is connected by a long sacred story that’s rooted in history and experience. And that story is still being written today.

So let’s hear now the Word of the Lord from:

Scripture: 1 Chronicles 12:23-40 (NRSV)

These are the numbers of the divisions of the armed troops who came to David in Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul over to him, according to the word of the Lord.

The people of Judah bearing shield and spear numbered six thousand eight hundred armed troops.

Of the Simeonites, mighty warriors, seven thousand one hundred.

Of the Levites four thousand six hundred. Jehoiada, leader of the house of Aaron, and with him three thousand seven hundred. Zadok, a young warrior, and twenty-two commanders from his own ancestral house.

Of the Benjaminites, the kindred of Saul, three thousand, of whom the majority had continued to keep their allegiance to the house of Saul.

Of the Ephraimites, twenty thousand eight hundred, mighty warriors, notables in their ancestral houses.

Of the half-tribe of Manasseh, eighteen thousand, who were expressly named to come and make David king.

Of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, two hundred chiefs, and all their kindred under their command.

Of Zebulun, fifty thousand seasoned troops, equipped for battle with all the weapons of war, to help David with singleness of purpose.

Of Naphtali, a thousand commanders, with whom there were thirty-seven thousand armed with shield and spear.

Of the Danites, twenty-eight thousand six hundred equipped for battle.

Of Asher, forty thousand seasoned troops ready for battle.

Of the Reubenites and Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh from beyond the Jordan, one hundred twenty thousand armed with all the weapons of war.

All these, warriors arrayed in battle order, came to Hebron with full intent to make David king over all Israel; likewise all the rest of Israel were of a single mind to make David king. They were there with David for three days, eating and drinking, for their kindred had provided for them. And also their neighbors, from as far away as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, came bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen—abundant provisions of meal, cakes of figs, clusters of raisins, wine, oil, oxen, and sheep, for there was joy in Israel.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – 1 Chronicles: The Spirituality of Genealogies and Biblical Lists

Each of the 12 Tribes of Israel, from a variety of backgrounds and regions, are rallying together for a common purpose—to support King David.

Too often our tribes alienate us from other tribes. We look with suspicion upon those different from us or from different regions.

But not here. We see a renewal, a coming together—a spiritual, national, and family reunion. The 12 Tribes and King David are enriched by, rather than threatened by their difference. God is on the move. God's covenant with his people is sealed with a covenant meal—friends and companions breaking bread together joyfully, with one heart and mind, ready for action and service to God.

As the church, we too are united by David—the Son of David—The Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus has called us friends—he brings us together. He is the host, and we break bread at his table. We can lay aside our differences, come together and shine a light and be a friend to our dark and lonely world.

Best-selling author Tom Rath in his small book [Vital Friends](#) talks about the people we can't afford to live without in our lives. No one person can fill all these rolls.

First, you need a **BUILDER** friend in your life who invests in you and challenges you to personal and professional growth.

Second, you need a **CHAMPION** friend who stands up for you and sings your praises.

Third, you need a **COLLABORATOR** friend with similar interests that you can work on projects together.

Fourth, you need a **COMPANION** friend who is always there for you, through thick and thin. They're your emergency contact, the first person you call in a crisis. They've got your back.

Fifth, you need a **CONNECTOR** friend who is a bridge that brings people together. Connectors point you in the right direction, they make things happen.

Sixth, you need an **ENERGIZER** who gives you a boost and fresh wind in your sails. They're fun and help you relax, breathe deep, and laugh.

Seventh, you need a **MIND OPENER** who expands your horizons, stretches you, and helps you embrace new ideas and see the world in a new way. They're the innovators who bring change.

Finally, you need a **NAVIGATOR** who keeps you focused and single-minded and on track. Navigators help guide you through the choppy and troubled waters of life.

The spiritual practice of friendship has the power to transform our families, our workplace, our church, our neighborhood, our nation, and our world into kinder places. But the spirituality of friendship is something you don't hear about much these days. *But this wasn't always so.*

In the early Celtic church—there was a special name given to friends: *Anam Cara*, which means "soul friend."

For Celtic Christianity, friendship is a vital component of spiritual growth. Soul friends bring the best out of you.

In fact, God is our Divine *Anam Cara*—our Divine Soul Friend who walks by our side throughout our lives. God called Abraham his friend. Jesus said to the disciples, "Behold, I call you my friends."

This morning I want to focus on two vital soul friends we need in our lives from our Scripture reading.

Like David, we need an *Issachar* and a *Zebulun* in our lives.

An *Issachar* is a loyal friend who has an understanding of the times and knows what ought to be done. An *Issachar* is a **MIND OPENER**.

A *Zebulun* is a loyal friend who helps us keep a singleness of purpose in our lives. A *Zebulun* is a **NAVIGATOR**.

Recently Hans Rosling, a Swedish medical doctor and professor of public health, has been an Issachar for me. His new book *Factfulness* is one of the most jaw-dropping, eye-opening and mind-blowing books I've ever read in my life. I commend *Factfulness* to you.

Hans Rosling gives a test in his book that I want to give all of you to see how well you know the times and the world we live in. If you can get out your No. 2 pencils, that would be great. I want you to keep track of how you do.

Are you ready?

1. In all low-income countries across the world today, how many girls finish primary school?
 - a. 20%
 - b. 40%
 - c. 60%

2. Where does the majority of the world population live?
 - a. Low-income countries
 - b. Middle-income countries
 - c. High-income countries

3. In the last 20 years, the proportion of the world population living in extreme poverty has
 - a. Almost doubled
 - b. Remained more or less the same
 - c. Almost cut in half

4. What is the life expectancy of the world today?
 - a. 50 years old
 - b. 60 years old
 - c. 70 years old

5. There are 2 billion children in the world today, aged 0-15 years old. How many children will there be in 2100, according to the United Nations?
 - a. 4 billion
 - b. 3 billion
 - c. 2 billion

6. How did the number of deaths per year from natural disasters change over the last 100 years?
 - a. More than doubled
 - b. Remained about the same
 - c. Decreased to less than half

7. How many of the world's 1-year-old children today have been vaccinated against some disease?
 - a. 20%
 - b. 50%
 - c. 80%
8. Worldwide, 30-year-old men have spent 10 years in school, on average. How many years have women of the same age spent in school?
 - a. 9 years
 - b. 6 years
 - c. 3 years
9. In 1996, tigers, giant pandas, and black rhinos were all listed as endangered. How many of these three species are more critically endangered today?
 - a. 2 of them
 - b. 1 of them
 - c. None of them
10. How many people in the world have some access to electricity?
 - a. 20%
 - b. 50%
 - c. 80%
11. Global experts believe that, over the next 100 years, the average temperature will...
 - a. Get warmer
 - b. Remain the same
 - c. Get colder

OK, are you ready to see how you did?

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How did you do? I did terrible when I first took it.

Medical students, teachers, university lecturers, eminent scientists, investment bankers, journalists, activists, and politicians have taken this test—and the majority get most of the answers wrong.

Our world desperately needs an Issachar. We need to understand the times and what to do. I think today Issachar would remind us to follow the Bible's most repeated command: *be not afraid*. God's got the whole world in his hands.

Believers do not need to be gripped by or paralyzed by fear. Our friend Issachar reminds us to be learners. To seek to understand what's really going in the world. To do this, we've got to upgrade our outdated and distorted world views. To seek first to understand before being understood takes humility. To admit maybe we don't have all the answers.

Listening to our friend Issachar keeps us curious, learning, humble, and open for such a time as this. We're not too quick to blame, and we take thoughtful and informed steps of action and faith. We look for causes, not villains.

Yes, things are bad in the world, *but they're also getting better at the same time*. This is not what the media is telling us—no matter what news channel you follow.

To me—this is inspiring. It's a call to hope to continue engaging in mission, evangelism, and humanitarian work. We're making a difference. Not everything is gloom and doom, like the news tells us 24-7. With God, there's hope. Let's keep up the good work!

Of course there are dangers out there—we can't be naïve or complacent. These are the six global risks Hans Rosling says we should be concerned about:

**possibility of WW3*

**global pandemic*

**another worldwide financial crisis*

**climate change*

**extreme poverty*

**and also the unknown—a "black swan" that we have no idea about.*

But with faith in God, we can be at peace. We can trust.

First, the Issachars out there remind us our irrational fears can be calmed and our energies can be refocused on constructive activities. We can make better decisions, be alert to real dangers, and avoid being needlessly stressed out—on a global and individual level—in all areas of life.

Secondly, we need our friend Zebulun—who helped King David and us with singleness of purpose. We can't do this alone.

In the Buddhist tradition, there is what's called a *Kalyana-Mitra*, or a "*Noble Friend*." Your Noble Friend will be honest with you—about your strengths and your weaknesses.

Just as we have a blind spot in our retina, so we have a blind spot in our soul. Our Kalyana-Mitra, our Noble Friend will help us see what we cannot see in ourselves. And we do the same for our friend. We can help each other stay true to ourselves and our calling. To live life whole-heartedly and single-heartedly.

I'd like to close with a *Celtic Friendship Blessing* written by [John O'Donahue](#).

I'm praying this over you and your families. I'm praying this over Immanuel and the city of Tucson. I'm praying this over our world. We need God's help to transfigure our fiends into friends.

May you be blessed with good friends.

May you learn to be a good friend to yourself.

May you be able to journey to that place in your soul where there is great love, warmth, feeling, and forgiveness.

May this change you.

May it transfigure that which is negative, distant, and cold in you.

May you be brought in to the real passion, kinship, and affinity of belonging.

May you treasure your friends.

May you be good to them and may you be there for *them*; may they bring you all the blessing, challenges, truth, and light that you need for your journey.

May you never be isolated.

May you always be in the gentle nest of belonging with your *anam cara*—your soul friend.

Amen.

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