

Imagine that tonight God appears to you in a dream and says, **Ask for whatever you want me to give you” (1 Kings 3:5)?** What would you ask for?¹ If we could take a poll and collect all the answers in the room right now I think that one of the top answers would be: “Let the pandemic be over.” And that would be a good answer. That’s something that I ask God for. But we should also recognize that in a fallen world new problems always replace old ones. And so what we need is something to help us navigate the many challenges of this life.

As king, Solomon would face many difficult challenges. In those days the king also functioned as a judge. He would hear cases and have to give decisions. Later in this same chapter Solomon was presented with a difficult case. Two women came before the king. They lived in the same house and they both had babies three days apart. And one of the babies tragically died during the night. Both women claimed that the living child was hers. What should the king decide?

Do you have a job where you have to make difficult decisions? If you’re in charge of a business you need to make decisions about how to serve your customers safely. If you’re in charge of a school, you need to make decisions about how to reopen safely. If you’re in the leadership of a church, you need to make decisions about how to serve people’s souls while at the same time keeping them safe. And you don’t need to be in a leadership position to be presented with difficult decisions. Should I go into a public place or should I not? We’re starting to see why Solomon asked for wisdom and why we should too. In this passage I’d like to point out four characteristics of true wisdom.

First, wisdom is humble. Solomon was humble. He says, **“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” (3:7).** Solomon recognized the importance of the job of being king. He also recognized how inexperienced he was. And that made him humble. Have you ever felt like Solomon? Maybe you’re a parent and you recognize the importance of the job that God has given you to do, but you also recognize your inexperience. It’s actually good to enter into a job with humility and ask God for wisdom.

The second characteristic of wisdom that I would like to point out is that wisdom is discerning. Solomon recognizes his inadequacy and so he asks, **“So give your servant a discerning heart” (3:9).** To discern means to be able to recognize something and distinguish it from other things.² For example, the merchant in Jesus’ parable was able to recognize the valuable pearl and distinguish it from the other pearls that weren’t so valuable. Solomon asks for a discerning heart so that he can **“govern your people and ... distinguish between right and wrong” (3:9).** As we go throughout our lives many times we need to distinguish between right and wrong. God’s Word is the lamp that helps us see clearly what’s right and what’s wrong. The writer to the Hebrews says that **“Solid food (the solid food of God’s Word) is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (Hebrews 5:14).** True wisdom is discerning.

Third, true wisdom is unselfish.³ One commentator pointed out that God’s offer served to bring out what was in Solomon’s heart.⁴ The Lord mentions not only what Solomon asked but also what he *didn’t* ask for. It says, **“The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, ‘Because 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, I will do what you have asked” (3:10-12a).** If God were to say for you or

¹ I owe this question to Jonathan Schroeder, *Planning Christian Worship: Year A*.

² The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, online <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discern>.

³ I owe this third point to Walter A. Maier III, *1 Kings 1-11*, Concordia Commentary, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2018).

⁴ Maier, *1 Kings 1-11*, 368.

me, "Ask for anything you want," what would our answer reveal about our hearts? Our prayer life, what we ask God for, does reveal something about our hearts. Is it possible that in your prayer life and mine there could sometimes be a lopsided focus on earthly things?⁵

When we see the treasure we have in the kingdom of heaven, that puts earthly things in their proper perspective and it makes us unselfish. It makes us unselfish with our possessions. Having the kingdom of heaven also makes us unselfish with our time and with our energy. Solomon recognized the job of being king would be difficult. He would have to make many difficult decisions. But he wanted to do it because they were God's people. **"Your servant is here among *the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So 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?" (3:8-9).*** I think of our church leaders who serve on the church council. Serving on the church council is a sacrifice of time and energy. Sometimes you have to make difficult decisions. But they do it because they love God and his people. I also think of Christian parents. God has entrusted these children to us. And we ask for wisdom so that we can be good parents. I also think about Christian spouses. God has put me into the life of my spouse to be a blessing to her. God has put me into the life of my neighbor to be a blessing to them. True wisdom is unselfish.

Finally, true wisdom trusts God's promises. Before he made his request King Solomon mentioned his father David. He says, **"You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David" (3:6).** David was the youngest of eight brothers. And God took him from watching the sheep and made him ruler over all Israel. And God made a promise to David that his son would succeed him as king. And God kept his promise by making his son Solomon king. **"You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day" (3:6).**

But there was more to God's promise to David. God promised David that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). King Solomon was a picture who pointed forward to Jesus. Among ordinary humans, Solomon was the wisest man to ever live. God said, **"there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be" (1 Kings 3:12).** But Jesus is not an ordinary human. Jesus is God in human flesh. The book of Colossians says that **"In Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9).**⁶ And **"In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).** In Christ God showed his greatest wisdom, when Christ died on the cross for your sins and mine (1 Corinthians 1). Solomon was a great king, but he pointed forward to a greater King, King Jesus. He came the first time to take away our sins. He'll come the second time to bring us to his heavenly kingdom. As we navigate the challenges and difficulties of this life, we know that we have a king who is coming. And when he comes, he will make all things right. True wisdom trusts God's promises.

One last thing about wisdom. Wisdom is from God. God gives it. Solomon asks, **"So give your servant a discerning heart" (3:9).** And God says, **"I will give you a wise and discerning heart" (3:11).** If we are to have wisdom, God needs to give it. And we know that he is pleased with this request. **"The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this" (1 Kings 3:10).** And so we confidently asked God for wisdom. May he grant it to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

⁵ I owe this insight to Jonathan Schroeder, *Planning Christian Worship: Year A*.

⁶ Maier, p. 371.