

9.19.21 Solomon - What Does Wise Living Look Like? 1 Kings 3.5-15
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Who or what comes to mind when you hear the word wisdom? If I asked you to define the word, “wise,” what would you say? You might say responding sensibly or shrewdly to a particular situation or demonstrating good judgment and discernment. Wisdom is more than knowledge or experience; it is **knowledge applied to life**. Do you know anyone you consider wise? I don’t mean someone who has a lot of knowledge about a particular subject or who has a lot of educational degrees. Do you know someone who is **wise**? How do you know she or he is wise? What is it about someone’s life that causes you to reach that conclusion?

A person in the Bible some people associate with wisdom or being wise is Solomon. The story of his reign as king is found in the book of 1 Kings. Next month, we’ll turn to a section of the Hebrew Bible known as the Wisdom Literature which includes books like Job, Psalm, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. The latter two are associated with Solomon. While some people think of “The wisdom of Solomon,” he made a lot of unwise decisions. Today we’re going to look briefly at his life in the book of 1 Kings and see the consequences of choosing wisely or poorly. The reality of life is the more power, authority, or responsibility a person has, the greater the impact of his or her making wise or foolish choices. Choosing wisely or foolishly can make or break a life, a family, a business, a church, an organization, or a nation. I suspect most of us would rather be known for being wise than being a fool, so that’s why it’s wise to learn from those who have gone before us, so we don’t repeat their mistakes.

The book of the Bible we’re in this week is 1 Kings and it’s about (shockingly) **kings and political history** from the death of King David (chapters 1-2) and the enthronement and reign of King Solomon (chapters 3-11) through the reigns of **the terrible king Ahab in Israel (the northern kingdom) and Jehoshaphat of Judah in the south** (chapters 12-22). **While the subject is political history, the theme is the moral and religious failure** that led to the loss of national identity and freedom (see 2 Kings 25). Each king is evaluated by how well he put God first and oversaw God’s temple in Jerusalem – or more usually – how he failed in this responsibility. **Political and social turmoil, and national defeat resulted from these failures.**

1 Kings spends the most time telling the story of Solomon's glory and his subsequent downfall that came from **failing to obey and follow the God of Israel**. This leads to a divided nation that splits into two weaker kingdoms that fall even farther from God's ways. It is only the voice of prophets like **Elijah** and a few others who continue to emphasize **the importance of being devoted to God**.

The setting for today's scripture from 1 Kings is an unsettled time of political turmoil within the nation and threats beyond the borders. Before King David dies two of his sons **Adonijah and Solomon** are working the angles politically, militarily, and spiritually to position themselves to be next on the throne. Solomon and his supporters, including his mother Bathsheba, and the prophet Nathan, win the approval of King David. In a classic case of be careful what you wish for, you just might get it, soon after receiving his father's blessing, the weight of leading a nation began pressing down on Solomon's young shoulders. It isn't a surprise that he was having trouble sleeping and was dreaming. Listen to **1 Kings 3:5-15 (NIV)**,

"At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon **during the night in a dream**, and God said, **"Ask for whatever you want me to give you."**

Solomon 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. Now, O 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. **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**?"*

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had **asked** for this. So 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, I 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. 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. **And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.***” Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream.

He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the Lord’s covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.”

In Solomon’s dream, God said, **“Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”** Can you imagine God asking you that question? If you could ask God for anything, what would you ask God for? You might wish for an endless supply of the very best food, or to be married to someone you love and desire who would love and desire you. You might ask to be rich, powerful, artistic, musical, athletic, articulate, attractive, or successful. You might ask to be an instrument of change, to accomplish something important, to make the world a better place, to be respected, or to go down in history. Perhaps you’d wish for something for someone other than yourself such as health or life for a loved one who is sick or who has died. The choices are endless.

Solomon has a dream and he got to ask God for anything – what an opportunity, a responsibility, and a risk. What you would ask God for is very telling, it reveals your value system. Solomon doesn’t ask for long life, wealth, power, or the death of his enemies (perhaps because he’s killed many of them already, motivating others to flee to the safety of other nations (see 1 Kings 11:14, 24, 26). As nasty, negative, and depressing as politics are today in our country, it’s not yet as bad as what Solomon was involved with when he came to power. His father David, on his death bed, told him to kill two people to avenge old wrongs, including Joab who had been David’s commander in chief (see 1 Kings 2:6 and 9 - Joab and Shimei). Solomon’s not only vies with his older brother Adonijah for power, but he also orders his death (1 Kings 2:13-25).

Now Solomon must lead in uncertain and precarious times, and he needed the same thing that you and I need today and that’s **wisdom. Solomon asked for a discerning heart of wisdom that he might lead the people with justice.** This is admirable.

Spiritually speaking, wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life. Wisdom is skill in the art of living with each aspect of your life under God’s guidance and direction. When God gives you wisdom, then you’re to use it. Put

another way, **when God gives it, you live it**. Solomon was given a wise and discerning heart and he tends to be remembered positively however he didn't live wisely. He married so many women who worshipped other gods his heart was led astray. This was a key factor that led to internal dissent that would result in splitting the country. In addition, high taxes, huge debt, and forced labor to work on royal building projects, also led to growing domestic dissatisfaction. Meanwhile the threat of attack from Egypt was growing and not addressed well. When God gives wisdom, you must live it, heed it, and follow it. Solomon sadly, did not.

Ironically, Proverbs is a book full of practical wisdom, much of it attributed to Solomon. **Proverbs 1:7** says, ***"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction."*** Solomon got in trouble when he began fearing what his wives would say more than pleasing the Lord and he neglected what God had told him. Proverbs warns (**Proverbs 11:2, 13:10, 16:22, 19:8, 24:14**).

*"When pride comes then comes disgrace, but **wisdom** is with the **humble**.*

Wisdom is with those who **take advice**.

Wisdom is a **fountain of life** to one who has it. To get **wisdom** is to **love oneself**; to keep understanding is to prosper. Know that **wisdom** is such to your soul; if you find it, you will find **a future, and your hope will not be cut off.**"

God gives wisdom, guidance, and direction about how to live, but it's up to you to apply it and live it.

Jesus' life was marked by many things and one of them is **wisdom**. People were drawn to him in part because he was so wise. We learn in **Luke 2:40, 52** that when he was a boy, he, *"grew and became strong, **filled with wisdom**, and the favor of God was upon him. **And Jesus increased in wisdom** and in years, and in divine and human favor."* **Jesus was filled with and increased in wisdom**. He read and learned the scriptures, he lived wisely. Jesus criticized the people of his time pointing out how people came from all over to **hear the wisdom of Solomon (Luke 11:31)** but *"something greater than Solomon is here!"* Jesus is the wise and faithful king, the one who the prophet Isaiah said would be filled with (**Isaiah 11:2**), ***"the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."***

As eager as he was to have power, Solomon felt overwhelmed by his responsibility as king. You also may feel overwhelmed at times that you don't have the wisdom you need, or you may lack the ability to follow through on what you know is right. What can you do about that? **James 1:5** tells us, ***"If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you."*** God is happy to help us live lives marked by wisdom, love, and justice.

I asked in the beginning how you can tell when your life or someone else's is marked by the wisdom of God or not? **James 3:14-18** gives us a clear way to **distinguish the presence or absence of wisdom from above**. *"But if you have **bitter envy and selfish ambition** in your hearts, do not be **boastful and false to the truth**. Such **wisdom** does not come down **from above**, but is **earthly, unspiritual, devilish**. For where there is **envy and selfish ambition**, there will also be **disorder and wickedness of every kind**. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in **peace** for those who make **peace**."*

Wisdom is about making good choices about who or what you worship, follow, or listen to, what you do with your life, what you do in countless situations each day, what you will look at, what you will dwell on, how you use your energy and time and what your priorities will be. Where you struggle, ask God for help. In Matthew's story about the birth of Jesus, what kind of people came looking for the baby? Wise men. Wise people are still seeking Jesus because we see in his life something we'd like in our own. Sometimes in stressing the divinity of Jesus we miss the truth that Jesus was appealing in part because he was so wise, he was so **skilled in the art of living with each aspect of his life under God's guidance and direction**. Jesus sought God's wisdom constantly and what God gave he lived and shared with others.

For part of my first two years at Colby College, I ran at 6:00 am every morning with my friend Hall Adams who was in United States Marine Corps Officer training. When he was a senior and I was a sophomore, he was the Head Resident of a large residence hall, and I was one of his Resident Assistants. He gave me a copy of a picture for the door of my room. The image was of John Wayne as Sgt. John Stryker in

the World War Two era film about the US Marines called *The Sands of Iwo Jima*. Next to the image was the quote from the film, ***“Life is tough. It’s tougher if you’re stupid.”*** I don’t mean to be ungracious or unkind in saying that, but it’s true. Hall’s purpose in having this on our doors was to send a message to the students in our dorm to be smart and not to make stupid choices that would be harmful or detrimental because make life tougher on ourselves and those around us when we make stupid, foolish choices instead of wise, godly ones. That is simply a fact.

The progress of your life is shaped significantly by the choices you make each day. Will I do my homework or not? Will I exercise or not? Will I read the Bible or something instructive that will help me grow or not? Will I eat this or that? Will I watch this or that? Life demands that we make many, many choices every day. Every single choice you make is shaping who you are and who you are becoming. Each choice makes you better, or worse, more like Jesus, or less. **Wisdom is the ability to make godly choices in life.** When God gives it, live it.

Learn the lesson that Solomon didn’t. When you fail to live wisely the consequences are painful. The more responsibility a person has, the more people are impacted by your wise or foolish living, the higher the stakes in the choices you make. The greater the level of one’s leadership; the wider and deeper the impact of our choices. Solomon’s decisions would have dire consequences for God’s people for generations to come. Not only your own life, but your family, your friends, your church, the cause of Christ and the greater good in the world are all impacted positively or negatively by the choices you make every day.

Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount by telling everyone who listened, you’re wise if you do what I’ve said, you’re like a man who built his house on a rock, but if you hear my words and don’t do them, you’re a fool, you’re building your life on sand. Paul describes Jesus in **1 Corinthians 1:24** as ***“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*** We’re wise to learn from him.

Prayer “Give us, O Lord,
Steadfast hearts, which no unworthy thought can drag downwards;
Unconquered hearts, which no tribulation can wear out;
Upright hearts, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside.

Bestow upon us also, O Lord God,
 Understanding to know you, Diligence to seek you, **Wisdom to find you**,
 And a faithfulness that may finally embrace you,
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen” *Thomas a Kempis, 15th Century*

The Serenity Prayer

God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed,
 Courage to change the things that should be changed,
 And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. Reinhold Niebuhr

Blessing: Now may our hearts be encouraged and united in love, so that we may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ himself, **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**”
 Adapted from Colossians 2:2-3

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. In Solomon’s dream, God said, “*Ask for whatever you want me to give you.*” If you could ask God for anything, what would you ask God for? Why?
2. In the sermon, wisdom is defined as “*the ability to make godly choices in life.*” How would you define wisdom in your own words?
3. How would you describe the difference between “knowledge” and “wisdom?” Is it possible to be very knowledgeable and yet not very wise? How or why does that happen?
4. The greater the level of your leadership; the wider and deeper the impact of your choices. Solomon asked for wisdom, but looking at his life, do you think he lived wisely? If not, where did he go wrong? What mistake(s) did he make and what consequences resulted?
5. What guidance does James 3:14-17 provide for evaluating when our life or someone else’s is marked by the wisdom of God? What does “the wisdom from above” look like?
6. Do you think it’s important to live wisely? If so, how do you try to do that? What role do faithfulness and integrity have in living wisely? What can you learn from Solomon’s experience to help you?