



If God showed up in your life and offered to fulfill any request, what would you ask for? World peace? Happiness? Good health? Of course, an offer like that would only make sense if the person making the offer actually had the resources to provide whatever it is you ask for.

Back in 2005 there was a TV program called *Three Wishes* that actually went to small towns across America and chose individuals to receive one thing they wanted more than anything else in life. The producers of the show said money was no object, which may explain why the show was canceled after only one season: making wishes come true can be very expensive! But what if the one asking that question actually had infinite resources?

In 1 Kings 3 God comes to Solomon and says, *“Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”* There’s an offer from One who really can deliver! But something I’ve been wondering about is why God would make such an offer? Was it just an expression of love? What if Solomon asked for something bad; something contrary to God’s nature? Would God have given it to him? It seems to me there was a deeper purpose in this question.

Whenever you see God asking questions of people, there’s a deeper purpose. Throughout the Bible, the Lord asks penetrating questions so we can search our own hearts. After Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God and God called out to them, *“Where are you?”* Did he ask that because he didn’t know where they were? At the very start of Jesus’ ministry, when two future disciples were first introduced to Jesus and began to follow him, he turned to them and asked, *“What do you want?”* (Jn 1:38). That question must have forced them to probe their own heart, *“What do we want?”* So when the Lord said to Solomon, *“Ask for whatever you want me to give you,”* he was probing Solomon’s heart. *“Solomon, what’s important to you? What’s your goal in life? What are you aiming at?”*

Have you ever asked yourself that question? What’s important to you? What do you want out of life?

I believe for Solomon in particular this was a crucial question. Remember, Solomon had just been established as the new king of Israel. He was probably around 20 years old. His father, David, had just died after leaving him with a final charge: *“Be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires...”* (2:2). David had left his son a rich heritage. David had defeated all of Israel’s enemies so when Solomon came to the throne there

was no one left to fight. It’s no wonder his name comes from the Hebrew word *shalom* (peace). He also inherited a great deal of wealth. David spent 40 years amassing a huge fortune to be used for the temple and in other ways. Most importantly, Solomon had received a rich spiritual heritage from his father. David loved the Lord and had deep insight into the nature of God. All of this was passed on to Solomon.

Some of you can relate to Solomon. You’ve been the recipient of a rich heritage. Your parents and grandparents fought and won battles you’ll never have to fight. Maybe you have parents who loved and served the Lord and modeled that and passed that on to you. There are others here who didn’t have that. I didn’t have that but now I have the opportunity to pass that on to my children and grandchildren. But here’s the thing to remember: it’s not what you have that matters; it’s what you do with what you have. You don’t have to go any further than 1 and 2 Kings to see that. There were kings who received a great heritage from their parents but did nothing with it; they actually went in the other direction. But there were also kings who received nothing by way of faith from their parents, but ended up to be great men of God.

Warning Signs

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. The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the Lord. Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar (verses 1–4).

So what did Solomon do with what he had been given? In the first four verses we see the kind of young man he was. Notice a few things about Solomon. Notice first he loved the Lord. He even demonstrated his love for the Lord by walking in the instructions his father David had given him. He also worshipped the Lord. In v. 4 we’re even told how he went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices to God and offered no less than 1,000 burnt offerings. Imagine the

cost and the labor involved in sacrificing that many animals to God! Even in his prayer, which we'll look at in a minute, we see how his love for the Lord was expressed in a heart of gratitude and humility for all the kindness that God had shown him.

But, as much as he loved the Lord, there were some early warning signs in Solomon's life that reveal his love wasn't wholehearted. The traditional view of Solomon's life is he started well and finished poorly. In this view it wasn't until the end of his life his heart turned away from God. But here we see that isn't entirely true. Early on he showed a divided heart.

The first warning sign was that he married Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh was the king of Egypt. The whole purpose of such a marriage was to make a political alliance. This was problematic in several ways. We have no reason to think this woman had faith in the God of Israel, so this is what we call an unequal yoke. God has always warned his people not to intermarry with those of different faiths (Ex. 34:15–16; Dt. 7:1–4). In the second half of his life, this was his downfall. 1 Kings 11 says, "*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter... As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods...*" (1 Kings 11:1, 4). This was also a problem because God wanted his people to trust in him and not try to find security by aligning themselves with other nations, especially their ancient nemesis, Egypt.

But there was another warning sign. It has to do with the way he worshipped. Notice in v. 1 several building projects are mentioned. It says Solomon would build the Temple of the Lord, but before that it mentions he'd also build his own palace. Later, we'll see how he spent more time and money on his own house than he did on God's house. And notice how it says the people were still worshipping at the high places because the Temple was yet to be built. The high places were the sites the Canaanites worshipped idols. God didn't want his people to have any part in that. Solomon knew that but in v. 3 it says he also worshipped at the high places. In v. 4 we see him worshipping at a high place called Gibeon. That's where the tabernacle was located. But years earlier, David had brought the ark to Jerusalem, and until the temple was built, Solomon should have worshiped there.

What we really see here is from very early in his reign Solomon had a divided heart. Solomon is like so many of us. We love the Lord, but our hearts are divided. We cling to something else. We're like the young man who loves the Lord, but he watches a little porn on the side. Or like the executive who loves the Lord, but he tolerates unethical practices in his business. Or like any one of us when we say we love the Lord, but we cling desperately to something in our life which we know God doesn't want us to have.

Dave Roper tells a story of finding his 3-year-old son, Joshua, wrestling with Kelly, their black Lab. He had his arms wrapped around her with his face pressed into her side. The dog would usually put up with this for a bit, but when she had enough, she'd turn around and nip him. Joshua knew that, but he kept doing it. One day he was squeezing her when Dave came by and heard him say with his eyes squeezed shut, "Dear God, please don't let Kelly bite me!"

That's so much the way we are. We cling to something we know is going to bite us, and we say, "Lord, don't let it bite us!" "Lord, I love you, but I love something else, too. It's very important to me and I have to cling to it."

So to me it's no surprise that the Lord came to Solomon at this time and asked this penetrating question.

The Gift of Wisdom

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" (v. 5).

It's not all that unusual, especially in the Old Testament, for God to reveal important information in a dream. I think of Joseph, Daniel and even Peter in the book of Acts. What's unusual about this dream is it involves a two-way conversation between God and Solomon.

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, 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?" (verses 6–9).

Solomon responds to God's offer in verses 6–9. Once again, you can see Solomon's prayer reveals he knows and loves God. He recognizes God's "kindness" to his father, David. That word points to God's loyal, covenant love. We know David wasn't perfect, but notice how he describes him as "*righteous and upright of heart.*" David was so flawed, but he had an enormous heart for God. On one occasion David said what the one thing was that he'd ask for. "*One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple*" (Psalm 27:4). David did a lot of stupid things, but

his passion in life was simply to know God and to be with him. Solomon remembers that here.

Solomon also reveals his own humility. He knows he has an immense task before him: to lead God's chosen people, a people too numerous to count. He recognizes he's like a "little child" who doesn't know what he's doing. When God calls you to do something, it will usually be something you feel inadequate for. You see that all over the Bible. You see it in Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah. Beware of those times when you think you have what it takes. Paul wrote, *"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God"* (2 Cor 3:5).

So Solomon asks for a *"discerning heart to distinguish right from wrong"* in order to fulfill his duties as king. Traditionally this is known as Solomon's request for wisdom. What is wisdom? Wisdom is not just an understanding of truth, it's not just head knowledge; wisdom is the capacity to relate truth to practical experience; to be able to discern right and wrong in the everyday situations in life. Wisdom helps a young person know who to marry, as well as how to live with that person all through life. Wisdom helps a couple know how to raise a family. Wisdom helps us know how to use our money. Wisdom teaches us how to both work and play. Wisdom is the skill of how to get along with others. James wrote the *"wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"* (James 3:17).

We all need wisdom to live well. But where do we get it? This story shows us wisdom comes from God. But there's something to understand here about what Solomon actually says: *"So give your servant a discerning heart..."* That word *discerning* actually means "hearing" or "listening." He asks for a hearing heart, a heart that listens to God. You see, what makes us wise is listening to the Lord and to his Word. Solomon was a smart guy, but apart from God's Word he was helpless. He needed to listen to the Word so he could rule on that basis. That's where true wisdom comes from.

The prophet Isaiah understood this. He wrote, *"The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary."* Do you want to know how to have a word that sustains the weary? Do you want to have a well-instructed tongue? The key is in what he says next: *"He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away"* (Is 50:4–5). Do you want to be able to say the right things to people in need? Then you need a hearing ear. You can't rebel against what God says. You must listen to the Word and let it instruct you. That was to be the basis of Solomon's wisdom.

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 wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life" (verses 10–14).

How do you think God felt about Solomon's request? God is pleased and gives Solomon not only an abundance of wisdom but a bonus as well—great wealth and honor. And if he faithfully obeys God's commands, he'll give him a long life as well. It's like what Jesus said, *"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you..."* (Mt 6:33).

Remember, all this took place in a dream. The story closes with what Solomon did after he awoke.

Then Solomon awoke—and he realized it had been a dream. Lord's covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court (v. 15).

The great thing about this is this encounter seemed to have an immediate impact on him. He returns to Jerusalem and he worships in the place and in the way he's supposed to. No more high places, at least for now.

What Can We Learn From This Story?

Let me try to summarize what we can learn from this story. Here are four life lessons we can learn.

First of all, God graciously and relentlessly pursues us even when our hearts are divided. As I said, God makes this offer to Solomon as a way of getting him to search his own heart. What do you really want? What's most important to you? Maybe the Lord is asking you the same questions this morning. Maybe you love the Lord but you love other things just as much. Thankfully, we serve a God who loves us enough to pursue us, even when our hearts are divided.

Second, when we allow the seeds of sin to germinate in our hearts for long, they'll eventually take over. This was the story of Solomon's life. Early in his life we see the seeds of not doing things God's way. Later in life, these things were his downfall. Most often, the little seeds we sow now don't seem like that big of a deal, but they will eventually ruin our relationship with God. What seeds are you allowing to germinate in your heart? Will you repent of those and take time to deal with them today?

Third, wisdom is an infinitely valuable gift from God. How important to you is the pursuit of Godly wisdom? You don't acquire wisdom innately; no one is born wise. You don't acquire it by reading a lot of books and having a lot of knowledge. You don't acquire wisdom just by getting older. Woody Allen, who in his sixties married his stepdaughter, later admitted that age hadn't brought wisdom. He said, "I've gained no wisdom, no insight, no mellowing. I would make all the same mistakes again, today." So how do you get wisdom? You get it by asking God for a heart that listens and heeds his Word. James wrote, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him"*** (Jms 1:5).

Finally, the wisest thing we can do is pursue a relationship with Jesus Christ. We have a Savior who is ***"greater than Solomon."*** Scripture says he's ***"the wisdom from God"*** and in him are

"hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (1 Cor 1:24; Col 2:3). His wisdom is more perfect and lasting than Solomon's wisdom because he never gave into temptation like Solomon did. Sometimes the wisdom of God seems like foolishness to us. Think of the cross. The cross of Christ seems like foolishness to the world, but it's the wisdom of God for our salvation. However foolish it may seem, this wisdom brings forgiveness and eternal life to all who believe.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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