

1st Kings 3:7-9

7 And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. 9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

Solomon was probably hoping for divine revelation and had arranged a great sacrifice to the Lord and remained overnight in a high place. He needed great wisdom in order to rule. Solomon shows modesty and insight as the Old Testament reveals wisdom comes from God.

When I was a small child, I sat on the back stoop in Roanoke looking up at the white star on top of Mill Mountain. It changed to red whenever there was an accidental death in the community. I marveled at the star, contemplated the finality of death and had unanswered questions about God. I spent a considerable amount of time sitting there alone and reflecting on my discovery of God. I enjoyed sitting there away from the drama of being in a dysfunctional family. Too young to understand the kind of things that adults were unable or unwilling to explain, I prayed for peace and wisdom. Now I know a young child only needs an introduction to God. They just need to know that God exists and God loves them. As we grow we become more receptive and understand things of theology more clearly.

Solomon's reign is presented as a golden age of wealth, peace, and prosperity. Like his father King David, he loved the Lord. His desire was to live up to his father's devotion. While he was worshiping the Lord, he prayed for wisdom. He did so because he was young and inexperienced, he desired to care for the Lord's people, and he desired to know and please God. In the text, Solomon asks and God gives. Kings back then claimed special divine favor. Solomon wanted skill to govern for the welfare of the people. Solomon alludes to the past relationship and covenant loyalty between a faithful David and a God that keeps promises. His prayer for discerning wisdom was unselfish. What he wanted was not for himself. He wanted wisdom to better serve God. This pleases God and Solomon was rewarded with discerning wisdom. Wisdom is in a realm beyond knowledge. Wisdom knows what to do with the knowledge. His request is specific – to discern what is right – to calculate the many variables and make correct judgment. God granted Solomon wisdom and Solomon became an insightful problem solver devoted to God. Solomon had a long and prosperous reign of honor, glory, power, and success.

There is a condition placed on God's benevolence. God warns Solomon with the key word "if." Watch out for that transitional word when it appears in the Bible, the word "if" means a conditional element to the equation; a set of circumstances that is based on another. God says to Solomon "if you will walk in my ways." This is the exact same condition as given many times before to the whole nation and biblical heroes. God essentially says if you walk in my ways you will be OK. God instructs Solomon to keep the commandments and stay devoted like his father King David did. Solomon worshiped God, stood before the Ark of the Covenant, offered burnt offerings, and provided a feast

for all of his servants. The most famous story of wisdom occurs when two women each had a baby of the same gender and age. One baby died and the mother switched babies. The case is presented to King Solomon for resolution. He orders to cut the baby in half and give half to each mother. He knew that the true mother would give up her baby so that the baby could live. This is gross to think about but it is real.

In that time and place the marriages of ancient kings were made specifically for foreign policy. The problem Solomon ran into was not intentional transgression. He started off good, faithful, aiming to please God, and never intended to stray. His problem was women but it is much more complex than that. His problem was a common biblical problem as well as a common contemporary problem. It was a problem of greed and selfish ambition. God also rewarded Solomon with prosperity and wealth as he married into prosperous political marriage. It is because of his selfish desires that he allowed women to influence him. His many foreign wives enticed him to worship their false gods. He let his lust for women, wealth, and power lead him astray to embrace their religious practices. He had 700 wives primarily for political alliances and 300 concubines. The women worshiped foreign gods and persuaded him to do the same. His downfall is attributed to these pursuits as it cost him God's favor.

Unfortunately, Solomon failed to pray for tenacity and the discipline to remain faithful. Tenacity is extremely important in our faith. He should have remained faithful to the one true God during times of prosperity and use his power to influence and convince others around him to turn to God. He lost focus by the distractions of daily living. That is our lesson. Do not lose focus by allowing the distractions of daily living to dilute the potency of our devotion. God reminds people repeatedly of the importance of remaining devoted.