

THE GIFT OF WISDOM  
1 KINGS 3:5-12

You are granted one wish, what would you ask for? It might be something for yourself: success, wealth, the trappings of power, health and a long life, or something else? Or your wish might be for someone else: your children, your spouse, your parents and you might wish the same things for them!

Be careful what ask for: know story from Greek legend of king Midas? He was given one wish and wished that everything he touched would turn to gold – it was a mark of his greed! He was granted his wish and everything he touched turned to gold; it was fun to begin with - he touched a stone and it turned to gold, then an oak twig and it turned to gold. Then he went back to his palace and ordered his servants to set the table for a feast to celebrate his new-found power. But then, he discovered that this was a mixed blessing: he could eat nothing because as soon as he touched his food it turned to gold. Even worse, his daughter came to see him and he touched her and she turned to gold as well. Be careful what you wish for!

Solomon was given that kind of wish. It came when he was visiting Gibeon, the place of worship in Israel; it came in a dream: “Ask for...” (v5) God gave Solomon this one wish. What one thing would Solomon ask for? Before we see look at his answer, we need to see kind of person that Solomon was; this is not just a history lesson, but is a story from which we can learn for our lives. Like every person Solomon was a mixture of good things and questionable things:

What was good about Solomon?

**1. He loved God:** “*Solomon showed...*” (v3a) Solomon had learned from his father to love God; he understood something of God’s goodness and kindness to him and his family and so at heart of his being, he loved the Lord.

**2. He worshipped God:** he came to Gibeon with thousands of offerings because he wanted to give worship, glory, and honour to God; he knew something of the greatness and kindness of God and paid tribute to God in worship.

What was questionable about Solomon?

**1. he married Pharaoh’s daughter** that might have seemed a good idea politically, to make an alliance with one of the strongest armies on the planet at the time; but it was not as good as it seemed; later we find that Solomon married other foreign women and his many wives took his heart away from Lord; chapter 11 tells us that he did not love the Lord as well as he should; his wives became his weakness.

**2. he let the high places stay:** these were pagan shrines in Israel, worshipping gods other than the living God; the people brought offerings to these statues and instead of worshipping only the living God, their worship was mixed; a little bit of the living God and a little bit of pagan worship and Solomon let this continue.

So, he was not the perfect person; like all the rest of us, Solomon had some good bits, and some questionable bits. But to Solomon, God comes with this great offer: “*Ask for...*” (v5) I wonder what you would ask for in his shoes; all kinds of things perhaps, depending on what we think is important. Here is Solomon’s answer: “*I am...*” (v7-9) He knew his weakness; he knew that being king would not be easy, that there would be problems and difficulties that he would need to deal with, that he was young and so he needed to have wisdom so that he could deal with these difficult things, to be able to make right choices, to make good choices. He could have asked for the superficial trappings of kingship: power, money, victories in battle; but instead he asked that God give him wisdom and insight so that he could be right kind of man with right priorities, to be the right kind of king.

“A discerning heart” – literally ‘a heart with the skill to listen’ (New English Bible) God answers his prayer. It is no surprise that the very next story in 1 Kings 3 is all about Solomon’s wisdom, his discerning heart. Two women have babies; one of the babies dies and both women then claim the surviving child as their own. They come to the King to have their dispute resolved. Solomon listens; he listens to what they say, he listens to way they say it and comes up with an answer: the baby is to be divided in two and half given to each woman; he never had any intention of doing such a dreadful thing, but it was his clever way of finding out which is the real mother, which I suspect he already knew. The real mother is more prepared to see her baby live than anything else; she is willing to give her baby up to keep it alive. So the real mother is given her baby back and Solomon’s discerning, listening heart is there for all to see. God answers his prayer; God gave him all that he asked for and much, much more.

I suspect that most of us in Solomon’s shoes wouldn’t be very sure how to pray, not sure what to ask for, or how to respond. There are a whole lot of reasons for that: a lack of confidence in our ability to choose the right things, or to find the right words to pray; we are all too aware of our own faults and weaknesses and who are we to ask big things of God because we are weak, frail, fallible people; perhaps we’re not sure that God answers prayers anyway. Paul writes to the Christians in Rome: “*The Spirit...*” (8:26) God lives in us by His Spirit and the Spirit knows our hearts and puts our feeble prayers into words for God. God has promised to help us pray; the Spirit’s job to take our heart’s desires, and take these to God on our behalf and God will answer our prayers, even if we can’t find words to say.

God has promised to answer our prayers and much more besides. Perhaps this is first time you have read these words in Romans 8; you are totally uncertain about this thing called prayer and not sure how to find right words; well, finding right words doesn’t matter, according to Paul because God does that for us; all we need are right intentions! From there Paul goes on to show us all kinds of ways in which God will bless us with far bigger blessings than we could ever ask. God is for us; God has given us His Son; God will forgive us our sins; then the great climax of these verses: “*For I am...*” (Rom 8:38f) God will love us with love that never ends and from which nothing can separate us; is that not the answer to so many of our prayers and compared to these blessings our prayers are so small; this is what God will give us; how will He not give us everything we need?

‘A heart with the skill to listen’ – that was Solomon’s prayer and God answered him. What does that mean? Well, Solomon had two kinds of listening to do: first of all, he had to listen to God and we’ve already seen that he had begun to do that; Solomon tried to live all of his life in God’s way, though he did not always succeed. Secondly, he was to listen to his people – we’ve seen one evidence of this in the story of the two women; I’m not sure how well he did this later in his life as king; there are plenty of stories of his power and splendour, but not so much about his love and compassion, but his Proverbs and the book of Ecclesiastes show some great insight into life and what life is like and should be like in the real world. Solomon knew the world he lived in, he listened to the people around him and he tried to live life in that real world by faith in and obedience to living God. He listened (in some way at least) to both God and to his people.

There are three kinds of listening we need to do:

**1. Listen to God** God speaks to us, mainly today by the Bible; He tells us what He has done for us so that our faith will be stronger; He tells us what He wants of us so that our life might be better. Only 10% of Christians in Scotland regularly read bible! So how can we listen to God if we ignore way by which He speaks? “The non-

communication between God and us is not because God is either dead or silent, but because we are not listening... Is this not the main cause of the spiritual stagnation we sometimes experience? We have stopped listening to God." (John Stott *The Contemporary Christian* p.105) (Re)Learn to read the bible; take to heart what you read; if you find it hard, use some notes that will help you. We cannot be disciples of Jesus if we don't listen to God.

**2. Listen to one another** Do you know the old story of Mark Twain? "When I was a boy of fourteen, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be twenty-one, I was astonished at how much he had learned in seven years" (Stott p.106) Of course, it was not that at all, but the young man had learned to listen. How good are we at listening to one another, in Church, at home, elsewhere? Listening not just to what people say, but to the way in which people say it because the way people say things tells us so much? Or do we switch off during a conversation and so 5 minutes later we can't actually remember what we've been told, because we're not listening? Learn to listen to one another, even people with whom you disagree in a Session meeting or Bible Study – "listening can be a greater service than speaking." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer quo in Stott p.109)

**3. Listen to the world** "The contemporary world is positively reverberating with cries of anger, frustration and pain. Too often we turn a deaf ear to these anguished voices." (Stott p.110) Do we know what bothers people in our street? Do we know what makes our neighbours angry, or what makes them hurt? Do we know the issues that face our community? Or, as Christians, have we written these other people off because they don't come to Church and not show any interest? Before we can make the gospel relevant to the world in which we live, we need to listen to the world, to people who are hurting and angry, to people who are frustrated, to those who are poor, the people around about us. Then we can present gospel in a way that answers these cries of anger, pain and frustration.

*"He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame." (Proverbs 18:13)* Solomon wrote these words. Did he learn that hard way? *"Let the wise listen and add to their learning." (Proverbs 1:5)* He wrote that as well. Two different pieces of advice. Solomon prayed that God would give him a 'discerning heart', a heart that was willing and able to listen, because then he would be able to make good choices in life. We have choices to make all way thru' life, day-to-day choices, choices as parents for our children, choices as church leaders for the future of the congregation, choices of all kinds. Our first task is to listen – to listen to God by reading the Bible, to really listen to one another, to listen to the world and people's cries of anguish, pain and frustration – then we can make good choices. Solomon prayed for a discerning heart – what a good choice!