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SOLOMON: UNFAILING WISDOM



If you could be the leading expert in any field, what would it be?

QUESTION #1

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THE POINT

Christ-centered living chooses wisdom from God, not simply knowledge.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In a single day, most of us can become well-informed in virtually any subject. The sleeping patterns of the aardvark; the inner-workings of a carburetor; the preparation of crème brûlée; the gravitational pull of Mars—thanks to the Internet, we can accumulate enough knowledge on any of these subjects to have a stimulating conversation at any dinner party.

We're flooded with information of all kinds, and we're continually exchanging knowledge. Every second of every day, six thousand tweets are tweeted, over forty thousand Google queries are searched, and more than two million emails are sent.¹

In short, we're swimming in an ocean of knowledge while dying of thirst for wisdom. *Knowledge* and *wisdom* are two very different things, and wisdom is by far the more valuable of the two.

As we'll see in the life of Solomon, relying on God's wisdom must become second nature to us so that our lives, and not just our intellect, reflect who God is and who He has called us to be.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 Kings 3:3-9

³ Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, only he sacrificed and made offerings at the high places. ⁴ And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place. Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you." ⁶ And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. ⁷ And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸ And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude. ⁹ Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

As we open the Book of 1 Kings, we find Solomon freshly appointed as the new King of Israel. By taking that role, he followed in the footsteps of the greatest king the people had known. He inherited a throne his father had taken to the highest of heights. And all of this happened when Solomon was less than 20 years old.

Talk about pressure! So what does a young man do when he knows he's in over his head? What does he do when he knows he isn't up to the challenge? Solomon made many mistakes in his life, but in this moment he absolutely did the right thing: he prayed.

In his youth, Solomon was aware of something that often escapes us: we are utterly, completely, and inescapably dependent upon God.

What's the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

QUESTION #2

Solomon also knew a bit about what he needed. So many times when we find ourselves in over our heads in a given situation, our knee-jerk response is to pray for deliverance. We petition God to change our circumstances. We want to get out of whatever is making us feel uncomfortable. But Solomon did something different.

Instead of asking God to remove the struggles and challenges he would face as king, Solomon asked instead for the wisdom and discernment to operate within those struggles and challenges.

1 Kings 3:10-14

¹⁰ It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹ And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹² behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. ¹³ I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. ¹⁴ And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days."

The gravity of verse 10 should not escape us: the Lord was pleased with Solomon's request. Something about what Solomon asked, and how he asked it, touched the heart of God.

Three things stand out about Solomon's request for wisdom:

- ▶ **The request was made humbly.** Solomon knew he couldn't muster up the wisdom necessary to do the job he'd been given. So he came to the Lord with a humble spirit and asked God to do for him what he could not do for himself.

When has God given you more than you asked for?

QUESTION #3

WISE AMONG YOU

People with wisdom are worth seeking out. Choose two of the following categories to record the names of people who demonstrate wisdom in addition to knowledge.

Family and friends

Politicians

Church leaders

Writers and thinkers

What's a step you can take this week to learn from one or more of the people listed above?

- ▶ **The request made much of God.** As Solomon was humbled, the Lord and His power were uplifted. When we humbly acknowledge our own deficiency, we simultaneously acknowledge the overflowing sufficiency of God. When God responds to our humble requests, we cannot make the claim of being wise or powerful or clever on our own. In the eyes of the world, God is lifted up and shown to be great, for His power is made perfect in our weakness. (See 2 Cor. 12:9.)
- ▶ **The request was for the sake of others.** When Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom, it's true that he was the recipient of that gift. But it's equally true that Solomon did not want this gift purely for his own benefit. The entire community—and more—would benefit and be strengthened.

I wonder, if we honestly evaluated our own prayer lives, how many of our requests would be purely for our own comfort, ease, or advancement. It delights the heart of God to see His children seeking good for others.

The end result of Solomon's prayer is that God granted his request. Thankfully, our God still delights not only in hearing from His people, but in giving them what they need. For that reason, when we approach the throne of God's grace, we should examine ourselves to see if we're asking humbly, in a way that makes much of God, and that will benefit others.

Such an attitude in our prayers both demonstrates and produces wisdom in our lives.



How do we gain and apply wisdom in our daily lives?

QUESTION #4

1 Kings 4:29-34

²⁹ And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, ³⁰ so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. ³² He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. ³³ He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke also of beasts, and of birds, and of reptiles, and of fish. ³⁴ And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom.

Wisdom doesn't end with the person who receives it. Rather, God intends for wisdom to be pushed out through His people for the sake of others. We see that principle at work in the passage above. God's gift of wisdom didn't stay with Solomon; its benefits were spread out across the known world.

In short, God expects His blessings to be shared, not hoarded.

This is another way in which wisdom is different from knowledge. While knowledge can be accumulated simply for the purpose of having information or for being recognized as the resident expert, wisdom is meant to be exercised and used.

In this way, the difference between knowledge and wisdom is like the difference between a body builder and a lumberjack. A body builder and a lumberjack are both strong. Both have built up their muscles. But the bodybuilder is building muscle only for the purpose of showing it off. A lumberjack is building muscle to put it to use and complete a task. Real wisdom is of little use until it hits the streets in real life.

God has given us wisdom to share with the world. Our friends, neighbors, and communities all benefit when we make the Christ-centered choice of seeking that wisdom each day.

What are some practical ways to communicate God's wisdom in a positive way?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

What steps can you take to seek out God's wisdom this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Read.** True wisdom is found in reading God's Word. Commit yourself to read one chapter from the Book of Proverbs each day this month.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Memorize Proverbs 9:10, a proverb written by Solomon: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight."
- ▶ **Meet.** Who is one person whose wisdom you could benefit from? Contact that person and request to meet one on one so that you can learn from his or her insights. Or consider being a mentor to someone who could benefit from the wisdom God has given you.



Yes, knowledge is out there—more than you or I know what to do with. But while knowledge might increase our prominence or reputation, wisdom is to be more treasured than gold. Humbly pray for wisdom and trust the God who is generous in answering.

My thoughts

1. Stephanie Pappas, "How Big Is the Internet, Really?" *Live Science*, March 18, 2016 [Cited 6 March 2017], livescience.com/54094-how-big-is-the-internet.html

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