

SESSION 2

SOLOMON: UNFAILING WISDOM



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

QUESTION #1

#BSFLsecondnature

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

THE PASSAGES

1 Kings 3:3-14; 4:29-34

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In a single day, most of us can become well informed in virtually any subject. Such as ...

- ▶ ... the sleeping patterns of the aardvark
- ▶ ... the inner workings of a carburetor
- ▶ ... the preparation of crème brûlée

Thanks to the Internet, we can accumulate enough knowledge on any of these subjects—and millions more—to have a stimulating conversation at any dinner party.

We are flooded with information on over one billion websites. We are continually exchanging knowledge: six thousand tweets are tweeted, over forty thousand Google® queries are searched, and more than two million emails are sent—every second!¹

We are swimming in an ocean of knowledge while dying of thirst for wisdom. Knowledge and wisdom are two very different things. Wisdom moves us into the realm of real life, for we find wisdom only in knowing God and then applying what we know of Him to real-life situations. We cannot simply be pursuers of knowledge. Relying on God's wisdom must become second nature to us so that our lives reflect who God is and who He has called us to be.

1 Kings 3:3-9

3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.

4 And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place: a thousand burnt offerings did Solomon offer upon that altar.

5 In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee.

6 And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7 And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.

8 And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.

9 Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

KEY WORD:

a little child (3:7)—The Hebrew word was used of newborn infants, little boys, and males of marriageable age. It does not specify a definite age and likely sometimes has the sense of immaturity.

Think back to your first day at a new job. You surely felt a sense of unfamiliarity about it, and you may have even been overwhelmed by new systems, new relationships, and new responsibilities. If that new role included leading people, your head was swimming with the amount of responsibility you suddenly shouldered. Everywhere you turned, people were asking you questions. Requests came from every

direction. So many things had to be done, and you had no idea how to prioritize. It seemed like all you wanted to do at the end of that first day was go home, sit quietly, and bring order back into your life.

If you can remember a time like that, then you have a small glimpse of what Solomon must have felt. As the Book of 1 Kings opens, we find Israel's greatest king, David, had become a mere shadow of his former self. Gone was the triumphant military leader who had held the head of the Philistine champion in his hand; here was an aging ruler whose physical health was so far gone he couldn't get warm even when they covered him with blankets (1 Kings 1:1).

To make matters worse, the jockeying for position had already begun. One of his sons, Adonijah, was aggressively campaigning to succeed his father before David was even dead. Adonijah had rallied support to his cause, and acted as *de facto* ruler. But because of the behind-the-scenes work of a prophet named Nathan, and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, David named Solomon king (vv. 5-39).

So there Solomon was, following in the footsteps of the greatest king the people had known. He was inheriting a throne his father had taken to the highest of heights. And all of this happened when Solomon was very young, somewhere between twelve and twenty.

DIGGING DEEPER



HIGH PLACE

Elevated site, usually found on the top of a mountain or hill; most high places were Canaanite places of pagan worship. The average high place would have an altar (2 Kings 21:3; 2 Chron. 14:3), a carved wooden pole that depicted the female goddess of fertility (Asherah), a stone pillar symbolizing the male deity (2 Kings 3:2), other idols (2 Kings 17:29;

2 Chron. 33:19), and some type of building (1 Kings 12:31; 13:32; 16:32-33). At these places of worship the people sacrificed animals (at some high places children were sacrificed according to Jer. 7:31), burned incense to their gods, prayed, ate sacrificial meals, and were involved with male or female cultic prostitutes (2 Kings 17:8-12; 21:3-7; Hos. 4:11-14).

"High Place," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 761-762.

Talk about pressure! So what does a young man do in this situation, when he knows he is in over his head? What does he do when he knows he is not up to the challenge? Solomon would make many mistakes in his life, but in this moment he absolutely did the right thing: he prayed.

Even in his youth, Solomon was aware of something that often escapes us: we are utterly and completely dependent upon the Lord. We can try and convince ourselves of our ingenuity and cleverness, but in the end we are fragile and feeble creatures who only exist by the will and grace of our Creator. Thankfully, our Creator is not stingy with His grace! He is a willing and joyful Giver of the daily bread we need. We can pray to our Father and trust that whatever comes from His hand is indeed what we need to continue on.

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. When we find ourselves in times that seem overwhelming, God wants us to do the same. Perhaps His desire is not to change our circumstances, but for us to be able to navigate the circumstances in a wise and godly way for the benefit of those around us. We, too, can ask God for wisdom and discernment.

What's the difference between wisdom and knowledge?

QUESTION #2

1 Kings 3:10-14

10 And the speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.

11 And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment;

12 Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.

13 And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.

14 And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.

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

QUESTION #3

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

- ▶ **The request was made humbly.** Solomon knew he couldn't muster up the wisdom to do the job he had been tasked to do. So he came to the Lord, in a humble spirit, asking God to do for him what he could not do for himself. Humility is an attribute that pleases God. James 4:6 reminds us "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." When we come to God, we must come to Him in humility. We must acknowledge we bring nothing to the table, save the sin from which we need to be rescued. This

posture of humility should characterize each and every time we make requests of God.

- ▶ **The request made much of God.** As Solomon was humbled, the Lord and His power were uplifted. When we humbly recognize 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 (2 Cor. 12:9).
- ▶ **The request was for the sake of others.** When Solomon asked the Lord for wisdom, he would be the one who received the gift of wisdom. But it's also true that Solomon did not want this gift from the Lord 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.

When has God given you more than you asked for?

QUESTION #4

God granted Solomon's request. Thankfully, He is still a God who delights not only in hearing from His people, but giving them what they need. When we approach the throne of God's grace, then, we should examine ourselves to see if we are asking humbly, in a way that makes much of God, and that will benefit others.

1 Kings 4:29-34

29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.

30 And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.

32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

Wisdom does not end with the person who receives it. Rather, God gives wisdom for the sake of others. We see that in Solomon's life. People from the entire known world would benefit from what God had given to one of His people. This is how God means for His blessings to work: He wants His people to share them, not hoard them. Knowledge can be accumulated simply for the purpose of having information or for being recognized as the resident expert, but wisdom is meant to be exercised and used. Think of the difference between a body builder who shows off his strong body and a lumberjack who actually uses it.

Who benefits when we share God's wisdom?

- ▶ **Families benefit.** One of the most immediate avenues through which we can share wisdom is the family. Children often recognize their parents have indeed lived a little more life than they have. This is a chance for parents to speak words of wisdom into the most tangible aspects of life.
- ▶ **Churches benefit.** In the church, decision-making usually comes down to a group of people who pray, seek God's

wisdom, make a decision, and trust God with the results. Wise church leaders listen to a variety of counselors so that the wisest possible decision can be reached.

- ▶ **Communities benefit.** Most Christians aren't on staff at a local church. Most live and work in the secular world: they may be business people or stay-at-home parents. But God does not mean for us to exercise His wisdom only in the home and in the church. Our friends, neighbors, and communities benefit when we humbly live out and share the wisdom of God.

How can we effectively reflect God's wisdom in our culture?

QUESTION #5

KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

Make a list of things you know on the left (knowledge) and the ways you correctly use those things on the right (wisdom). An example has been given to help you get started:

Knowledge

Wisdom

Example: The Bible helps people live well

Posting a relevant verse on social media

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LIVE IT OUT

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

- ▶ **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 is understanding.”
- ▶ **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.



END NOTES

1 Stephanie Pappas, “How Big Is the Internet, Really?” *Live Science*, March 18, 2016, <http://www.livescience.com/54094-how-big-is-the-internet.html>

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLsecondnature**